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TO: All MSCHÉ Member Institutions
State and System Colleagues
FROM: Elizabeth H. Sibolski, President
Heather F. Perfetti, President-Elect
RE: USDE: Information for Accrediting Agencies Regarding Temporary Flexibilities
DATE: March 19, 2020

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education continues to be concerned about the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and understands that this is a difficult time for our institutions, all students, faculty, staff, and administration, and for the communities our institutions serve. The Commission has received additional guidance from the United States Department of Education (USDE) outlining temporary flexibility to allow accreditors to substitute on-site reviews with virtual site visits in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) interruptions. In anticipation of such flexibilities, the Commission had already approved of virtual site visits and communicated with institutions and teams (March 13, 2020) to inquire about their willingness and capacity to host virtual visits in lieu of on-site visits for spring 2020. The Commission determined that virtual site visits would not be made available to applicant institutions, institutions on probation, or those institutions with concerns that necessitated on-site review.

The USDE guidelines require that virtual site visits rely on engaged, interactive formats, and may not be solely document reviews and exchanges of emails. The guidance further requires a subsequent follow-up, in-person visit. However, we are currently seeking clarification from the USDE about the nature and purpose of such a visit and whether any preliminary visits required by Commission policies and procedures and conducted by Commission representatives could serve as an appropriate substitute.

To assist institutions and teams with preparing for virtual site visits, the Commission is developing a recorded webinar that will be posted at the Commission's website: www.msche.org/covid-19.

Institutions that have requested virtual site visits or delayed visits will receive a separate communication from their MSCHÉ Vice President liaisons with further guidance. As a reminder, the Commission will take an accreditation action to delay a visit in accordance with its Accreditation Actions Policy and Procedures. The Commission's action will be published on the institution's Statement of Accreditation Status (SAS). The Commission will post other required information about its response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) in accordance with the USDE guidance.

Please continue to access the MSCHÉ Response to COVID-19 (coronavirus) website for updates and additional resources. A copy of the USDE guidance dated March 17, 2020, titled Information for Accrediting Agencies Regarding Temporary Flexibilities Provided to Coronavirus Impacted Institutions or Accrediting Agencies, providing flexibility for virtual site visits can be found on the USDE website. As always, chief executive officers and accreditation liaison officers (ALOs) should contact their assigned MSCHÉ Vice President liaison with questions and concerns. The Commission remains focused on the safety, health, and well-being of our member institutions and all who contribute to peer review.

Resources

MSCHÉ: www.msche.org/covid-19

U.S. Department of Education: www.ed.gov/coronavirus

Download a PDF of this memo at <https://go.msche.org/20200319-USDE-Information-for-Accrediting-Agencies>