

Middle States Places a Growing Emphasis on Institutional Improvement and Innovation

By Don Sutherland

Dr. Andrea Lex, Senior Vice President of Operations and Chief of Staff at the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), was among the keynote speakers at the Assessment Network of New York's Annual Conference. Dr. Lex spoke about the changes that have taken place at Middle States, evolving accreditation expectations, and possible changes that still lie ahead.

Some major points from Andrea Lex's keynote address included:

- The 14 standards were premised on the idea that institutions were “becoming” [better in terms of planning, budgeting, assessment, serving students, etc.]. The new standards are premised on the idea that they are “being” (already perform all those tasks competently and effectively).
- On account of the Commission's new expectation, MSCHE has shifted its focus toward institutional innovation and improvement.
- MSCHE's role is evolving as it relates to how accreditors identify institutional “risk” and what they do about it. MSCHE is considering taking a more robust approach in its accreditation actions. In the future, the Commission could begin to offer specific recommendations in its accreditation actions.
- The Self-Study Report was that it should involve “real self-reflection.” It should address the following questions: “What are we doing really well?” “What should we stop doing?” “What should we start doing?” “What should we scale up?”
- The Self-Study Report should be “useful and used.” Therefore, it should be an integral part of an institution's strategic planning process.
- Middle States is still working on the Annual Institutional Update. It will go beyond “what we must ask” (federal requirements). MSCHE is now looking at “what can we ask?” and “what should we ask?” Those questions relate more to improvement and innovation than compliance.
- The Mid-Point Peer Review will analyze trends obtained from the Annual Institutional Update. The Mid-Point Review could lead to recommendations, requests for additional explanation, team visits, and/or accreditation actions.