

An Introduction

By Don Sutherland

This is an exciting time for those who are involved with accreditation- or assessment-related issues. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) has very recently adopted seven [new standards](#) to replace its longstanding fourteen standards. For the first time, assessment is explicitly mentioned in every standard. MSCHE's [annual conference](#) will be held in Washington, DC from December 3-5 and that conference should provide a lot of important insight into MSCHE's expectations. Finally, the practice of assessment has continued to transition from an early focus on enhancing student learning outcomes to one that aims to promote continual improvement and excellence across all of a college's or university's activities and operations.

At present, American Higher Education is confronted with the kind of big challenges that have faced companies in every industry and policy makers in local, state, and federal government in recent years and decades. The underlying theme that ties those disparate challenges together is the lesson that no institution—public or private, for-profit or non-profit—has ever found a permanent resting place in which its success is assured for all-time.

Instead, environmental change (evolving demographics, changing consumer tastes, rapidly advancing technology, a dynamic balance of power in the realm of geopolitics, and numerous additional variables) has rendered yesterday's business models and strategies obsolete. Continual change has also placed some of today's models and practices on the proverbial endangered list. Nevertheless, this gale of creative destruction, to borrow from Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter's insights, is not all bad.

The very same forces that continually shape and reshape the environment in which colleges and universities operate also create rich opportunities for the institutions that recognize them and are willing and able to position themselves for the tomorrow that is just emerging. Assessment, if pursued in a coherent, robust, and sustained fashion, in which planning, resource allocation, and assessment are integrated into a cohesive whole, can help colleges and universities build a bridge that brings them to a bright tomorrow.

The purpose of this blog will be to discuss accreditation standards and outcomes, assessment practices, teaching and learning, and sometimes additional topics. Accreditation- and assessment-related commentary will cover a wide range of issues, including but not limited to those I deal with as Lehman College's Institutional Effectiveness Coordinator. Obviously, in the near-term, I will be discussing the new MSCHE standards, as well as the Periodic Review Report that Lehman College had submitted on June 1, with the results expected on Thanksgiving Day (November 27).

Initial feedback from the MSCHE reviewers was very positive with respect to the College's assessment-related activities, especially as they related to Standard 7 (Institutional Assessment) and Standard 14 (Assessment of Student Learning). My teaching and learning discussions will address issues and initiatives I have undertaken in the classes I teach. From time to time, I will also share other thoughts and resources.

I would be remiss not to give a good measure of credit to [Alyson Vogel](#), Associate Director of Online Education at Lehman College, for helping bring this blog to the Commons. She introduced me to this forum at a recent seminar and has provided valuable assistance in getting things running smoothly. On a larger scale, her myriad efforts have been beneficial to Lehman College's faculty, particularly faculty members teaching fully online or hybrid courses, as well as those deploying clickers in the classroom. All of those activities push the frontiers of student learning. So, thank you Alyson.

I also thank CUNY Academic Commons Director [Matthew K. Gold](#) and Community Facilitators [Sarah Morgano](#) and [Marilyn Weber](#). They have been instrumental in working to address a technical glitch associated with my quick link.

Finally, with MSCHE posting its Periodic Review Report outcomes later this week, next week's blog entry will provide a snapshot of those results.