



3624 Market Street
Suite 2 West
Philadelphia, PA 19104
(267) 284-5000
www.msche.org
Follow us: @mscheorg

MSCHE Response to Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Webinar - March 17, 2020

This is Heather Perfetti, President-Elect with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. On behalf of the Commission and President Elizabeth Sibolski, we are hosting this webinar to share important messaging and deliver information to all of our constituents. This webinar is based on information available to us at the time this webinar was prepared.

We know that the coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to be a global concern, and the Commission has received a number of inquiries about its operations. The Commission understands that this is a difficult time for our institutions, all students, faculty, staff, and administration, and for the communities our institutions serve. Know that the Middle States Commission on Higher Education is committed to working with our institutions during this challenging time. Institutions should understand that we are all working through this together. First and foremost, we want institutions to focus on the safety, health, and well-being of their communities and constituents.

The Commission has established a page at our website to document all of the Commission's activities relating to its response to the coronavirus pandemic, which you are seeing on the screen. As you look to us to help guide you and your decisions at this time, the Commission offers a number of resources which will be featured at the end of this webinar; however, you should now rely on this page at our website for the most up-to-date information as well.

Understand that our Commission is committed to flexibility, and it has outreached to the United States Department of Education to inquire about additional flexibility for accreditation agencies, in particular relating to the use of virtual visits, currently prohibited by federal regulation, as a substitute for on-site reviews. The Department has been responsive; however, the Guidance has been under review by the Office of Management and Budget, or the OMB since last week. As soon as the additional guidance relating to virtual visits is received, we will distribute additional guidance to institutions and teams. The Executive Committee of our Commission has already voted to align our policy and procedures with the anticipated Department guidance to permit virtual visits; however, until we receive that guidance, we do not know the conditions that may be reflected in the guidance document and are not in a position to move forward without that.

On March 5, 2020, the United States Department of Education provided Guidance for interruptions of study related to Coronavirus (COVID-19), which you can find posted at our website and theirs. As soon as we received that Guidance, the Executive Committee of our Commission temporarily waived the substantive change requirements for distance education and contractual agreements to align with the USDE Guidance. A communication was sent to all institutions on March 9, 2020, documenting our Commission's decisions and requesting an update from institutions that needed to adopt temporary distance education operations, entered into temporary agreements with other institutions, experienced an impact on the academic calendar, and/or established temporary sites for instruction. We asked for that report by April 1, 2020, to be sent to the institution's assigned MSCHE vice president liaison, signed by the Chief Executive Officer or Accreditation Liaison Officer.

I also want to provide an update about the Commission's operations and business continuity. As you may be aware, the Commission had continued its operations at its offices in Philadelphia but had offered remote working opportunities to staff. On March 16, 2020, the City of Philadelphia and the Governor of Pennsylvania issued updated restrictions for all non-essential businesses beginning at 5 p.m. on March 16 and lasting through March 27. That means that all Commission staff are currently working remotely, a situation that we have been preparing to support. You should see no interruption in the services that we provide to your institutions but we too ask for

patience at this time as we manage a high volume of inquiries and are moving as quickly as we can to be responsive and help reduce the anxiety that we know everyone is suffering.

The Commission had to cancel two events so far, including the Town Hall and planned workshop that was to be held on March 17th, in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and the Town Hall and planned workshop that was to be held on April 7th in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Decisions about Commission events planned later this spring have not yet been made. For these canceled events, the Commission has offered full refunds.

The Commission did host a number of visits earlier this spring, including team visits and staff visits, as well as events in February and an event as recent as March 10th. If you need to report potential exposure that should be conveyed to our staff or to our higher education community, please send that information to communications@msche.org. We will distribute the information accordingly.

As you are aware, the Commission supports activities that are pre-scheduled at this time of year, such as the Annual Institutional Update or the Call for Commissioner Nominations. We know these are not priorities for your institutions where you and other institutional leaders are focused on making critical decisions impacting your students and other constituents. Please understand that we intend to work closely with our institutions as we near the date that the Annual Institutional Update is scheduled to close, and we will provide additional messaging to institutions. For IPEDS institutions, most of the information is pre-populated, so we intend to begin the AIU process on our end, and you will see updated information about this year's AIU shared via email as well as posted on the website. Rest assured that we understand the challenges associated with completing the AIU for your institutions right now, and we intend to be mindful of these challenges as we move through the weeks ahead.

In late-February, with the realities of what was occurring abroad, the Commission gathered information about its international visits. The Commission took action to delay international visits and shared messaging with those three institutions and their teams. Since that time, the circumstances have changed, and the Commission has been working since then to manage impact of the coronavirus on all institutions with scheduled visits and with peer evaluators contributing to peer review this spring. Christy Faison will walk you through the breadth of institutional matters that have since followed international visit delays and share with you updates relating to our domestic institutions, and that will be followed by Stephen Pugliese offering a summary of important next steps.

Hello. This is Christy Faison, Senior Vice President for Accreditation Relations. First, let me thank our institutional members and peer evaluators for their incredible flexibility and understanding during these challenging times. I would like to walk you through how the Commission has been working with our institutions over the past few weeks.

- As you heard, it began initially with an international travel ban on March 2, 2020. The Commission acted to delay the on-site evaluations for three of our international institutions.
- On March 9th, we issued a memo to all institutions notifying them that MSCHE would temporarily waive substantive change requirements for distance education and contractual arrangements to assist institutions in accommodating students. This was done in accordance with the United States Department of Education guidelines that were published March 5th. We asked institutions to report modifications and impacts on the academic calendar to us by April 1st and continuously thereafter if additional changes were made.
- On that same date, March 9th, we outreached to institutions hosting spring 2020 visits requesting updates about their ability to host onsite visits.
- Also on March 9th, we outreached to peer evaluators about their availability and willingness to continuing to serve on teams in light of the changing information relating to the coronavirus and travel restrictions beginning to be put into place. We were also mindful of personal health concerns that may have prompted a peer evaluator to no longer be in a position to travel.
- We included state and system colleagues in our communication strategy so that we could learn of any modifications or restrictions they may have imposed on our accredited institutions. Also, many state and system colleagues participate in on-site visits so it was important to share updates with them.

- With conditions rapidly changing, on March 13th we released another memo and accompanying survey to provide flexibility to institutions scheduled for the remaining spring 2020 visits. After consulting with team chairs, the institutions were offered the opportunity to host virtual visits or request delays. As you heard, because on-site visits are mandated by federal regulations, the option to host a virtual visit is dependent upon the release of further guidance from USDE. As soon as we receive and process the guidance from the USDE relating to virtual visits, we will distribute additional guidance to institutions and teams.

We do want to note that some institutions will not be offered the opportunity to host virtual visits. Those include applicant institutions, institutions on probation, and those for which the Commission's concerns necessitate an on-site review. Staff will work directly with the three institutions that will require on-site visits as well as the team of peer evaluators scheduled to conduct those visits.

The total number of visits that remained this spring was 26. That means that the staff are working diligently to be responsive to 26 institutions and 26 teams. Staff will outreach to each of those 26 institutions to provide guidance on virtual visits, if permitted, or about delayed visits. It is important to note that for some delays, the Commission may be required to take action to formally delay the visit due to extraordinary circumstances and also to note that the institution remains accredited.

If your institution was scheduled for a self-study preparation visit by your Vice President liaison which has not yet occurred, your visit will be rescheduled. If you were required to host a Commission Liaison Guidance Visit, those will be conducted by audio and video conferences, and if your institution was scheduled for a substantive change follow-up visit, those will be rescheduled when travel is permissible and practicable.

Finally, we want to make you aware that Homeland Security has provided additional guidance for accommodating international students, and additional guidance for assisting veterans is pending at the time of this webinar. As information becomes available to us, we will update our COVID-19 link on our website.

We, at the Commission, are working very hard to support our member institutions during this challenging time. I want to reiterate that you should reach out to us with questions or concerns.

Hello. This is Steve Pugliese, Senior Vice President and Chief of Staff. We know that these are stressful times and the Commission, and, as you have heard, our staff are committed to assist institutions during these challenging times. I want to summarize important next steps.

It is important for you to monitor and address institution specific matters with the Commission and/or with the United States Department of Education. The Commission's standards for accreditation and requirements of affiliation require adherence to Guidance issued by the Department and we encourage you to outreach to Department officials if your institution has unique circumstances that are not addressed in our guidance to determine what, if any, alternative options may be available. Any additional direction provided to you by the Department may also need to be reported to us. With this said, the Commission will continue to monitor, interpret and communicate guidance released by the Department through constituent specific communications and through the Commission's website. The Commission's COVID-19 webpage and the link to the Department's website are provided on the screen.

We also encourage institutions to reach out to your specific state and/or system offices for guidance as well. If you are a state or system representative, we encourage you to keep us updated on any and all measures being taken that impact our accredited institutions. We would ask that you contact Diana Bonner at dbonner@msche.org.

Once we get through the critical short-term priorities, we will continue to work with institutions around all of our processes and we will remain attuned to the longer term impacts that will be dependent on the extent of what transpires relating to COVID-19 over the next several weeks.

As you continue to have questions, we encourage you to reach out to us. We cannot stress this enough.

- The institution president or accreditation liaison officer (ALO) should continue to work collaboratively with their Vice President liaison. If you are unsure as to who your vice president is please consult your Statement of Accreditation Status through the Commission's website, or if you are a key contact you can find the Vice President liaison listed within the institution portal when you log in.
- If you were a team member assigned to an on-site evaluation or follow-up visit and have questions about the status of your assignment, please contact Erin Mattson at emattson@msche.org.
- We know that many institutions have questions about changes they are implementing and whether those require the submission of a substantive change request. Please outreach to Carmella Smith at csmith@msche.org.
- Media and associated requests should be sent to Brian Kirschner at bkirschner@msche.org.

We have provided a lot of information to assist you and your institution: If there is something that has not been addressed by our comments or other communications, or if you have a question but are not sure who to contact, you can send your inquiry to communications@msche.org. We will monitor all questions coming into the Commission and publish additional information or host future events that provide an opportunity for us to share information most broadly.

We appreciate all that you are doing to assist your students. Please be assured of the continuing interest of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in the safety, health, and well-being of our member institutions and all who contribute to peer review. Thank you.

- Slide 1 Background

Image LOGO MSCHE, Middle States Commission on Higher Education

MSCHE COVID-19 Update

Image of MSCHE website page

<https://www.msche.org/covid-19>

March 17, 2020

- Slide 2 Background

Resources	Questions
MSCHE Institution President or Accreditation Liaison Officer	Assigned MSCHE Vice President
Peer Evaluators	emattson@msche.org
Substantive Change	csmith@msche.org
State and System Representatives	dbonner@msche.org
Media/Communications	bkirschner@msche.org
Additional Questions	communications@msche.org
MSCHE	www.msche.org/COVID-19
U.S. Department of Education (USDE)	www.ed.gov/coronavirus

