

June 2015 MSCHE Self-Study Report Outcomes: A Snapshot

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The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) released the accreditation outcomes from its June 2015 meeting. The percentage of self-study reports leading to follow-up requests and the citations for Standard 7 (Institutional Assessment) and Standard 14 (Assessment of Student Learning) were comparable to the three-year average. However, there was a spike in citations for Standard 4 (Leadership and Governance), with requests for follow-up on that standard more than double the three-year average.

Select data is below:

Rank	Standard	June 2015 (% of Follow-up Requests)	2013-2015 Average (% of Follow-up Requests)
1.	Standard 14	68%	65%
2.	Standard 7	64%	65%
3.	Standard 4	32%	15%
4.	Standard 2	28%	32%
5.	Standard 3	24%	37%
	Standard 8	24%	20%

Percent of Self-Study Reports with Follow-up Requests	62.5%	63.2%
Sanctions as Percent of Follow-up Requests	24.0%	27.5%

With the large increase in Standard 4 citations, it makes sense to take a closer look. Eight institutions received follow-up requests concerning Standard 4. Three major elements were involved: (1) a clearly articulated governance structure; (2) assessment of the effectiveness of governance; and, (3) a conflict of interest policy. The first two elements were each cited in 50% of the follow-up requests for Standard 4. The conflict of interest policy was mentioned in one (12.5%) of the follow-up requests. For those who are interested in mapping elements of Standard 4 to the new MSCHE Standard VII, the requirement for a clearly articulated governance structure is set forth in VII, 1. The element for periodic assessment can be found in VII, 5. The language concerning a written conflict of interest policy and its implementation can be found in VII, 1. h.

Considering the high share of follow-up requests that concern assessment (Standards 7 and 14), the assessment-related focus on Standard 4 may be a prime candidate area for initial scrutiny under new MSCHE Standard VII, especially as assessment is now explicitly embedded in all the new standards.

With respect to assessment, Standard 4 states, “A manifestation of a governing body’s responsibility is its willingness to assess its own effectiveness periodically.” Standard VII

contains a similar requirement for “periodic assessment of the effectiveness of governance, leadership, and administration.”

When it comes to meeting the requirements of Standard 4 and, subsequently Standard VII, a number of documents can be helpful for demonstrating compliance. Those documents include, but are not limited to, written governance documents (i.e., Charter and Senate Bylaws), an organization chart and/or list of Board members and titles, written policies outlining governance responsibilities of administration and faculty, a strategic action plan on equity and diversity, a written conflict of interest policy, annual reports documenting progress on an institution’s strategic plan, collective bargaining agreements (for unionized institutions), and assessment outcomes and use of assessment results related to governance and leadership. In a contemporary higher education environment in which accreditors, governmental bodies, and the general public are increasingly focused on accountability, transparency in which most of these documents are posted on an institution’s website/intranet/assessment package such as *Taskstream* and/or made available through written materials disseminated to administration, faculty, and staff can be helpful in demonstrating compliance.

Considering the importance of leadership and governance in guiding an institution coupled with the increasingly demanding higher education context, institutions should assume that assessment of leadership and governance effectiveness will be a sustained theme of accreditation reviews. Effective documentation, transparency, and use of assessment results focused on leadership and governance performance can help assure that an institution will remain in compliance with Standard 4 and later Standard VII.