

Middle States Holds 2016 Annual Conference This Week

By Don Sutherland

From December 7-9, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) will hold its annual conference at the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown Hotel.

Descriptions of three concurrent sessions from the Conference program follow:

From 14 to 7: Successfully Organizing a Meaningful Decennial Review

As institutions prepare to move from 14 accreditation standards to seven, panelists from three institutions with differing missions who were in the first cohort to use the new MSCHE standards, will share first-hand experiences and informed guidance about (1) organizing and overseeing key aspects of the self-study process, including the Steering Committee, Work Groups, Compliance Review, and the Documentation Roadmap; (2) interpreting the new standards and associated criteria in order to provide verifiable and recommended self-study evidence; (3) keeping the focus on continuous improvement; (4) creating a campus community sense of ownership; (5) using the self-study to assess and provide guidance for the strategic planning process; and (6) anticipating issues and questions while maintaining balance and humor.

Aligning Assessment, Planning, and Resource Allocation—Can It Be Done?

One of the key compliance indicators for MSCHE is to demonstrate that an institution's planning process, resources, and structures are aligned for continuous improvement of its programs and services. Is it possible? Can it be done? Binghamton University has done so by developing a comprehensive system to link assessment results, strategic planning, faculty contributions to mission, and resource allocation. The University's approach to assessment combines centralized support and data gathering with decentralized and campus-wide ownership of the assessment process. All aspects of the University are assessed, including each unit of every division using a combination of formative and summative approaches to assessment. The presenters will provide specific examples of how the University has used assessment results for decades to inform planning and to improve institution effectiveness. They will also demonstrate how the resource allocation process is aligned with the data gathering and assessment processes.

(Author's Note: SUNY at Binghamton's accreditation was reaffirmed in November 2016 and the institution was commended for the quality of its periodic review report).

Tracking Our Progress: Creating a Strategic Planning and Budgeting System

In preparation for its 2016 MSCHE self-study visit, Salisbury University (SU) recognized that an online tracking system was needed to more efficiently determine how adequately institutional goals were being met. The presenters will describe how SU developed a Strategic Planning and Budgeting System (SPBS) tool that allows the institution to identify unit-level initiatives, link them to the University's strategic plan, describe successful milestones, and track estimated and actual expenses associates with these initiatives. The strategic plan is used as the road map for

the allocation of new resources. Through a collaborative effort, the Office of University Analysis, reporting, and Assessment, Associate Provost, and Web Development Office created the SPBS, which explicitly connects the strategic plan to budgeting in a transparent manner that ensures accountability.

(Author's Note: Salisbury University's accreditation was reaffirmed in June 2016 and the institution was commended for the quality of its self-study process and report).