

## Middle States Accreditation FAQ's

1. *What is "Middle States"?* "Middle States" is shorthand for the [Middle States Commission on Higher Education](#) (MSCHE), an institutional accreditor recognized by the U.S. [Department of Education](#). MSCHE is a non-governmental membership association that accredits over 500 colleges & universities. Prior to July 2020, MSCHE was referred to as a "regional" accreditor. However, federal regulatory changes in that year eliminated the traditional geographical boundaries that limited MSCHE accreditation to institutions within that specified region.
2. *What is accreditation?* Accreditation is an assurance to the public that an academic institution meets acceptable levels of performance on established standards, requirements, and policies. The MSCHE accreditation process includes institutional self-reflection on how it meets these obligations, peer review, and evaluation of compliance with several federal and other regulatory elements. Although a voluntary practice, holding institutional accreditation by a federally recognized accreditor is a requirement for higher education institutions seeking to access federal student financial aid and other funding under Title IV of the Higher Education Act. Accreditation is also a typical prerequisite for transfer of academic credit between institutions.
3. *How long has The University of Scranton been accredited?* The University has held accreditation through Middle States since 1927. Our accreditation was most recently reaffirmed in 2019.
4. *Why is accreditation important?* In addition to being an indicator of institutional quality, maintaining institutional accreditation is necessary for institutions to gain access to Title IV federal financial aid funding. Title IV is part of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (as amended), the law that regulates many aspects of U.S. higher education activities. A number of the practices and policies in place with MSCHE flow from this legislation.

Institutional accreditation is also often a baseline criterion for transferring credit from one institution to another. Many employers look for degrees from accredited institutions, and some will only offer educational benefits to employees if they are seeking education through an accredited institution. State governments may require that an institution is accredited in order for students to access state funds, and some require that students sitting for certain placement or credentialing examinations are coming from accredited institutions.

In addition to institutional accreditation through Middle States, a number of academic programs at the University maintain [disciplinary accreditation](#) at the program level. These are important markers of program quality and rigor. Information about the disciplinary accreditations held by University programs is available in the University catalog, individual program web sites, and the University's Consumer Information web page. For more

information about these accreditations, their cycles, standards, and processes, contact the Dean's Office within each college.

5. *What is the accreditation process? How do we achieve accreditation, and how do we maintain it?*

Once an institution achieves initial accreditation through a robust candidacy process, accreditation status is determined at key points in the accreditation cycle. This cycle is a generally an eight to ten-year period beginning and ending with a comprehensive self-study, a mid-point review, annual reporting, and sometimes through other interim progress reports as required by the accreditor. Within Middle States, institutions engage in self-study every eight years<sup>1</sup>, and submits annual reporting each spring that includes standard data and information elements, along with response to any recommendations or requests for supplemental or ongoing reporting as required by the Commission.

In addition to these regular milestones, when and if an institution wishes to make certain changes that differ from what is currently approved by the accreditor – for example, adding certain types of new programs, degree levels, modes of delivery, or new sites or locations for the delivery of existing programs - they may be required to complete a proposal for Substantive Change. These proposals serve as the means through which institutions demonstrate the quality of these planned offerings, and ensure that they are covered under the scope of the institution's accreditation. Middle States must approve proposals prior to the launch of the program or initiative. Some type of changes may not require prior approval, but instead prompt notification to the Commission when they occur. Commission staff also monitor institutions to identify any special circumstances that may require additional evaluation or reporting.

In addition to these activities, institutions must comply with a number of policies that define good practice shared by member institutions and align their activities with federal standards and definitions, such as such as transfer of credit, contractual arrangements for educational services, and student identity verification.

6. *What is self-study?* Self-study is the foundation of Middle States accreditation, and peer-review is its cornerstone. The self-study process gathers together persons from across the college or university to prepare a self-study report. Within this document (about a hundred pages) institutions engage in intensive self-reflection, examining and evaluating their programs, services, and operations. The report articulates the institutions' strengths and ability to meet – through documented evidence – MSCHE standards in the context of the institution's mission and goals. In addition to affirming compliance with these standards, institutions make recommendations for self-improvement.

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<sup>1</sup> In December 2016, member institutions voted affirmatively on a measure that would change the accreditation cycle from ten years to eight, and made significant adjustments to the accreditation process. Institutions cycle into this new process at the time of their next self-study. Contact Kate Yerkes, the University's Accreditation Liaison Officer, for details.

Once the self-study report has been reviewed and affirmed by the institution and its leadership, it is submitted to the Middle States Commission. Also submitted a separate compliance report, documenting those policies and procedures in place that address selected requirements of affiliation and accreditation-relevant federal legislation. The Self-Study Report is reviewed by a team of peer reviewers selected by MSCHE: faculty, staff, and administrators from other MSCHE member institutions who have expertise in one or more subject areas. This peer team visits the campus about six weeks after receiving the report, and engage in discussions with members of the university community to consider and validate its findings.

The team then prepares a Peer Review Report of its own, which summarizes its key findings related to the institution's compliance with MSCHE standards, and may make recommendations or suggestions of its own to the institution. The Middle States Commission then reviews this Peer Review Report, and the institution's own Self-Study and Compliance reports. At this time the institution's accreditation status is determined. The commission may require the institution to engage in follow up reporting on one or more standards if additional work is needed.

7. *What are the Middle States Standards?* In 2023, Middle States updated its *Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation*. There are seven standards:
- Standard 1: Mission & Goals
  - Standard 2: Ethics & Integrity
  - Standard 3: Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience
  - Standard 4: Support of the Student Experience
  - Standard 5: Educational Effectiveness Assessment
  - Standard 6: Planning, Resources & Institutional Improvement
  - Standard 7: Governance, Leadership & Administration

Within each standard are a number of criteria intended to guide the institution in realizing its mission and goals. View the full Standards document, and learn about the revision process, [here](#).

8. *Who manages all of this?*

Within Middle States, the President of the institution is its official member. However, the President must assign an Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) to serve as the official contact for the institution. In addition to managing the self-study process, the ALO is responsible for preparing and submitting official documents and correspondence, such as Substantive Change application, notifications, and other reports. The ALO manages day-to-day accreditation operations and leading processes to assure that compliance with Middle States standards and policies are addressed through necessary channels. The ALO works closely with the institution's assigned Middle States staff Vice President to navigate matters of relevance to the institution's accreditation.

The University of Scranton's ALO is Ms. Kathryn Yerkes, Assistant Provost for Planning & Institutional Effectiveness. Kate has served in this role since 2013. Contact Kate for more information, questions about Middle States accreditation, or the University's status, via email at: [Kathryn.yerkes@scranton.edu](mailto:Kathryn.yerkes@scranton.edu).

Visit the MSCHE web site for more information about these and other accreditation topics:  
<https://www.msche.org/>