



## **Accreditation Actions**

(Version 030116)

### **I. Purpose**

This policy defines the procedural and substantive accreditation actions that the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (the Commission) may take with respect to the accreditation of an individual institution.

### **II. Introduction**

Accreditation actions occur regularly after a review of candidacy activities, self study /on-site evaluations, periodic review reports (PRR), follow-up reports (progress report, monitoring report, supplemental information report, show cause report) and visits, substantive change requests, or at any other time that an institution's accreditation is reviewed. The Commission may conduct an accreditation review at any time that the institution proposes developments and changes or engages in activities that may affect its educational effectiveness or its ability to continue to meet accreditation standards or the requirements of affiliation. The institution and the public are notified of the Commission's action in accordance with the policy, *Notification of Accreditation Decisions*.

### **III. Actions on Institutional Submissions**

The Commission may accept, document receipt of, or reject the institution's accreditation report. The Commission "accepts" a report when its quality, thoroughness, and clarity are sufficient to respond to all of the Commission's concerns. Rather than accepting a report, the Commission may, at its discretion, "document receipt of" a report that contains limited institutional responses to requested information or does not present evidence and analysis conducive to Commission review. The Commission "rejects" a report when its quality or substance are insufficient to respond appropriately to the Commission's concerns or requires extraordinary effort on the part of the reviewer.

### **IV. Accreditation Actions**

#### *A. Affirming Actions*

The Commission may act to grant or reaffirm accreditation with no required follow-up reporting when an institution meets the Commission's accreditation standards and requirements of affiliation and there are no questions or concerns regarding the institution's continued compliance. While no written report or visit is required, such actions may include a stipulation for issues to be emphasized in the institution's next regularly scheduled accreditation review.

The Commission may take the following affirming actions:

- **Grant candidate for accreditation status** and invite to initiate self-study
- **Grant (initial) accreditation** (*with no required follow-up reporting*)
- **Reaffirm accreditation** (*with no required follow-up reporting*)

#### *B. Affirming Actions with Follow-Up Reporting*

The Commission may act to grant or reaffirm accreditation with follow-up reporting (progress report, monitoring report, supplemental information report), and with or without a visit, prior to the

next regularly scheduled accreditation review. The Commission may request follow-up reporting to ensure continued compliance with its accreditation standards and requirements of affiliation or to provide more information to keep the Commission informed of institutional developments. The Commission may also request follow-up reports and activities any time that it has evidence that the institution may no longer meet the accreditation standards and requirements of affiliation. Follow-up activities may take the form of reports, visits, or both. Refer to the Commission's guidelines *Follow-Up Reports and Visits* for more detail about the types of reports and visits that may be requested by the Commission.

The Commission may take the following affirming actions with follow-up reporting:

- **Grant candidate for accreditation status** and request an updated accreditation readiness report (ARR), with or without a visit. Institutions ordinarily remain in candidate for accreditation status for at least one year and, by Federal regulation, under no circumstances for longer than five years. See the Commission's publication, *Becoming Accredited*.
- **Grant (initial) accreditation** and request a follow-up report, with or without a visit
- **Reaffirm accreditation** and request a follow-up report, with or without a visit
- **Remove warning**, reaffirm accreditation and request a follow-up report, with or without a visit
- **Remove probation**, reaffirm accreditation and request a follow-up report, with or without a visit
- **Remove show cause**, reaffirm accreditation and request a follow-up report, with or without a visit

### C. Procedural Actions

The Commission may take a procedural action when it requires further information in order to make a decision regarding accreditation. ***The institution remains accredited or maintains candidate status during a procedural action.***

The Commission may take the following procedural actions:

- **Reject** the accreditation report and request resubmission in a short time frame. If an institution is in a non-compliance status, a report can be resubmitted only if the period of non-compliance would not exceed the federal regulatory requirements and Commission policy,
- **Defer a decision on (initial) accreditation** and request a supplemental information report, with or without a visit - The candidate institution shows promise but the evaluation team has identified issues of concern and recommends that the institution be given a specified time period to address those concerns. Institutions ordinarily remain in candidate for accreditation status for at least one year and, by federal regulation, under no circumstances for longer than five years. See *Becoming Accredited*.
- **Postpone a decision on candidate for accreditation status, (initial) accreditation, reaffirmation of accreditation, or substantive change.** The Commission postpones a decision and requests a supplemental information report, with or without a visit, when it has determined that there is insufficient information to substantiate institutional compliance with one or more accreditation standards or requirements of affiliation.
- **To note a voluntary lapse of accreditation.** Failure to schedule a visit, to submit required information to the Commission including the annual Institutional Profile, or to submit its dues within 12 months of the billing date, is considered to be a voluntary lapse of accreditation. The Commission may require the institution to fulfill these obligations of membership or address the Commission's concerns in some other manner, as

determined by and within a time period specified by the Commission. If the institution does not address the Commission's concerns, the Commission will issue a notice of show cause, and the institution must demonstrate why its accreditation should not be withdrawn.

#### D. Administrative Actions

In the event that the Commission is unable to evaluate the institution due to circumstances which the Commission determines to be outside of the institution's or the Commission's control (e.g., natural disaster, some instances of change in ownership, or U.S. State Department travel warnings to the area in which the institution is located, etc.), the Commission may take an administrative action. This action does not speak to the accreditation status of the institution, but rather to the inability of the Commission to conduct an appropriate review in order to determine whether the institution meets accreditation standards and requirements of affiliation. ***The institution remains accredited or maintains candidate status during an administrative action.***

The Commission may take the following administrative action:

- **Continue accreditation** - The Commission may act to continue accreditation for a period not to exceed one year. If it is still not possible to conduct an appropriate review after a continuation, the institution will be required to show cause why its accreditation should not be withdrawn.

#### E. Substantive Change Actions

Substantive changes, as defined in the Commission's *Substantive Change Policy* and *Substantive Change Procedures*, require Commission review and approval prior to implementation. Substantive change actions are official actions of the Commission and are recorded in the institution's history.

The Commission may take the following substantive change actions:

- **Decline to consider** the substantive change request
- **Reject** the substantive change request
- **Acknowledge receipt** of the substantive change request. To include the substantive change within the scope of accreditation\*
  - with or without follow-up reporting, with or without a visit
  - Pending a site visit
  - Effective upon receipt of all necessary approvals
- **Include the substantive change** within the scope of accreditation, and direct the institution to commence early self-study
- **Postpone a decision** on the substantive change and request a supplemental information report
- **Refer** the substantive change request to the Executive Committee of the Commission or full Commission for review and action
- **Deny the institution's request** to include the change within the scope of current accreditation
- **Rescind approval or withdraw approval** of the substantive change request

\* If the action language includes "pending a site visit," the institution can begin operations but a site visit must be conducted within 6 months of the commencement of operations at the site. If the action language includes "effective upon receipt", the institution cannot begin operations until all required approvals are received by the Commission. If approval(s) are not received, the Commission may rescind or withdraw the action.

## F. *Non-Compliance Actions*

A non-compliance action (warning, probation, or show cause) indicates that the Commission has identified one or more areas in which the institution does not meet the Commission's accreditation standards and requirements of affiliation and are preliminary to an adverse action by the Commission. The areas of non-compliance are to be specifically noted in the Commission's action language. At each review, areas of compliance that have been satisfied will be noted, and any new areas of non-compliance that are identified can be added. To have the non-compliance action removed by the Commission, the institution must take appropriate steps to satisfy the Commission that the institution is in compliance with all accreditation standards and requirements of affiliation within the timeframe established by federal regulation (24 months). ***The institution remains accredited or maintains its candidacy during a non-compliance action.***

The Commission is not bound by any sequence nor precluded from taking an action at any level (e.g., warning need not precede probation; the next action following warning may be show cause).

The Commission will request a monitoring report when an institution is placed on warning or probation and will request a show cause report when an institution is placed on show cause. A visit is required with a non-compliance action. Refer to the Commission's guidelines *Follow-Up Reports and Visits* for more detail.

The Commission may take any of the following non-compliance actions:

- **Issue or Continue Warning**, with monitoring report and visit.  
The Commission warns an institution that its accreditation may be in jeopardy when the institution is not in compliance with one or more accreditation standards and requirements of affiliation. A monitoring report and a small team visit are required to demonstrate that the institution has made appropriate improvements to bring itself into compliance. Warning indicates that the Commission believes that, although the institution is out of compliance, the institution has the capacity to make appropriate improvements within a reasonable period of time and the institution has the capacity to sustain itself in the long term.
- **Issue or Continue Probation**, with monitoring report and visit.  
The Commission places an institution on probation when, in the Commission's judgment, the institution is not in compliance with one or more accreditation standards and requirements of affiliation and the non-compliance is sufficiently serious, extensive, or substantial that it raises concern about one or more of the following:
  1. the adequacy of the education provided by the institution;
  2. the institution's capacity to make appropriate improvements in a timely fashion; or
  3. the institution's capacity to sustain itself in the long term.

Probation is often, but need not always be, preceded by an action of warning. The Commission may place the institution on probation at any time if it determines that the institution has failed to address satisfactorily the Commission's concerns regarding non-compliance with accreditation standards and requirements of affiliation in a prior action. This action is accompanied by a request for a monitoring report and a visit follows. Probation may, but need not always, precede an action of show cause.

- **Issue Show Cause** with show cause report, teach-out plan, and visit.

Show Cause is a non-compliance action requiring an institution to demonstrate why its accreditation should not be withdrawn. The Commission may require an institution to show cause at any time if the Commission determines that the institution no longer meets one or more of the accreditation standards and requirements of affiliation. A show cause action requires an institution to present its case to the Commission for continued accreditation by means of a show cause report and an on-site visit/evaluation. The institution is required to submit a teach-out plan with the show cause report. See the guidelines *Follow-Up Reports and Visits* for more information. The institution has the opportunity to appear before the Commission when the Commission meets to consider the institution's show cause report. See the procedures *Show Cause Appearance Before the Commission Prior to Withdrawal of Accreditation*. Show cause may or may not result in the adverse action of withdrawal of accreditation (described in G).

### **Time Frames for Non-Compliance Actions**

The Commission must determine whether compliance has been achieved no later than 24 months after the initial non-compliance action was taken (34 CFR §602.20 (a)). The Commission will ask for one or more reports and visits within that time frame in order to determine compliance.

Commission actions of warning, probation, or show cause (none of which is deemed to constitute an adverse action) automatically result in further Commission review of the institution's status prior to the expiration of the 24 month period. Such review will either result in the removal of the non-compliance action, the imposition of a subsequent non-compliance action, or the imposition of an adverse action (as described below in G.).

***Extension for Good Cause.*** At any time during the 24 month period of non-compliance, the Commission may, at its discretion, continue the institution's non-compliance status and extend accreditation for good cause beyond the original 24 month period (CFR 34 §602.20(b)). The Commission may extend accreditation for good cause only once and for a maximum of twelve months. During the extension, the institution remains accredited and is continued on warning, probation, or show cause. At the conclusion of the extension, the Commission must act to reaffirm accreditation, require the institution to show cause why its accreditation should not be withdrawn, or withdraw accreditation provided the institution has been given the opportunity to show cause.

Extensions for good cause are made at the sole discretion of the Commission. Typical criteria may include:

1. The institution has, during the period of monitoring, demonstrated significant progress towards the resolution of its non-compliance issues (for example, an institution addressing non-compliance on multiple standards has achieved reaffirmation on the majority of those standards); or
2. The institution has, during the period of monitoring, demonstrated to the Commission's satisfaction the potential to remedy its accreditation-relevant deficiencies within the period of extension (for example, an institution has initiated new data-collection procedures and will be able to demonstrate the application of relevant findings during its subsequent budgeting cycle); or
3. The institution has provided written and compelling evidence describing reasonable plans to meet the Commission's expectations for reaffirmation within the period of extension (for example, an institution has documented its commitment of financial and human resources to resolve all remaining non-compliance issues within the period of extension).

### G. Adverse Actions

In an adverse action, the Commission withdraws an institution's candidate for accreditation status or its accredited status or denies candidate status or (initial) accreditation and therefore, membership in the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Adverse actions are subject to appeal in accordance with due process as delineated in the procedures *Appeals from Adverse Accrediting Actions*. An institution retains its accreditation during the appeal. The Commission, in its sole discretion, shall fix the effective date of the withdrawal of accreditation status. The effective date of an adverse accreditation action is not an appealable decision.

The Commission may take the following adverse actions:

- **Deny candidate status** – An institution is denied candidate for accreditation status.
- **Deny accreditation** – An institution is denied (initial) accreditation. The institution may be permitted to remain in candidate status until it is ready for a new evaluation within the allowable five-year period of candidacy.
- **Withdrawal of candidate status** – An institution's candidate for accreditation status is withdrawn. The institution must wait two years to reapply.
- **Withdrawal of accreditation** – An institution's accredited status is withdrawn. If the institution appeals this action, its accreditation remains in effect until the appeal is completed or until the effective date of the withdrawal of accreditation. The institution must wait two years to reapply.

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Relevant Documents: *Follow-up Reports and Visits, Public Communication in the Accrediting Process; Show Cause Appearance before the Commission Prior to Withdrawal of Accreditation, Appeals from Adverse Accrediting Actions, C-RAC Common Framework (Apr 9, 2014)*,  
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