

MSCHE Publishes 2016 Edition of its Compliance Handbook

By Don Sutherland

Accredited institutions are expected to be in “compliance with all applicable government (usually Federal and State) policies, regulations, and requirements” under the Requirements of Affiliation and also new MSCHE Standard II (Ethics and Integrity). To assist institutions, MSCHE periodically publishes Compliance Verification handbooks and Institutional Report Templates.

MSCHE has just released its 2016 edition of [Compliance: Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal Regulations](#). As was the case with the 2015 edition, institutions are expected to verify compliance in the following areas: student identity verification in distance and correspondence education, transfer of credit policies and articulation agreements, Title IV program responsibilities, and assignment of credit hours. With federal policy makers demanding greater transparency, four new areas have been added: institutional records of student complaints, required information for students and the public, standing with state and other accrediting agencies, and contractual relationships.

There was also an addition to Title IV program responsibilities. Colleges and universities are now expected to provide documentation of the three most recent years of [Composite Financial Ratios](#) used by the U.S. Department of Education. Composite scores are calculated based on an institution’s primary reserve ratio, equity ratio, and net income ratio using assigned strength factor scores and weights applied to the strength factor scores. The Composite Score scale is as follows: -1.0 to 0.9: Not financially responsible; 1.0 to 1.4: In the “Zone”; and, 1.5 to 3.0: Financially responsible. Schools falling on the scale’s lowest range are required to submit a letter of credit of at least 50% of its financial student aid funding. Schools in the middle are subject to additional oversight.

The following is a summary of the new areas:

Institutional Record of Student Complaints:

- Written description of policy and methods used in handling student complaints
- Five years’ documentation of student complaints (number, patterns in type, resolution)
- Written procedures for making modifications and improvements based on complaints

Under the newly-adopted MSCHE standards, deficiencies in this area could impact an institution’s performance related to the Requirements of Affiliation (#5); Standard II (Ethics and Integrity): 3, 8; and, Standard IV (Support of the Student Experience): 3.

Required Information for Students and the Public:

- URLs for course catalogs and student handbooks
- URL documenting “Student Right to Know” information
- URL of policies covering satisfactory academic progress, attendance, and leave of absence

- Written description of methods used to collect and review information on student outcomes and licensure pass rates
- Documents and URLs for advertising and recruitment materials available to current and prospective students

Under the newly-adopted MSCHE standards, deficiencies in this area could impact an institution's performance related to the Requirements of Affiliation (#5); Standard II (Ethics and Integrity): 6, 7, 8; Standard III (Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience): 3; Standard IV (Support of the Student Experience): 1a; and Standard V (Educational Effectiveness Assessment): 2, 5.

Standing with State and Other Accrediting Agencies:

- Written documentation about the relationships with any specialized, programmatic, or institutional accrediting agencies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education
- Written documentation of any review resulting in a non-compliance action determined by the accrediting agency, state or country within the last five years

Under the newly-adopted MSCHE standards, deficiencies in this area could impact an institution's performance related to the Requirements of Affiliation (#5) and Standard II (Ethics and Integrity): 6, 8.

Contractual Relationships:

- List of contractual arrangements for education services
- Written documentation such as policies and procedures or contract excerpts demonstrating that the institution is responsible for all required segments of the educational service

Under the newly-adopted MSCHE standards, deficiencies in this area could impact an institution's performance related to the Requirements of Affiliation (#5) and Standard II (Ethics and Integrity): 8; Standard III (Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience): 7; Standard IV (Support of the Student Learning Experience): 5; and, Standard V (Educational Effectiveness Assessment): 4.