

# MSCHE-Periodic Review Report Workshop

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**Cautionary Note:** The notes presented here represent the interpretation of the writer as gathered from the presentations and discussions at the MSCHE-PRR Workshop. They are not meant to document the precise comments made on behalf of any of the presenters/facilitators at the workshop.

## **I. WELCOME AND COMMENTS ON THE COMMISSION'S EXPECTATIONS FOR THE PRR - ELLEN MILLER CASEY, UNIVERSITY OF SCRANTON**

- Financial Aspects of the PRR will be analyzed by designated Financial Reviewers (i.e., CPAs or CFAs).
- PRR evaluation process:
  - Phase I: Preparation of PRR and institutional submission by June 1, 2010.
  - Phase II: MSCHE sends 2 institutional PRR to two designated Peer Reviewers. Only one reviewer will write their findings, comments, commendations, and recommendations.
  - The reviewer reports must address the issues stated in the PRR and Institutional priorities.
  - By August 1, 2010 the reviewers will send out their report to:
    - Institution
    - The Commissioner.
    - There will also be a confidential recommendations report submitted to the MSCHE.
    - The receiving institution can respond to the report if they wish.
  - Phase III: A committee of peer reviewers, chaired by the Commission, and attended by the Vice Presidents will meet to make recommendations on accreditation.
    - They will receive for this meeting the PRR Executive Summary with all the major issues and findings, a financial report, and the Confidential Report submitted to the Commission.
    - They will determine which institutions do not have serious issues based on the groups consent, and hence can go on the "Consent Agenda" and which institutions exhibit serious problems, and should go on the Commission's November meeting under the "Discussion Agenda".
  - Phase IV: Commission Meeting in November 2010 for accreditation determinations; the Commissioner from the Peer Review Committee participates in representation of the institutional reports and the committee's recommendations.
    - The Commission will receive the recommendations made by the Peer Review Committee, and a History of each institution's status of accreditation with MSCHE (e.g., follow-up reports, etc.).

- They will address a Consent Agenda, and a Discussion Agenda, as per the committee’s recommendations. Nevertheless, the Commission is at liberty to move agendas from one agenda to the other.
    - They will make determinations and send out the Commission’s final Response according to three categories:
      - Accepted: The PRR is good enough and offers evidence of complying with accreditation standards.
      - Received: Not a very good report.
      - Rejected: A new report is warranted.
  - Phase V: Follow-up (if applicable)
    - Documents are presented before a Standing Committee of Commissioners and are seen along with Candidate Institutions.
- Things to consider in the Preparation Phase:
  - **Reviewers do not have the Self Studies** and normally do not know the Institutions. Consequentially, the PRR **has to answer all recommendations** made in the Self-Study by the Visiting Team; hence the PRR must make reference to each one.
  - Acronyms must be explicitly defined.
  - Offer supporting documents and make clear the relevance of these documents to the institutions arguments and conclusions.
  - **Avoid underestimating problems and critical issues. Recognize difficulties and address attainable solutions.**
    - Not addressing issues reveals that you’re ignoring or hiding a problem, and other information will be reviewed through sources such as Monitoring Reports.
  - It is important to note that institutions with Commendations are used as models for other institutions.

These categories may require follow-up.

## II. **BREAKOUT SESSION – DR. LUIS PEDRAJA, VICE PRESIDENT MSCHE**

- Self Study recommendations must be addressed in terms of challenges and opportunities.
- It is important to follow-up on the subject of assessment, as it is being treated as a “new concept”, despite it being around since the 1950s.
- Areas to address in the PRR from the Self Study:
  - **Suggestions:** are to be taken as “friendly peer advice”, and are to be addressed **only if the institution wants to.**
  - **Recommendations:**
    - Not addressing recommendations **may put an institution at risk** in terms of accreditation status or having to follow-up on their PRR.
    - They may become irrelevant if it isn’t an institutional priority, if changes have occurred, **but they must at least be mentioned.**
- Strategies for addressing recommendations:
  - Group recommendations into logical areas, and talk about general activities that have been set in place.

- Do not address issues addressed in a follow-up report, but mention it in the narrative in order to familiarize the readers with the information that was included. A follow-up report should be included as an attachment to the PRR.
- Readers/reviewers have the prerogative to request an institutions recommendations if they need them.
- All recommendations, institutional and those made by the Visiting Team should be addressed. The Visiting Team does not necessarily address all recommendations made by the institution in their Self-Study as it is understood that the institution recognizes that there are areas for improvement, and mentioning them in the Team’s report would be repetitive.\*
- An institution has the prerogative to say that they will not take up a recommendation if it is not an institutional priority.
- It is importance to state the context of each recommendation being addressed in the PRR.
- Middle States is an evidence-based organization, if you talk about issues like “plans”, be sure to include it as an attachment.
- Pay attention to grammar, consistency of data, formats, etc. Overlooking this could be costly to an institution.
- MSCHE is aware that the economy has shifted; as long as an institution documents an evidence-based prioritization process, the Commission will review determinations to not address recommendations favorably. What is not acceptable is that they are not being addressed because the **Institution simply does not want to**. MSCHE does, however, want to see some projects finalized by the PRR.\*
- It is important that the PRR demonstrate that the institution recognizes Challenges, Opportunities, and strengths.
- **The Institutional Assessment Plan can be more of a Documented Process than a Documented Plan.** This is in recognition that institutionalizing assessment requires cultural changes.
  - **MSCHE views too many plans as a problem.**
  - MSCHE tends to view high student: faculty ratios as a problem for assessment.
- Institutions should be realistic with enrollment projection figures. Increasing enrollment may not be a solution, as opposed to a problem.
- The PRR can be submitted with all its attachment electronically, but we have to give the readers the option, since not all reviewers are “Tech Savy”.

### **III. TWIN PEAKS OF ASSESSMENT, DR. JO ALLEN**

Institutional Assessment → Operations

Student Learning Assessment → What are students learning?

- Assessment results mainly from the requirement of accountability. Hence, institutions must strive to recruit faculty interested in and committed to assessment.
- The emphasis placed on assessment means that prospective students will begin to focus more on assessment results.
- Any good assessment process should be able to answer the following questions:
  - Can you identify what works in your institution?
  - Is data regularly used for improvement?
  - Do you use assessment findings for budget allocation?
- What reviewers are looking for in terms of assessment:
  - A Budget Allocation process.
  - Data driven decisions regarding enrollment projections, that take into account budgeting:
    - Is there a well documented rationale for increases in areas such as enrollment?
  - Alignment of priorities and resources.
  - Institution-wide evidence.
  - Linked institutional planning and budgeting:
    - Are assumptions realistic
    - Are enrollment trends proportional to actual growth and budget?
    - Emphasis on other sources of income.
  - The institution has analyzed the impact of their Net Income, in areas such as the income from tuition (i.e.,  $\text{Net Income} = \text{Gross Tuition} - \text{Discounts/Institutional Aid}$ ).
- A solid Institutional Research Office is essential to gathering and interpreting supporting data.
- Finances:
  - Audited statements include an in-depth look at data that cannot be gathered from any other source or statement; hence the determination to have “financial reviewers”.
  - Management letters included with audited statements address issues that require attention. They also provide evidence as to how prior requests have been addressed.
  - IPEDS financial data should be considered and included as part of the PRR.
  - Has the institution analyzed its finances by unit/department as opposed to by “spending code”?
  - Is there a reflection that there are particular changes in income?
  - Has the institution analyzed financial aid trends?
  - Has the institution analyzed what the cost of admitting new students is.
  - What is the institution’s Viability Ratio, by means fo
    - Current ratio
    - Debt burden

- Endowment:
  - Restricted
  - Unrestricted = Liquidity Ratio
- There is a preference towards Consolidated Activity Statements.
- Institutions should in-depth explanations regarding financial constraints.

#### **IV. BREAKOUT SESSION – DR. BARBARA LOFTUS, VICE PRESIDENT MSCHE**

Preparation for the PRR, Hints for a successful PRR:

- The PRR is as serious as the Self-Study, although there is not a deliberation as in depth as in the latter.
- Make use of existing committees, such as a Planning Committee, to review either chapters or the entire PRR.
- Use the sections used in the *Handbook for Periodic Review Reports* as chapters of the PRR.
- First phase in the preparation process should be identifying recommendations and the progress made towards addressing them.
- Writing the PRR should occur towards the middle of Fall, prior to submission, at the latest.
- Student participation can be minimal. This document focuses its attention on five standards, and is not as ample as the Self Study which warrants student participation.
- The PRR needs to speak for itself:
  - Transparent
  - Clear
  - Straight Forward
  - **Not WORDY**
  - Should highlight the fundamental elements of the standards.
  - Acknowledge that the reviewers do not know the institution.
- In terms of finance, it is important to document that there is a budget allocation process in place, that if there are some economies (i.e., discretionary budgeting) or extra income, strategies are in place to prioritize areas to which allocate budget.
  - This is the best explanation for institutions with little or no extra funding aside from the operational budget.
- The reviewers will look for institutions to have selected 3-5 initiatives of the Strategic Plan to which budget are allocated.
- The most important thing is the **participatory process for establishing priorities**.

\*Responses to questions which I made.