

New MSCHE Standards: V and VI Could Be the Most-Cited

By Don Sutherland

Last year, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) adopted a set of seven standards to replace the existing fourteen standards that have been a familiar feature of the Middle States accreditation landscape. Under the existing standards, 14 (assessment of student learning) and 7 (institutional assessment), have been the most frequently cited standards following the submission of self-study and periodic review reports. Relevant to the institutions in the Middle States region, this familiar pattern has amounted to a powerful signal concerning MSCHE's expectations: regular assessment of student learning is of paramount importance and assessment of an institution's academic and administrative activities (including linkage between planning, budgeting, and assessment) is essential if an institution is to position itself for continual improvement.

Now that familiar landscape is in transition. By the time Lehman College undergoes its next self-study visit, the College will be reporting under the new standards, which will be fully implemented beginning in 2017. Implementation of the new standards does not mean that uncertainty has supplanted what had become reliable clarity concerning MSCHE's expectations.

First, all of the institutions that belong to MSCHE had played a role in the drafting, evaluation, and adoption of the new standards. Second, the new standards are a product of extensive consultation with those institutions, along with external authorities whose voices have played an influential role in the broader higher education discourse. Third, there have been trends under way in which MSCHE has been placing growing emphasis on institutional effectiveness and institutional resources. Consideration of those three points argues that MSCHE will continue to focus on educational effectiveness (after all, student learning is a central aspect of the academic enterprise) and the relationship between planning, resource allocation, and institutional improvement.

In fact, mapping the components of the outgoing standards to the new ones, suggests just such an outcome. To be sure, certain elements from the outgoing standards are no longer present in the new standards and the new standards contain elements that were not present in the earlier ones. Nevertheless, there is sufficient commonality to allow for a general glimpse of the emergent MSCHE world. Based on a mapping exercise for early analytical purposes in advance preparation for Lehman College's next self-study report, Standards III (Student Learning Experience), Standard V (Educational Effectiveness Assessment), Standard VI (Planning, Resources, Institutional Improvement) would have been the most frequently cited MSCHE in requests for follow-up reports from the 2014 accreditation cycle.

Standards Cited as a Percentage of Follow-Up Report Requests:

Report	Standard III: <i>Student Learning Experience</i>	Standard V: <i>Educational Effectiveness Assessment</i>	Standard VI: <i>Planning, Resources, Institutional Improvement</i>
Periodic Review Report	25%	75%	54%
Self-Study Report	39%	67%	82%
Both Reports	33%	70%	70%

It should be noted that any mapping exercise contains some degree of interpretation, so the percentages could differ somewhat depending on how things are mapped. However, if one is looking for a reasonable and approximate snapshot, rather than precise details, the big themes related to MSCHE's expectations are very likely well-represented in the above table.

Finally, in the broader and more important context, colleges and universities should not be engaged in a variety of activities—including, but not limited to greater integration between planning, resource allocation, and assessment with an emphasis where long-term planning takes precedence over often chaotic ad hoc policy making—because their accrediting agency expects it. They should be undertaking such activities, because such activities are essential to institutional well being, effectiveness, improvement, and innovation in an environment where the public expects more from higher education.