

Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal Regulations

Implementation for 2016



Middle States Commission on Higher Education

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Verification of Compliance with Accreditation–Relevant Federal Regulations

Implementation for 2016

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education, as a federally recognized accreditor, is obligated to ensure that its candidate and member institutions comply with accreditation-relevant federal regulations. This document is focused on the Commission’s verification of institutional compliance in several areas:

1. Student identity verification in distance and correspondence education
2. Transfer of credit policies and articulation agreements
3. Title IV program responsibilities
4. Institutional records of student complaints
5. Required information for students and the public
6. Standing with state and other accrediting agencies
7. Contractual relationships
8. Assignment of credit hours

In the event that one or more of these regulations do not apply to an institution, that institution shall indicate that fact in the compliance document. Otherwise, all accredited and candidate institutions must respond with regard to each of the areas.

These areas may also be reviewed as part of the self-study or periodic review process, especially as they relate to the MSCHE Standards.

Please note that as additional guidance is received from the U.S. Department of Education, these guidelines may be modified.

Student Identity Verification in Distance and Correspondence Education

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.17(g), the Commission must verify that institutions have effective procedures in place to ensure that the students who register in a distance or correspondence education course are the same students who participate in and complete the course, and receive the academic credit.

Institutions must provide the following documentation:

- 1 Written description of the method(s) used to ensure student identity verification in distance or correspondence education courses. Include information related to the Learning Management System (LMS) and integration with college-wide systems.

- 2 Written procedure(s) regarding the protection of student privacy in the implementation of such methods. Include information related to the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), student record access, and process for resetting student passwords.
- 3 Written procedure(s) for notifying students about any projected additional charges associated with student identity verification such as proctoring fees
- 4 Written procedure(s) indicating the office(s) responsible for the consistent application of student identity verification procedures.

Peer reviewers assigned to this verification should consider the following questions:

- 1 What methods are used by the institution to verify the student's identity? In your professional judgment, are these methods adequate and effective?
- 2 What is the procedure for protecting the privacy of students enrolled in distance or correspondence education courses? In your professional judgment, is the procedure adequate and effective?
- 3 What is the procedure for notifying students regarding any additional charges associated with identity verification? In your professional judgment, is the procedure adequate and effective? Does the institution notify students at the time of registration or enrollment of any projected additional student charges associated with the verification of student identity, such as a separate fee charged by a proctoring service?
- 4 What office(s) is/are responsible for ensuring that the provisions for ensuring student identity verification are consistently applied?

Transfer of Credit Policies and Articulation Agreements

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.24(e), the Commission must confirm that an "institution has transfer of credit policies that: (1) are publicly disclosed in accordance with section 668.43(a)(11); and (2) include a statement of criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education."

Section 668.43(a)(11) states:

(a) Institutional information that the institution must make readily available to enrolled and prospective students under this subpart includes, but is not limited to—

(11) A description of the transfer of credit policies established by the institution which must include a statement of the institution's current transfer of credit policies that includes, at a minimum—

(i) Any established criteria the institution uses regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution; and

(ii) A list of institutions with which the institution has established an articulation agreement.

In addition, the Commission must confirm that any articulation agreements with other educational institutions are readily available to current and prospective students.

Institutions must provide the following documentation:

- 1 Written policies and procedures for making decisions about the transfer of credits earned at other institutions, including all modes of delivery.
- 2 Public disclosure of the policy for transfer of credit. Document the URL and the catalog location of this information; include other publications if available.
- 3 Procedures that indicate the office(s) responsible for the final determination of the acceptance or denial of transfer credit.
- 4 A published and accessible list of institutions with which the institution has established an articulation agreement. Document the URL and publication location of this information.

Peer reviewers assigned to this verification should consider the following questions:

- 1 Describe the documented policies and procedures for making decisions about the transfer of credits earned at other institutions. Do the policies and procedures include all modes of delivery? In your professional judgment, are the policies and procedures adequate and effective?
- 2 Is the policy for transfer of credit readily available on the institution's website or in other relevant publications?
- 3 What criteria have been established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education?
- 4 Does the institution publish a readily accessible list of institutions with which the institution has established an articulation agreement? Is this list available on the website or in other publications?

Title IV Program Responsibilities

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.16(a)(1)(x), the Commission must review the institution's record of compliance with its Title IV program responsibilities to determine if that record suggests the institution may not be in compliance with Commission standards and requirements. The Commission is particularly interested in reviewing significant deficiencies and material weaknesses that have been identified and any corrective action plans that have been developed to address those deficiencies and material weaknesses.

Institutions must provide the following documentation:

- 1 Formal documentation from the U.S. Department of Education regarding the institution's cohort default rate for the three most recent years. Provide the most recent three-year rates supplied by the U.S. Department of Education.
- 2 Reports on compliance from U.S. Department of Education in regard to the cohort default rate.

- 3 External audits of federal programs (A-133) for the past three years, if applicable to the institution. Include the complete single audit report (A-133) for the most recent three years as an appendix, even if included in other documentation.
- 4 Relevant correspondence from the U.S. Department of Education, such as program reviews and any actions to limit, suspend, or terminate the institution's eligibility to participate in Title IV. Include institutional responses, if applicable.
- 5 Financial Responsibility Requirements – documentation of the three most recent years of composite ratios used by the U.S. Department of Education.

Peer reviewers assigned to this verification should consider the following questions:

- 1 What is the institution's cohort default rate for the past three years? Is this rate within the federal limit?
- 2 Are there any significant impending litigation issues with respect to financial aid activities, in regard to the cohort default rate?
- 3 Do the independent audits of the institution's financial aid programs (A-133) document any significant non-compliance issues? If so, summarize these issues. Describe the institution's corrective action plan for the weaknesses or deficiencies documented.
- 4 Describe any limitations, suspensions, or termination actions that the U.S. Department of Education has taken.
- 5 Describe any fines, letters of credit, or heightened monitoring arising from the U.S. Department of Education actions or reviews.
- 6 Review the documentation on the composite ratios. Are these ratios at consistent levels recommended by the U.S. Department of Education?
- 7 Based on the information provided by the institution, is there any evidence to suggest that the institution is failing to meet its Title IV program responsibilities?

Institutional Record of Student Complaints

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.16(a)(1)(ix), the Commission must confirm that institutions have effective policies and procedures for tracking and resolving student complaints.

Institutions must provide the following documentation:

- 1 Written description of the policy and methods used in handling student complaints.
- 2 Documentation regarding the record of student complaints over the last five years, including the number, patterns in type of complaints, and their resolution.
- 3 Written procedures for making modifications and improvements to the institution as a result of information obtained in handling student complaints.

Peer reviewers assigned to the verification should consider the following questions:

- 1 What policies and methods are used by the institution to handle student complaints and the tracking of the documentation?
- 2 What process is in place to ensure complaints are reviewed and resolved in a timely manner?
- 3 Is there a pattern of student complaints that raises concerns?
- 4 Has the institution shown that it uses the documentation to make improvements and enhancements to the quality of the institution as a whole?

Required Information for Students and the Public

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.16(a)(1)(iv), the Commission must confirm that institutions make available to students and the general public fair, accurate and complete information in catalogs, handbooks and other publications regarding the institution's calendar, grading, admissions, academic program requirements, tuition and fees, and refund policies.

In addition, the Commission must verify that institutions collect and post information on their websites concerning student performance in academic programs and their successful completion. Information should also be available regarding student employment after graduation and performance on licensing exams, as appropriate.

Finally, in accordance with 34 CFR 602.23(d), the Commission must verify that institutions provide clear and accurate information in their advertising and recruiting material about their accreditation status with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Institutions must provide the following information:

- 1 URLs for course catalogs and student handbooks, or the location of any alternative institutional website documenting required disclosures.
- 2 As required by Student Right to Know, the URL and supporting documentation for the following items:
 - a. graduation and completion rate for the student body disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, and receipt of Pell grants
 - b. overall cohort graduation rate
 - c. process for withdrawing as a student
 - d. cost of attendance (i.e. net tuition calculator)
 - e. policies on the refund and return of Title IV funds
 - f. names of applicable accrediting agencies
 - g. description of facilities and accommodations available for the disabled
 - h. policy on enrollment in study abroad
 - i. as appropriate, licensure pass rates for the most recent three-years.
- 3 Policies covering satisfactory academic progress (SAP), attendance and leave of absence (URL and/or catalog location).

- 4 Written description of the methods used to collect and review information on student outcomes and licensure pass rates.
- 5 Documents and URLs for advertising and recruitment materials that are available to current and prospective students that show the accreditation status with the Commission and any other U.S. Department of Education approved agencies.

Peer reviewers assigned to this verification should consider the following questions:

- 1 Does the institution appropriately document and publish the required information? Is the information reasonably accessible to the public from the home page of the website or in alternative publications?
- 2 For each of the reported topics, review the methods, policies, and procedures that the institution has documented. Are these methods, policies, and procedures reasonable for their purpose?
- 3 Do the institutional documents provide accurate, timely and appropriately detailed information to the current and prospective students and the public about the institution's accreditation status?

Standing with State and Other Accrediting Agencies

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.28, the Commission must verify that an institution is properly authorized or licensed to operate and is in good standing with each state in which it is authorized or licensed to operate. In addition, if the institution has status with a specialized, programmatic, or institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, the Commission must verify that the institution is in good standing with the agency or agencies.

Institutions must provide the following documentation:

- 1 Written documentation about the relationships with any specialized, programmatic, or institutional accrediting agencies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and all governing or coordinating bodies in the state(s) and countries in which the institution has a presence.
- 2 Written documentation regarding any review resulting in a non-compliance action determined by the accrediting agency, state or country within the past five years.

Peer reviewers assigned to this verification should consider the following:

- 1 Does the information note any accreditation issues related to accrediting agencies during the past five years?
- 2 Does the information from states and countries document any issues during the past five years?

Contractual Relationships

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.22(a)(2)(vii), the Commission is required to review any contractual arrangements an institution enters into with an organization that is not certified to participate in the Title IV, HEOA programs, and offers more than 25 percent of one or more of the accredited institution's educational programs.

As institutions seek to improve the ways in which they provide education to their students, they may find it more practical or efficient to contract with other institutions or organizations to provide certain components of the educational experience. Any institution accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education is held responsible for all activities carried out under the institution's name.

Institutions must provide the following documentation:

- 1 List of contractual arrangements for education services.
- 2 Written documentation such as policies and procedures or excerpts from contracts specifying that the institution is responsible for all required segments of the educational service.

Peer reviewers assigned to this verification should consider the following questions:

- 1 Does the institution's documentation ensure that the institution is responsible for any activities conducted in its name?
- 2 Does the institution's documentation raise any concerns with the contractual arrangements? If so, note accordingly.

Assignment of Credit Hours

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.24(f), the Commission "must conduct an effective review and evaluation of the reliability and accuracy of the institution's assignment of credit hours." Specifically, the Commission must review the institution's policies and procedures for determining the credit hours awarded as well as the application of the institution's policies and procedures to its programs and coursework, and make a "reasonable determination of whether the institution's assignment of credit hours conforms to commonly accepted practice in higher education."

Institutions must provide the follow documentation:

- 1 Written policies and procedures for credit hour assignment covering all types of courses, disciplines, programs, degree levels, formats, and modalities of instruction. Include each policy that documents the assignment of credit hours specific to the types noted above. Specify the location of the policy in the catalog and website. The following should be clearly indicated:
 - Academic period (e.g., 15 weeks plus one week exam over two semesters)
 - Recommended instructional time (e.g., three 50-minute sessions or two 75-minute sessions per week)
 - Recommended out-of-class time requirements (e.g., twice in-class time)

- 2 Evidence that the institution's credit hour policies and procedures are applied consistently across the full range of institutional offerings. If the institution is required to obtain approval from the relevant State Department of Education, compliance with this requirement should be documented. Other evidence must include:
 - Documentation from recent academic program reviews;
 - New course or program approvals;
 - Documentation for registration software/systems that ensure a consistent schedule of courses based on the credit hour assignment;
 - Academic calendars and/or schedules , and course matrices; and
 - Documentation of adherence to credit hour requirements, consistent with federal regulations, from a university system requirements, or disciplinary organization, etc.
- 3 A description and evidence of the processes used by the institution to review periodically the application of its policies and procedures for credit hour assignment. Indicate the individual(s) and/or entities responsible for the final review and approval.
- 4 A list of the courses and programs that do not adhere to the federal definition of credit hour or its equivalent as specified in the MSCHE Credit Hour Policy (e.g., online or hybrid, laboratory, studio, clinical, internship, independent study, and accelerated format) and evidence that such variations in credit hour assignment conform to commonly accepted practice in higher education.
 - Each course or program that does not adhere to the federal definition should be specified and supporting evidence that it conforms to commonly accepted practice should be provided using the criteria described above in Item 2.

Peer reviewers assigned to this verification should consider the following questions:

- 1 Are the institution's policies and procedures reasonable when compared with the federal definition¹ and the MSCHE Credit Hour policy? Is there evidence that the institution's assignment of credit hours falls within the range of commonly accepted practice in higher education?
- 2 Do the institution's policies and procedures for assigning credit hours – which may be written at the level of the institution, department, or school and which may be differentiated by degree level and/or delivery format – address all types of courses and programs offered by the institution?
- 3 Do the institution's policies and procedures address the amount of instructional and out-of-classroom time that is typically expected of students with regard to the number of credit hours earned?
- 4 For institutions with courses and programs that do not adhere to the federal definition of credit hour (e.g., distance education, alternative instructional formats, more or less instructional or out-of-classroom time than would typically be expected), how do the institution's policies and procedures equate credit hour assignment with intended learning outcomes that the typical student could reasonably achieve in the timeframe allotted?

- 5 Is there sufficient evidence that the institution applies and monitors its own policies and procedures, and that credit hour assignments are accurate and reliable across the full range of institutional offerings?
-

¹The U.S. Department of Education defines “credit hour” as:

“... an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutionally established equivalency that reasonably approximates not less than:

- (1) One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work for approximately 15 weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or 10 to 12 weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or,*
- (2) At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution, including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.”*

Appendix 1

Process for Electronic Submission of Materials and Reports (For Institutions, Peer Reviewers, Self-Study Chairs and PRR Readers)

All institutions participating in an accreditation-related review (Self-Study or PRR) must complete the *Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal Regulations* institutional report template (Appendix 2 of this booklet) for review by MSCHE peer evaluators. The materials required for the verification are submitted electronically in PDF format. Templates have been designed to aid in your submission. The institution should only submit the documents requested; any additional information (or attachments) will not be reviewed by the evaluators.

Requirements for Electronic Documents for Institutions:

Electronic file documents should be prepared using current PDF software. **Hard copies of the documents will not be accepted.**

- Ensure that electronic documents are bookmarked, indexed, and searchable with internal document links that allow for ease of movement across sections.
- Include pagination and internal document organizational strategies that make it easy for the reader to navigate with the electronic document.
- Include a detailed table of contents and index in all electronic documents. Listings in the table of contents and index should link directly to appropriate sections of the document allowing the reader to find information easily.
- Avoid links to websites or other material outside the required filing (specific request for URLs as defined in the *Verification* handbook are allowed).
- Use only those graphics and pictures that provide specific evidence.
- Ensure that the software settings are set to create clear text and graphics, yet not make the file size too large. Optimize graphics (downsample to 150 dpi) and pictures (use jpg medium quality) to reduce the size of the document.
- Do not scan printed documents to create a PDF document; this will result in a document that is large in file size and not text searchable.

Instructions for Institutions:

After preparing your final document file for *Verification of Compliance*:

1. Ensure that the file name is *Verification of Compliance - Institution*
2. Visit <https://www.msche.org/myche/login.aspx>. The website works best when using Mozilla Firefox.

3. Log in with your username and password. Your user name is your e-mail address at your institution. If you do not remember your username, please use the *Forgot Your Username* link. The password is case sensitive. If you do not remember your password, use the *Forgot Your Password* link.
4. Once you are logged in, select **Institutions** from the tabs at the top of the page.
5. Select **Meeting Documents** from the tabs at the top of the page.
6. Select the **View Documents** link in the meeting grid. If there are multiple meetings, please be sure to view the documents for the correct meeting type.
7. Once you are directed to the new page, you are in your institution's secure folder.
8. To upload documents, click the blue ↑ arrow and follow the commands to upload documents to your institution's secure folder. You may also use the blue ↓ arrow to download documents in the folder.

Instructions for Peer Reviewers:

Use the information located in the institutional documents submitted and uploaded by the institution to confirm compliance or the need to follow up on any outstanding compliance issues.

Accessing institutional reports

1. Ensure that the file name is *Verification of Compliance – Institution*.
2. Visit <https://www.msche.org/myche/login.aspx>
3. Log in with your username and password. Your username is your e-mail address at your institution. If you do not remember your username, please use the **Forgot Your Username** link. The password is case sensitive. If you do not remember your password, please use the **Forgot Your Password** link.
4. Select **Evaluators** from the tabs at the top of the page.
5. Select **Meeting Documents** from the tabs at the top of the page.
6. Select the **View Documents** link in the meeting grid. If there are multiple meetings, please be sure to view the documents for the correct meeting type.
7. Once you are directed to the new page, double-click the designated institution (you may be assigned several).
8. To upload documents, click the blue ↑ arrow and follow the commands to upload documents to the institution's folder. You may also use the blue ↓ arrow to download documents in the folder.

After completing the Peer Review, document your evidence and findings on the **Peer Review Template**. Name the file *Peer Reviewer Compliance Report* and upload the file using the instructions noted above, with the exception of the ↑ arrow for the upload.

Instructions for Chairs (Self Study Evaluation Teams):

A Peer Reviewer assigned by the Commission will review and report on the compliance documentation submitted by the institution according to the guidelines outlined in the *Verification of Compliance* publication. Prior to the Self Study Evaluation Team visit, you will need to review the Peer Reviewer's report regarding compliance in each of the designated areas. If the reviewer noted any issues or follow up, work with your team to review additional information as needed to satisfy the requirements found in the *Verification of Compliance* publication. Include any additional follow up performed on site in the final team report.

The Peer Reviewer's *Compliance Report* should also be included as an attachment to the *Team Visit Report*.

Recommended language for Team Visit Report - ***Section III Compliance with Federal Requirements; Issues Relative to State Regulatory or Other Accrediting Agency Requirements:***

- If the Verification of Compliance review determined that the institution is in compliance in all four areas:

Based on the separate verification of compliance with accreditation-relevant provisions of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, and as necessary, review of the self-study, certification by the institution, other institutional documents, and/or interviews, the team affirms that the institution meets the requirements related to Student Identify Verification in Distance or Correspondence Education, 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 Assignment of Credit Hours.

- If the Verification of Compliance review determined insufficient evidence at the first review and the team conducted additional reviews of documentation and interviews and determined the supplemental information was sufficient for compliance:

Based on the separate verification of compliance with accreditation-relevant provisions of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, and as necessary, review of the self-study, certification by the institution, other institutional documents, and/or interviews specifically in the areas (*state the areas noted*), the team affirms that the institution meets the requirements related to Student Identify Verification in Distance or Correspondence Education, 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 Assignment of Credit Hours.

- If the Verification of Compliance review determined insufficient evidence at the first review and the team conducted additional reviews of documentation and interviews and determined the supplemental information *was not sufficient* for compliance::

Based on the separate verification of compliance with accreditation-relevant provisions of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, and as necessary, review of the self-study, certification by the institution, other institutional documents, and/or interviews specifically in the areas (*state the areas noted*), the team cannot affirm that the institution meets the requirements related to (indicate the specific area based on the eight requirements).

Instructions for First / Second Reader (Periodic Review Reports):

As part of the Periodic Review Process, the Commission has incorporated an additional review for the Verification of Compliance which was completed by a Peer Reviewer; the report is based on the information submitted in the Institutional Compliance Report. Please review the Peer Reviewer's report regarding the eight areas: Student Identity Verification in Distance and Correspondence Education, 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 Assignment of Credit Hours. The reviewer has indicated the compliance with each of these eight requirements. If the Peer Reviewer noted insufficient evidence on any of the eight areas, the institution was asked to post a response to clarify the documentation to meet the HEOA requirements. Carefully review these two documents and add the following language to your *Confidential Brief*, in Section I.

- If the Verification of Compliance review determined that the institution is in compliance in all eight areas:

Based on the separate verification of compliance with accreditation-relevant provisions of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, the reviewers affirm that the institution meets the requirements related to Student Identify Verification in Distance or Correspondence Education, 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 Assignment of Credit Hours.

- If the Verification of Compliance review determined insufficient evidence at the first review and the institution submitted an Institutional response, you will need to review and determine if the supplemental information *was sufficient* for compliance. If the supplemental information was sufficient:

Based on the separate verification of compliance with accreditation-relevant provisions of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, and additional supporting documentation from the institution in *(state the areas noted)* the reviewers affirm that the institution meets the requirements related to Student Identify Verification in Distance or Correspondence Education, 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 Assignment of Credit Hours.

- If the Verification of Compliance review determined insufficient evidence at the first review and the institution submitted an Institutional response, you will need to review and determine if the supplemental information was sufficient for compliance. If the supplemental information was found to be *not sufficient* for compliance:

Based on the separate verification of compliance with accreditation-relevant provisions of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, and additional supporting documentation from the institution in *(state the areas noted)* the reviewers cannot affirm that the institution meets the requirements related to (indicate the specific area based on the eight requirements).

Appendix 2

Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal Regulations (Institutional Report Template)

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education, as a federally recognized accreditor, is obligated to ensure that its candidate and member institutions comply with accreditation-relevant federal regulations. This document is focused on the Commission's verification of institutional compliance in several areas:

1. Student identity verification in distance and correspondence education
2. Transfer of credit policies and articulation agreements
3. Title IV program responsibilities
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5. Required information for students and the public
6. Standing with state and other accrediting agencies
7. Contractual relationships
8. Assignment of credit hours

In the event that one or more of these regulations do not apply to an institution, that institution shall indicate that fact in the compliance document. Otherwise, all accredited and candidate institutions should respond with regard to each of the areas.

These areas may also be reviewed as part of the self-study or periodic review process, especially as they relate to the MSCHE Standards.

Please note that as additional guidance is received from the U.S. Department of Education, these guidelines may be modified.

NOTE:

The template should be used to submit documentation as noted. An electronic version of the template is available at http://www.msche.org/publications_view.asp?idPublicationType=19&txtPublicationType=Compliance+Verification. The information boxes will expand as information is inserted. Appendices must be bookmarked in the document. Save the file as a PDF to upload to the MyCHE portal.

The following report provides a review of institutional materials submitted by **(NAME OF INSTITUTION)** to document compliance with accreditation-relevant federal regulations. This report provides verification to the Commission of institutional compliance in the following areas:

1. Student identity verification in distance and correspondence education
2. Transfer of credit policies and articulation agreements
3. Title IV program responsibilities
4. Institutional records of student complaints
5. Required information for students and the public
6. Standing with state and other accrediting agencies
7. Contractual relationships
8. Assignment of credit hours

Student Identity Verification in Distance and Correspondence Education

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.17(g), the Commission must verify that institutions have effective procedures in place to ensure that the students who register in a distance or correspondence education course are the same students who participate in and complete the course, and receive the academic credit.

Institutions must provide the following documentation:

1. Written description of the method(s) used to ensure student identity verification in distance or correspondence education courses. Include information related to the Learning Management System (LMS) and integration with college-wide systems.

2. Written procedure(s) regarding the protection of student privacy in the implementation of such methods. Include information related to the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), student record access, and process for resetting student passwords.

3. Written procedure(s) for notifying students about any projected additional charges associated with student identity verification, such as proctoring fees.

4. Written procedure(s) indicating the office(s) responsible for the consistent application of student identity verification procedures.

Transfer of Credit Policies and Articulation Agreements

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.24(e), the Commission must confirm that an “institution has transfer of credit policies that: (1) are publicly disclosed in accordance with section 668.43(a)(11); and (2) include a statement of criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education.”

Section 668.43(a)(11) states:

(a) Institutional information that the institution must make readily available to enrolled and prospective students under this subpart includes, but is not limited to-

(11) A description of the transfer of credit policies established by the institution which must include a statement of the institution’s current transfer of credit policies that includes, at a minimum—

(i) Any established criteria the institution uses regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution; and

(ii) A list of institutions with which the institution has established an articulation agreement.

In addition, the Commission must confirm that any articulation agreements with other educational institutions are readily available to current and prospective students.

Institutions must provide the following documentation:

1. Written policies and procedures for making decisions about the transfer of credits earned at other institutions, including all modes of delivery.

2. Public disclosure of the policy for transfer of credit. Document the URL and the catalog location of this information; include other publications, if available.

3. Procedures that indicate the office(s) responsible for the final determination of the acceptance or denial of transfer credit.

4. A published and accessible list of institutions with which the institution has established an articulation agreement. Document the URL and publication location of this information.

Title IV Program Responsibilities

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.16(a)(1)(x), the Commission must review the institution's record of compliance with its Title IV program responsibilities to determine if that record suggests the institution may not be in compliance with Commission standards and requirements. The Commission is particularly interested in reviewing significant deficiencies and material weaknesses that have been identified and any corrective action plans that have been developed to address those deficiencies and material weaknesses.

Institutions must provide the following documentation:

1. Formal documentation from the U.S. Department of Education regarding the institution's cohort default rate for the three most recent years. Provide the most recent three-year rates supplied by the U.S. Department of Education.

2. Reports on compliance from the U.S. Department of Education in regard to the cohort default rate.

3. External audits of federal programs (A-133) for the past three years, if applicable to the institution. Include the complete single audit report (A-133) for the most recent three years as an appendix, even if included in other documentation.

4. Relevant correspondence from the U.S. Department of Education, such as program reviews and any actions to limit, suspend, or terminate the institution's eligibility to participate in Title IV. Include institutional responses, if applicable.

5. Financial Responsibility Requirements – documentation of the three most recent years of composite ratios used by the U.S. Department of Education.

Institutional Record of Student Complaints

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.16(a)(1)(ix), the Commission must confirm that institutions have effective policies and procedures for tracking and resolving student complaints.

Institutions must provide the following documentation:

1. Written description of the policy and methods used in handling student complaints.

2. Documentation regarding the record of student complaints over the last five years, including the number, patterns in type of complaints, and their resolution.

3. Written procedures for making modifications and improvements to the institution as a result of information obtained in handling student complaints.

Required Information for Students and the Public

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.16(a)(1)(iv), the Commission must confirm that institutions make available to students and the general public fair, accurate and complete information in catalogs, handbooks and other publications regarding the institution's calendar, grading, admissions, academic program requirements, tuition and fees, and refund policies.

In addition, the Commission must verify that institutions collect and post information on their websites concerning student performance in academic programs and their successful completion. Information should also be available regarding student employment after graduation and performance on licensing exams, as appropriate.

Finally, in accordance with 34 CFR 602.23(d), the Commission must verify that institutions provide clear and accurate information in their advertising and recruiting material about their accreditation status with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Institutions must provide the following documentation:

1. URLs for course catalogs and student handbooks, or the location of any alternative institutional website documenting required disclosures.

2. As required by Student Right to Know, the URL and supporting documentation for the following items:
 - a. graduation and completion rate for the student body disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, and receipt of Pell grants
 - b. overall cohort graduation rate
 - c. process for withdrawing as a student
 - d. cost of attendance (i.e. net tuition calculator)
 - e. policies on the refund and return of Title IV funds
 - f. names of applicable accrediting agencies
 - g. description of facilities and accommodations available for the disabled
 - h. policy on enrollment in study abroad
 - i. as appropriate, licensure pass rates for the most recent three-years.

3. Policies covering satisfactory academic progress (SAP), attendance, and leave of absence (URL and/or catalog location).

4. Written description of the methods used to collect and review information on student outcomes and licensure pass rates.

5. Documents and URLs for advertising and recruitment materials that are available to current and prospective students that show the accreditation status with the Commission and any other U.S. Department of Education approved agencies.

Standing with State and other Accrediting Agencies

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.28, the Commission must verify that an institution is properly authorized or licensed to operate and is in good standing with each state in which it is authorized or licensed to operate. In addition, if the institution has status with a specialized, programmatic, or institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, the Commission must verify that the institution is in good standing with the agency or agencies.

Institutions must provide the following documentation:

1. Written documentation about the relationships with any specialized, programmatic, or institutional accrediting agencies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and all governing or coordinating bodies in the state(s) and countries in which the institution has a presence.

2. Written documentation regarding any review resulting in a non-compliance action determined by the accrediting agency, state, or country within the past five years.

Contractual Relationships

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.22(a)(2)(vii), the Commission is required to review any contractual arrangements an institution enters into with an organization that is not certified to participate in the Title IV, HEOA programs and offers more than 25 percent of one or more of the accredited institution's educational programs.

As institutions seek to improve the ways in which they provide education to their students, they may find it more practical or efficient to contract with other institutions or organizations to provide certain components of the educational experience. Any institution accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education is held responsible for all activities carried out under the institution's name.

Institutions must provide the following documentation:

1. List of contractual arrangements for education services.

2. Written documentation such as policies and procedures or excerpts from contracts specifying that the institution is responsible for all required segments of the educational service.

Assignment of Credit Hours

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.24(f), the Commission “must conduct an effective review and evaluation of the reliability and accuracy of the institution’s assignment of credit hours.” Specifically, the Commission must review the institution’s policies and procedures for determining the credit hours awarded as well as the application of the institution’s policies and procedures to its programs and coursework, and make a “reasonable determination of whether the institution’s assignment of credit hours conforms to commonly accepted practice in higher education.”

The U.S. Department of Education defines “credit hour” as:

“ . . .an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutionally established equivalency that reasonably approximates not less than:

- (1) One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours out-of-class student work for approximately 15 weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or 10 to 12 weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or,*
- (2) At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution, including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.”*

Institutions must provide the following documentation:

1. Written policies and procedures for credit hour assignment covering all types of courses, disciplines, programs, degree levels, formats, and modalities of instruction. Include each policy that documents the assignment of credit hours specific to the types noted above. Specify the location of the policy in the catalog and website. The following should be clearly indicated:
 - Academic period (e.g.,15 weeks plus one week exam over two semesters);
 - Recommended instructional time (e.g., three 50-minute sessions or two 75-minute session per week); and
 - Recommended out-of-class time requirements (e.g., twice in-class time).

2. Evidence that the institution’s credit hour policies and procedures are applied consistently across the full range of institutional offerings. If the institution is required to obtain approval from the relevant State Department of Education, compliance with this requirement should be documented. Other evidence must include:
 - Documentation from recent academic program reviews;
 - New course or program approvals;
 - Documentation for registration software/systems that ensure a consistent schedule of courses based on the credit hour assignment;
 - Academic calendars and/or schedules , and course matrices; and
 - Documentation of adherence to credit hour requirements, consistent with federal regulations, from a system, or disciplinary organization; etc.

3. A description and evidence of the processes used by the institution to review periodically the application of its policies and procedures for credit hour assignment. Indicate the individual(s) and/or entities responsible for the final review and approval.

4. A list of the courses and programs that do not adhere to the federal definition of credit hour or its equivalent as specified in the MSCHE Credit Hour Policy (e.g., online or hybrid, laboratory, studio, clinical, internship, independent study, and accelerated format) and evidence that such variations in credit hour assignment conform to commonly accepted practice in higher education.
- Each course or program that does not adhere to the federal definition should be specified and supporting evidence that it conforms to commonly accepted practice should be provided using the criteria described above in Item 2.

Appendix 3

Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal Regulations (Reviewer's Report Template)

Peer Reviewers will review each item identified in the guide, *Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Regulations* along with the institution's report on the same and document their findings in the appropriate spaces below. Reviewers should expect institutions to address these requirements with brief narrative responses and provide supporting documentation, where necessary. Generally, if the reviewer finds in the course of this review that there are substantive issues related to the institution's ability to fulfill the standards, such issues should be raised in appropriate sections of the Team Report or PRR Report.

Institution: _____ **Reviewer:** _____

Date: _____

Summary of Findings:

Has the institution documented all eight areas of compliance? ___ Yes ___ No

Areas for Additional Review (if any):

| <i>Compliance Categories</i> | <i>Areas Requiring Additional Action</i> |
|--|--|
| Student Identity Verification in Distance and Correspondence Education | |
| 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 | |
| Assignment of Credit Hours | |

Student Identity Verification in Distance and Correspondence Education

| RECOMMENDED REVIEW | EVIDENCE | FINDINGS |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| <p>What methods are used by the institution to verify the student's identity?</p> <p>In your professional judgment, are these methods adequate and effective?</p> | | |
| <p>What is the procedure for protecting the privacy of students enrolled in distance or correspondence education courses?</p> <p>In your professional judgment, is the procedure adequate and effective?</p> | | |
| <p>What is the procedure for notifying students regarding any additional charges associated with identity verification?</p> <p>In your professional judgment, is the procedure adequate and effective?</p> <p>Does the institution notify students at the time of registration or enrollment of any projected additional student charges associated with the verification of student identity, such as a separate fee charged by a proctoring service?</p> | | |
| <p>What office is responsible for ensuring policies are consistently applied?</p> | | |

Transfer of Credit Policies and Articulation Agreements

| RECOMMENDED REVIEW | EVIDENCE | FINDINGS |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| <p>Describe the policy and procedures for making decisions about the transfer of credit earned at other institutions.</p> <p>Do the policies and procedures include all modes of delivery?</p> <p>In your professional judgment, are the policies and procedures adequate and effective?</p> | | |
| <p>Is the policy for transfer of credit readily available on the institution's website or in other relevant publications?</p> | | |
| <p>What criteria have been established by the institution regarding transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education?</p> | | |
| <p>Does the institution publish a readily accessible list of institutions with which the institution has established an articulation agreement? Is this list available on the website or in other publications?</p> | | |

Title IV Program Responsibilities

| RECOMMENDED REVIEW | EVIDENCE | FINDINGS |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| <p>What is the institution's cohort default rate for the past three years?</p> <p>Is this rate within the federal limit?</p> | | |
| <p>Are there any significant pending litigation issues with respect to financial aid activities, in regard to the cohort default rate?</p> | | |
| <p>Do the independent audits of the institution's financial aid programs (A-133) document any significant non-compliance issues? If so, summarize these issues.</p> <p>Describe the institution's corrective action plan for the weaknesses or deficiencies documented.</p> | | |
| <p>Describe any limitations, suspensions, or termination actions that the U.S. Department of Education has taken.</p> | | |
| <p>Describe any fines, letters of credit, or heightened monitoring arising from the U.S. Department of Education actions or reviews.</p> | | |
| <p>Review the documentation on the composite ratios. Are these ratios at consistent levels recommended by the U.S. Department of Education?</p> | | |
| <p>Based on the information provided by the institution, is there any evidence to suggest that the institution is failing to meet its Title IV program responsibilities?</p> | | |

Institutional Record of Student Complaints

| RECOMMENDED REVIEW | EVIDENCE | FINDINGS |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| What policies and methods are used by the institution to handle student complaints and the tracking of the documentation? | | |
| What process is in place to ensure complaints are reviewed and resolved in a timely manner? | | |
| Is there a pattern of student complaints that raises concerns? | | |
| Has the institution shown that it uses the documentation to make improvements and enhancements to the quality of the institution as a whole? | | |

Required Information for Students and the Public

| RECOMMENDED REVIEW | EVIDENCE | FINDINGS |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| Does the institution appropriately document and publish the required information? Is the information reasonably accessible to the public from the home page of the website or in alternative publications? | | |
| For each of the reported topics, review the methods, policies, and procedures that the institution has documented. Are these methods, policies, and procedures reasonable for their purpose? | | |
| Do the institutional documents provide accurate, timely and appropriately detailed information to the current and prospective students and the public about its accreditation status? | | |

Standing with State and other Accrediting Agencies

| RECOMMENDED REVIEW | EVIDENCE | FINDINGS |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| Does the information note any accreditation issues related to accrediting agencies during the past five years? | | |
| Does the information from states and countries document any issues during the past five years? | | |

Contractual Relationships

| RECOMMENDED REVIEW | EVIDENCE | FINDINGS |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| Does the institutional documentation ensure that the institution is responsible for any activities conducted in its name? | | |
| Does the institution's documentation raise any concerns with the contractual arrangements? If so, note accordingly. | | |

Assignment of Credit Hours

| RECOMMENDED REVIEW | EVIDENCE | FINDINGS |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| <p>Are the institution's policy/ procedures reasonable when compared with the federal definition and MSCHE Credit Hour policy?</p> <p>Is there evidence that the institution's assignment of credit hours falls within the range of commonly accepted practice in higher education?</p> | | |
| <p>Do the institution's policy and procedures for assigning credit hours - which may be written at the level of the institution, department, or school and which may differentiated by degree level and/or delivery format - address all types of courses and programs offered by the institution?</p> | | |
| <p>Do the institution's policies and procedures address the amount of instructional time and out-of-classroom time that is typically expected of students with regard to the number of credit hours earned?</p> | | |
| <p>For institutions with courses and programs that do not adhere to the federal definition of credit hour, how do the institution's policies and procedures equate credit hour assignment with intended learning outcomes that the typical student could reasonably achieve in the time frame allotted?</p> | | |
| <p>Is there sufficient evidence that the institution applies and monitors its own policies and procedures and that credit hour assignments are accurate and reliable across the full range of institutional offerings?</p> | | |

Additional Overall Comments from Reviewer:

Notes



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