



# Handbook for Commission Members

Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Published by the

Middle States Commission on Higher Education  
3624 Market Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Telephone: 267-284-5000

Fax: 215-662-5501

[www.msache.org](http://www.msache.org)

© 2003, Copyright by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. All rights reserved.

First edition 1999, replaced the policy statement “Membership on the Commission on Higher Education”: January 1974, February 1984; May 1990; November 1990; February 1991; 1993; November 1995.

Second edition November 2003. Revised November 2004.

*Printed in the United States of America*

# Contents

	Page
Acknowledgment . . . . .	iv
Mission and Purposes of the Commission . . . . .	1
Recognition for Accreditation Activities . . . . .	5
Relationship with Other Accrediting Organizations . . . . .	5
Membership and Responsibilities . . . . .	6
Officers of the Commission . . . . .	7
Attendance and Participation . . . . .	8
Conflict of Interest . . . . .	9
Confidentiality . . . . .	10
Communications and Correspondence . . . . .	10
Interim Vacancies . . . . .	10
Committees of the Commission:	
Executive Committee . . . . .	11
Committee on Evaluation Reports . . . . .	12
Committee on Periodic Review Reports . . . . .	13
Committee on Follow-up Activities/ Candidate Institutions . . . . .	14
Substantive Change Committee . . . . .	16
Committee on Membership . . . . .	17
MSA Board of Trustees . . . . .	18
The Nomination Process:	
Annual Schedule . . . . .	18
Nomination of Executive Committee and Officers . . . . .	21
Orientation of Commissioners:	
Principles . . . . .	21
Strategies . . . . .	22
Appendix:	
Conflict of Interest: Commissioners, Chairs, Evaluators, and Others . . . . .	24

# Acknowledgment

This Handbook for Commission Members consolidates and replaces a policy statement of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and numerous procedures that have evolved over the years relating to the role of commissioners.

The Commission is grateful for the assistance of three committees for developing this handbook: the committees on membership for 1996, 1997, and 1998.

This second edition was drafted by the Committee for 2002 to reflect provisions of the new charter of the Middle States Association and some new procedures that the Commission has developed, and it was further revised in 2003.

## **Committee on Membership, 2002**

Dr. Elizabeth Boylan, Chair; Dr. Carlos Hernandez;  
Sr. Mary Reap, IHM; Dr. José Jaime Rivera; and Dr. Gary Stone.

## **Committee on Membership, 2003**

Dr. Elizabeth Boylan, Chair; Dr. Jessica Kozloff; Dr. Martha Smith;  
Dr. Ronald Watts; and Sr. Mary Reap, IHM.

## **Staff liaison to the Committee:**

Ms. Mary Beth Kait, Assistant Director for Policy Development

# Handbook for Commission Members

The effectiveness of the Commission on Higher Education depends in large part on the commitment and dedication to higher education of thousands of volunteers who contribute their time and expertise. Because accreditation decisions and policy matters relating to the accreditation process rest with the Commission, commissioners must bring judgment, sensitivity, and insight to their work. Election to the Commission recognizes an individual's commitment to accreditation and to higher education.

## Mission and Purposes of the Commission

### Mission Statement

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education is a voluntary, non-governmental, peer-based membership association dedicated to educational excellence and improvement through peer evaluation and accreditation. As a recognized leader in promoting and ensuring quality assurance and improvement in higher education, the Commission defines, maintains, and promotes educational excellence and responds creatively to a diverse, dynamic, global higher education community that is continually evolving.

The Commission supports its members in their quest for excellence and provides assurance to the general public that accredited member institutions meet its standards. The Commission achieves its purposes through assessment, peer evaluation, consultation, information gathering and sharing, cooperation, and appropriate educational activities. The Commission is committed to the principles of cooperation,

flexibility, openness, and responsiveness to the needs of society and the higher education community.

## **Purposes**

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education is one of three commissions of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. Each commission (Commission on Elementary Schools, Commission on Secondary Schools, and the Commission on Higher Education) operates independently. Although operationally autonomous from the Board of Trustees and from each other commission, each commission's purposes are defined in the Association Bylaws, as follows:

### **A. Accreditation**

By delegation of authority from the Association, each Commission shall:

1. By accreditation, evaluation, consultation and in all other appropriate ways, promote the welfare and improvement of education with special emphasis upon service to member and candidate institutions but without limitation to these institutions;
2. Publish in writing or electronically lists of accredited and candidate educational institutions and programs in accordance with standards adopted by the Commission;
3. Adopt standards and changes thereto for the accreditation of educational institutions and programs, especially such modifications as will promote continued improvement in the effectiveness of member and candidate institutions and programs;
4. In accordance with Commission policy, cooperate in appropriate ways with similar bodies in other regional, national and international associations;
5. Subject to law, lawful court order, or decision by the Commission or its Executive Committee, keep the records relating to the evaluation or accreditation of any present, prospective, or former member of the Commission confidential. Such records shall not be disclosed outside the Association without the prior written consent of the governing authority of the institution concerned or where a Commission has adopted provisions with respect hereto.

Other than the report of a visiting team and Commission minutes relating to an accreditation action by such Commission, no document relating to such action shall be released to the institution itself without approval by the Commission, its Executive Committee or its designee. The Commission and the Board of Trustees shall cooperate with respect to such matters where a matter of principle, affecting another Commission of the Association, may be involved.

### **B. Authority**

Each Commission shall have the authority to:

1. Appoint an Executive Director who shall be its chief administrative officer.
2. Appoint other professional staff officers and employees, and determine all personnel matters relating thereto including, without limitation, dismissal, promotion, payments of all kind (within the limitations of the Commission's annual budget), termination, and job description.
3. Conduct the nomination and election of Commission members at the Annual meeting of the Commission or by proxy ballot in accordance with Business policies and procedures established by the Commission.
4. Elect annually a Chair and Vice Chair from the Commission membership. Officers are eligible for re-election up to a maximum of six years, provided they are elected to additional three-year terms as Commissioners in accordance with the procedures established by the Commission, but in no case shall the total length of service on the Commission exceed nine years of consecutive service.
5. Elect annually other members of the Commission in accordance with the procedures established by the Commission who, together with the Chair and Vice Chair, shall comprise an Executive Committee which shall exercise the functions of the Commission between meetings thereof, and shall meet with its Executive Director as frequently as may be required to carry out its responsibilities.
6. Assure periodic evaluation of the commission's operations and performance through the use of appropriate internal and external constituencies and communities of interest.

7. Designate a nominating committee for the election of the Commissioners with such rules as each such Commission shall determine from time to time.
8. Administer and have control over its own finances and its annual budget, including the accumulation of a segregated fund balance and the establishment of fees and annual dues.
9. Hold regional or other meetings of its constituents, at which action may be taken for proposal to its Commission or the MSA Board of Trustees for their own determination or review and approval by the membership at any Annual, Regular or Special Meeting thereof.

Such business of the Commissions may be proposed to the membership of the affected Commission, with appropriate notice, for voting in person at any meeting called for this purpose, or by proxy delivered through the mail or the hand of another, or by mail ballot without a meeting, according to procedures that shall be established by the Commission and disseminated in advance to the appropriate membership.

10. Hold regional or other meetings of its constituents for the purpose of discussion issues of topical interest within the jurisdiction of the Commissions, consistent with Article I, Section 2.E. hereof.
11. Determine all other aspects of its own internal affairs, including, but not limited to, its own operating rules, personnel policies and procedures, benefit policies, etc., and other matters relating to realty occupied by it, subject to relevant leases, condominium agreements, etc.
12. Through its commissioners, take any action required or permitted to be taken at any meeting of the commissioners without a meeting, if all Commissioners consent thereto in writing and the writing or writings are filed with the minutes of proceedings of the Commission.



## Recognition for Accreditation Activities

Every five years, the Commission must submit a petition to the U.S. Department of Education (USED) demonstrating that it meets the regulations implementing the Higher Education Act as amended.

In order to be eligible to receive Title IV student financial assistance, postsecondary institutions must be accredited by an agency recognized by the US Secretary of Education. The Commission on Higher Education has been recognized by the Secretary for purposes of Title IV gatekeeping since the 1950s.

The Commission on Higher Education also maintains recognition by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The Commission submits a petition for review every five years demonstrating that it meets CHEA's criteria for recognition.

## Relationship with Other Accrediting Organizations

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education is one of seven regional accrediting agencies in six regions. The regional accreditors constitute the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (CRAC). The Executive Directors of CRAC members meet regularly to address common concerns and strive for consistency in the way in which each organization addresses issues. The staffs of CRAC members also meet every two to three years for an interregional staff retreat in order to share information and to learn from each other.

## Membership and Responsibilities

The Commission on Higher Education is composed of 27 individuals who represent the higher education community and the public interest. Twenty-six of these members are elected by and represent the colleges and universities in the region that are members of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA) and represent the general public. The current president of the Association serves *ex officio* as a member of the Commission. At least one-seventh of the Commission's members are broadly representative of the public interest, and the remainder are elected from currently active faculties and administrators of member institutions. They are selected with regard to the unique perspectives they may bring to the discussion, based on their geographic distribution, institutional type, professional position, and other relevant factors. Previous evaluation experience is considered beneficial. However, each commissioner represents the entire region and state.

The federal definition of a public representative is a person who is not:

- (1) an employee, member of the governing board, owner, or shareholder of, or consultant to, an institution or program that either is accredited or preaccredited by the agency or has applied for accreditation;
- (2) a member of any trade association or membership organization related to, affiliated with, or associated with the agency; or
- (3) a spouse, parent, child, or sibling of an individual identified in paragraph (1) or (2) of this definition.

The term of membership on the Commission is three years, and a member may be re-elected for a second, final term. This six-year limit for service on the Commission may be extended to nine consecutive years for members who become elected officers, but, in accordance with Middle States Association (MSA) Bylaws, no one may serve as an officer for more than a total of six years.

Commissioners are elected by mail ballot by the accredited constituency of the Commission in accordance with the MSA Bylaws:

Each Commission shall have the authority to establish a membership adequate to carry out its purposes (Article VI, Sec. 3A).

The Members of a Commission shall be divided into three classes. Each year, the members of one class shall be elected to a three year term by the majority vote of their constituency and thereafter may be elected every three years for successive three-year terms. At least one-seventh of the members shall be elected who do not currently hold professional positions in education and who are broadly representative of the public interest. The remaining members shall be currently active professional and administrative staff of member institutions and shall be elected with consideration to geographical and institutional distribution reflective of the Commission's constituents and other levels of educational institutions (Article VI, Sec. 3B).

## **Officers of the Commission**

The officers of the Commission are the chair and vice chair. In order to be eligible to serve as an officer, a commissioner must be completing at least the second full year of service on the Commission.

Officers are elected at the fall Commission meeting each year in accordance with the following provisions of the Association Bylaws:

Each Commission shall have the authority to elect annually a chair and vice chair from the Commission membership. Officers are eligible for reelection up to a maximum of six years, provided they are elected to additional three-year terms as commissioners at the Annual Meeting of the Association, but in no case shall the total length of service on the Commission exceed nine years of consecutive service (Article VI, Sec. 2 B-4).

## Attendance and Participation

Election to the Commission confirms each Commission member's acceptance and agreement to carry out the responsibilities of membership by participating in the Commission's work and assisting in achieving its goals.

Commission business is scheduled on at least a dozen days a year. The full Commission regularly meets in the fall (November/December), winter (February/March), and spring (June). Commission meetings typically are scheduled from noon on a Wednesday through noon on Thursday.

Commissioners are expected to attend all three Commission meetings, and their full and active participation in the discussions is encouraged. In addition to the three full Commission meetings, commissioners are expected to serve a minimum of one day on a standing committee, although commissioners typically serve an average of three days. Members of the Executive Committee are not assigned to a standing committee, although they may serve as *ad hoc* members.

To remain in good standing, commissioners are expected to attend a minimum of three official meetings per year (Commission and committee meetings combined).

A commissioner shall be deemed to have resigned if he or she is absent for three consecutive Commission meetings, or if he or she fails to attend any combination of three meetings in a calendar year (either two Commission meetings and one committee meeting, or one Commission meeting and two committee meetings).

Throughout a commissioner's tenure, his or her ability to fulfill the commitment of membership may change. Commissioners are expected to resign from the Commission if circumstances change so that time no longer permits carrying out the full responsibilities of membership. When it is clear that non-attendance at committee and Commission meetings may jeopardize the integrity of the Commission's work, the chair of

the Commission or the executive director on behalf of the chair, will contact the individual to discuss whether the commissioner can continue to meet the duties and responsibilities of the position.

If possible, each commissioner accepts one assignment each year as the chair or member of an evaluation team. Commissioners can expect to spend three to four days serving on an evaluation team.

All members of the Commission are expected to attend special orientation sessions and to accept assignments that are designed to enhance their understanding and knowledge of Commission policies and procedures and key issues facing institutions in the Middle States region.

Commission members are reimbursed for all expenses incurred in fulfilling their responsibilities as a commissioner, but there is no honorarium for their work on the Commission. In the event that a commissioner participates on an evaluation team, the commissioner is paid the appropriate stipend.

From time to time, based on their areas of expertise and interest, commissioners may be asked to serve on panels, to moderate discussions, or to be presenters at Commission-sponsored workshops and conferences.

### **Conflict of Interest**

Throughout the Commission's procedures—from the selection of team members to the assignment of readers for the numerous reports that the Commission requires—scrupulous attention is given to avoid even the appearance of conflict of interest in any form. This principle is explicitly stated in the policy statement, "Conflict of Interest: Commissioners, Chairs, Evaluators, and Others." A copy of this policy statement appears in the Appendix.

Upon election to the Commission, members are required to submit a Conflict of Interest Statement disclosing all affiliations. All commissioners are asked to update this statement each year.

All commissioners will exercise their best efforts to comply with these guidelines. However, failure to comply with these guidelines does not invalidate Commission actions nor constitute grounds for liability of the individual commissioner, the Commission itself, or staff, unless applicable law so requires.

## **Confidentiality**

The relationship between the Commission and its member and candidate institutions is a confidential one. Commissioners should refrain from discussing institutional matters learned through the accrediting process—and, in particular, Commission discussions—with anyone other than commissioners, staff, evaluators, or the institution itself.

Every document received by a commissioner relative to an institution's accredited status, including Commission meeting materials, should be destroyed once the Commission has acted. The Commission office retains confidential copies of all documents and correspondence between it and the institutions.

## **Communications and Correspondence**

Commissioners may conduct regular correspondence with member or candidate institutions when they are directly chairing an evaluation team. All other communication, including that with members of the media, should be referred to the executive director or to the chair of the Commission. When speaking publicly on educational issues, unless specifically designated as a representative of the Commission on Higher Education, Commission members should make clear that they speak for themselves or their own institution.

## **Interim Vacancies**

Interim vacancies are filled by the Commission, or by the Executive Committee on its behalf, on an annual basis. At the appropriate time, if the individual is eligible and appropriately nominated, he or she may stand for election for a regular term of office.

## Committees of the Commission

The committees of the Commission are the Executive Committee, Committee on Evaluation Reports, Committee on Periodic Review Reports, Committee on Follow-up Activities/Candidate institutions, Substantive Change Committee, and Committee on Membership.

All committees are chaired by a member of the Commission. *Ad hoc* committees and task forces, which may include both commissioners and individuals who are not members of the Commission, are appointed from time to time to address specific issues or to develop policies for Commission consideration.

### Executive Committee

The Executive Committee of the Commission consists of the two officers of the Commission (the chair and the vice chair) and four other commissioners elected by the Commission annually. It has the authority and responsibility to:

- establish goals and priorities for the Commission
- participate in the Commission's planning process
- act on personnel, budget, and other administrative and operational matters other than day-to-day activities
- act on Middle States Association policy matters
- act as a review committee on policy developments
- review and approve the agenda for Commission meetings
- act as a committee of the Commission or on behalf of the Commission itself on matters arising between Commission meetings.

Commissioners who are non-officers are eligible to serve on the Executive Committee after serving one full year on the Commission.

Because the Executive Committee acts as a decision-making body, it includes, to the extent possible under the eligibility criteria, administrative, faculty, and public representation.

In the event that special circumstances arise or the timing of an institution's submission of a required report does not coincide with a committee's meeting schedule, the Executive Committee may perform the function of any other committee or of the Commission.

Members of the Executive Committee devote at least six days a year to meetings of that group.

### **Committee on Evaluation Reports**

The Committee on Evaluation Reports is charged to conduct an independent review of institutions that have submitted their decennial self-study documents and hosted a peer review team; to consider the team's recommendations, the institution's response, and any staff comments; and to recommend an accrediting action to the Commission.

The Committee meets several times each year to review a total of between 30 and 70 institutions, depending on the review schedule. Although 12 commissioners are assigned to the Committee, the number attending each meeting is based on the number of institutions under review.



One commissioner is assigned to each institution being reviewed to serve as reader and one commissioner serves as chair *pro tempore* for that meeting. In addition, the team chairs whose evaluation reports will be considered at a given meeting may serve as *pro tempore* members of the Committee in the event that a commissioner is unavailable.

As one means of broadening participation, experienced evaluators occasionally are invited as *pro tempore* members of the Committee to review reports as Commissioner readers.

Prior to the meeting, the commissioner-reader reviews the four major documents involved in the evaluation cycle: (1) the institution's self-study document; (2) the evaluation team report; (3) the chair's brief of the evaluation report; and (4) the institution's response to the evaluation report.

At the meeting, the chair presents the chair's brief orally, followed by an oral report by the commissioner-reader that may agree or disagree with the team recommendations. As appropriate, staff also may provide comments. General discussion by everyone present then leads to agreement on the recommendation that the Committee will make to the Commission.

### **Committee on Periodic Review Reports**

As part of its commitment to the concept of accreditation as a continuous process and in recognition of the rapid pace of change in higher education, the Commission requires accredited institutions to submit a report within five years of their most recent evaluation visit. This document, the periodic review report (PRR), like the site evaluation, provides the basis for Commission action on the institution's accreditation.

The Committee on Periodic Review Reports is an ad hoc committee which is charged with reviewing the PRRs and recommending action to the Commission. Institutions submit their PRRs to the Commission in June. The Committee, chaired

by a commissioner, convenes before the fall Commission meeting.

In addition to review by staff, each PRR is assigned to two external reviewers, who are responsible for an in-depth analysis of the PRR. The first reviewer prepares a written report that incorporates the analysis of the second reviewer. Each PRR also is reviewed by a finance associate whose primary responsibility is fiscal analysis. In advance of the meeting, all participants receive copies of five documents: (1) the executive summary for each PRR; (2) the external reviewer's analysis; (3) the reviewer's brief; (4) the finance associate's report; and (5) the institution's response. The commissioner who chairs the meeting ordinarily is not assigned the task of serving as an external reviewer.

### **Committee on Follow-up Activities/ Candidate Institutions**

The Committee on Follow-up Activities/Candidate Institutions is charged with reviewing reports from institutions for which the Commission has mandated follow-up reports or activities and to determine whether the institution has adequately addressed the Commission's concerns; and with reviewing reports from institutions seeking or already in candidate status to recommend appropriate accreditation action on inviting institutions to apply for Candidate for Accreditation status, on the admission of institutions to Candidate status, and to judge timely progress toward accreditation by those institutions already in candidacy. The Committee also makes recommendations to the Commission regarding accreditation actions.

The Committee is composed of six commissioners. Staff also attend the meeting and serve as a resource. The Committee meets before each meeting of the Commission, and the number of follow-up reports per Commission meeting may range from about 35 to over 60. A brief summary of its duties follows:

## *1. Follow-up Activities*

When it accredits or reaffirms the accreditation of institutions, the Commission frequently asks that they submit, at specified intervals, reports on certain areas of concern; or it may require a special visit to the institution as well as a report. The Committee is charged with reviewing all such institutional and special visit reports, evaluating them in light of the concerns expressed by the Commission in its requests, and recommending appropriate responses to the Commission. The Committee also reviews all follow-up activities resulting from substantive change review. (See the Commission's policy statement, "Substantive Change.")

Each member of the Commission is assigned a number of reports on follow-up actions taken. For institutions where written reports are not required, committee members may hear oral staff reports.

## *2. Candidate Status*

The Committee's chief responsibility with respect to applicant and candidate institutions is to recommend to the Commission appropriate action on the invitation of institutions to apply for Candidate status and on the admission of institutions to Candidate for Accreditation status. The Committee also judges timely progress toward accreditation by those institutions in candidacy.

**Application.** The process consists of two phases. In Phase 1, Commission staff reviews the documentation that applicants submit to determine if it appears to meet the eligibility requirements and to conduct a site visit at the institution. In Phase 2, the institution develops an Applicant Assessment Document, and the Commission conducts an Applicant Assessment Team Visit. The Phase 2 application materials and the staff visit report are forwarded to the Committee for review and discussion. Each institution under consideration is reviewed by a Committee member.

**Candidacy.** Once an institution is admitted to Candidate status, the Committee monitors institutions during the candidacy period, which may extend up to five years. A semi-annual interim report and a consultant's report are provided to the Committee and reviewed thoroughly by a member. It is the Committee's responsibility to determine whether the institution is making satisfactory progress and to make recommendations to the Commission regarding an institution's status.

### **Substantive Change Committee**

The Commission monitors routine and substantive changes that occur between regularly-scheduled periodic evaluations, because changes within institutions are frequent and there is a need to assure educational quality as institutions change. In addition, Federal regulations mandate that the Commission require prior approval of all changes that are substantive.

The Substantive Change Committee is charged with reviewing all reports requesting approval of substantive change and taking final action on such requests. Routine changes do not require prior approval and are not submitted to the Committee.

The Committee is comprised of approximately 70 members who represent all institutional types and states within the region. Both public representation and institutional representation at the administrative and faculty levels are included. The Committee is chaired by a commissioner, and public members of the Commission also may serve.

For additional information on the definition of substantive change and the review and approval process, see the Commission's policy statement "Substantive Change."

## The Committee on Membership

The Committee on Membership is a standing committee, appointed annually, whose charge it is to present to the Commission a slate of nominees for election to the Commission or to the Middle States Association Board of Trustees; to suggest individuals to fill interim vacancies on the Commission or on the Board; to recommend individuals for election or re-election as a Commission officer and as Executive Committee members; and to maintain and revise, as appropriate, the Commission's membership policies and procedures.

At the Commission's spring (June) meeting, the Committee on Membership presents a slate of nominees for the Commission and the Board. At the fall (November/December) meeting, it presents candidates for the Executive Committee and officers of the Commission. Candidates for Commission officers are nominated by the members of the Commission and selected by the Committee on Membership from the current membership of the Commission.

The chair of the Commission on Higher Education each year appoints the five-member Committee on Membership from among the Commission. At least two commissioners whose terms are expiring are appointed, and the remainder must be appointed from among those whose tenure will continue. The executive director serves as a non-voting member of the Committee.

Because the Committee on Membership nominates the Executive Committee, Executive Committee members whose terms are not expiring are not eligible to serve on the Committee on Membership, either as a member or a *pro tempore* member. Those eligible to stand for nomination and election to a second or third term are likewise ineligible to participate on the Committee.

Committee members should refrain from designating nominees who are specific replacements for individual outgoing members based on individual characteristics but, rather, should seek to

identify nominees who are committed to the goals of accreditation and whose affiliations contribute to an overall balance in representation.

## **MSA Board of Trustees**

The Board of Trustees of the Middle States Association has 12 members. Each commission of the Association nominates and elects four trustees to represent that commission. At least two members of the Board represent the public interest. In accordance with the MSA Bylaws, the elected commissioners of the Commission on Higher Education, in consultation with staff, nominate and elect representatives to the MSA Board of Trustees.

## **The Nomination Process**

The nomination process invites the participation of institutional representatives of accredited institutions, and it includes the input of Commission staff and recommendation(s) by the Committee on Membership.

## **Annual Schedule**

In order to facilitate the nomination process, the Commission on Higher Education undertakes the following activities each year. The dates are provided only as approximate guidelines to ensure that the election of new commissioners is completed by the end of the calendar year.

- (a) By January 15, staff identifies the vacancies expected to occur the following December in the membership of the Commission and the Board of Trustees. Staff contacts each commissioner and Board member whose term expires at the end of the calendar year but who is eligible for an additional term to inquire whether he or she is willing to stand for election to another term. Commissioners and Board members must notify the Commission office of their intent by February 15.

(b) By January 15, the chair of the Commission appoints the Committee on Membership.

(c) By February 15, the executive director solicits—through the newsletter, by mail, or other appropriate means—the names of potential candidates for membership from current and former Commission members, chief administrators of member institutions, accreditation liaison officers, and the Commission staff.

Names of potential candidates should be submitted, along with a résumé, *curriculum vitae*, or biographical sketch to the executive director by March 15.

(d) Staff reviews the qualifications of the potential candidates to determine the candidates' eligibility to serve on the Commission (including whether the individual appropriately meets the definition of public or institutional member) and to ensure that an appropriate balance of the Commission's constituency would be maintained. The names of all eligible candidates then are forwarded to the Committee on Membership. Staff does not eliminate potential candidates based on the perceived suitability of one candidate over another.

Staff prepares and distributes background materials to the Committee on Membership prior to its meeting. Materials include, but are not limited to, information on the terms and affiliations of commissioners whose terms will continue and any relevant demographic information about the region.

(e) By May 1, the Committee on Membership meets in person, by telephone, or otherwise to review the candidates and to select up to three candidates for each vacancy. The Committee on Membership will determine whether to nominate for a second term those commissioners whose first terms are expiring and whether to nominate other persons for those vacancies.

(f) The executive director or a commissioner will conduct a telephone and/or personal interview with the individual and will describe the work of the Commission and the commitment required in order to ascertain the individual's interest and availability to serve on the Commission. The interviewer makes clear that the candidate is one of many from which the Commission will make its selection. If the individual declines the nomination, the Committee selects and contacts one of the alternates.

(g) The final slate of candidates, along with résumés, is presented to the Commission at its June meeting for endorsement.

If the Commission endorses the slate and each nominee accepts, the basic documents about the nature and work of the Commission are sent to the nominees, along with an appropriate letter of introduction from the executive director.

If the Commission fails to endorse the candidate or if the candidate withdraws his or her nomination prior to the election and no alternate is designated, then the Committee on Membership will make a recommendation to the Executive Committee for endorsement.

(h) Once a candidate has agreed to stand for election, the executive director will extend an invitation to the nominees to attend a session of the Commission in the role of an observer. Depending on the timing of the election, the invitation may be extended in anticipation of their election by the membership.

(i) Commissioners are elected by mail ballot as allowed under the MSA Bylaws. Members of the Board of Trustees are elected by the Commission at the June or November meeting.

(j) New commissioners are introduced to the constituency through the Commission's newsletter.



## Nomination of Executive Committee and Officers

Prior to the fall Commission meeting, nominations are invited for Executive Committee members, including the offices of chair and vice chair. Names are submitted directly to the chair of the Committee on Membership.

The Committee on Membership meets prior to the fall Commission meeting in person, by telephone, or otherwise to select candidates for the positions of chair and vice chair and four additional members of the Executive Committee.

The Committee on Membership presents the slate of candidates to the Commission for vote at its fall meeting.

## Orientation of Commissioners

### Principles

1. Although prospective members of the Commission are identified because of their individual expertise, experience, and potential as effective decision-makers, it is reasonable to assume that each prospective member needs specific orientation to the actual nature of the Commission's work and corresponding expectations for members of the Commission.
2. Because no individual member of the Commission comes with a full knowledge and appreciation of the entire range of higher education and accreditation issues as they affect the decision making process of the Commission, the executive director will arrange for appropriate activities to orient individuals to the actual nature of the Commission's work and corresponding expectations for members of the Commission.
3. Even those persons who already have gained some experience on the Commission need to be kept apprised of current issues in higher education and accreditation as well as of its own policies and procedures.

4. The value and usefulness of mentoring is recognized as an essential component of any effective program of commissioner orientation.

5. A program of orientation for members of the Commission needs to be flexible enough to accommodate the varying needs of prospective, new, and experienced members.

6. In order to avoid excessive demands on the time of Commission members, orientation strategies are designed generally to coincide with other scheduled activities of the Commission (e.g., during committee or Commission meetings).

## Strategies

### *1. Newly-elected Members*

(a) Subsequent to their election by the members of the Middle States Association that are accredited by the Commission on Higher Education, new members receive welcoming letters from the Commission, accompanied by a list of initial committee assignments, a schedule of the Commission and relevant MSA meetings, and other pertinent information.

(b) Prior to their first official Commission meeting, the executive director assigns an experienced member of the Commission or an executive associate director as a mentor for each new member. Mentor assignments are made after consultation with prospective mentors. Mentors should telephone the new members to whom they are assigned as soon as practicable to establish contact and to determine how the mentors can be of assistance.

(c) Within a reasonable time, but preferably before a new member's first official meeting, the executive director arranges for a meeting with the staff, who will provide further orientation. This session includes basic information about committee assignments and report handling.

## 2. *All Members*

- (a) As appropriate, the executive director shares with members of the Commission special memoranda about important developments in higher education and accreditation.
- (b) As feasible, the executive director may arrange to have special guests at meetings of the Commission to make presentations designed to orient members about special topics or the work of other organizations and agencies with which the Commission interacts.
- (c) The executive director periodically may schedule presentations of institutional demographic data and other special information by members of the staff and by invited institutional representatives at some sessions of the Commission in order to ensure that the Commission understands the nature of the various types of institutions it accredits or any current issues affecting one or more segments of the Commission's constituency.
- (d) In order to stay informed of higher education issues and accreditation developments, the executive director occasionally may arrange for the Commission chair or another member of the Executive Committee to attend a professional development session of an appropriate higher education or accreditation organization.
- (e) Other strategies will be developed and implemented as needed and as appropriate.

## Appendix

# Conflict of Interest: Commissioners, Chairs, Evaluators, and Others

**T**he purpose of the attached “Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement” is to maintain the integrity, credibility, and codes of good conduct in accreditation and policy making processes and to avoid actual conflicts, potential conflicts, or even the appearance of conflicts of interest in the Commission’s decisions. Individuals covered by this policy may serve in the capacity of Commissioner, Commissioner Pro Tempore, Team Chair, Team Member, Substantive Change Committee Member, Periodic Review Report Reviewer, Candidate Consultant, and/or Finance Associate.

The Commission relies on the personal and professional integrity of individuals to refuse any assignment where the potential for an actual or perceived conflict of interest exists. The Commission expects any committee member, team chair, evaluator, PRR reviewer, or other individual acting on behalf of the Commission to recuse him or herself from any discussion or accreditation decision if any of the following conditions exist. The Commission will not assign an individual as a chair, team member, reader, or reviewer if:

- the individual’s home institution is part of the same system;
- the individual has been a candidate for employment in the evaluated institution within the past year;
- the individual has been employed by the institution within the past five years;

- the individual belongs to the governing body of the institution;
- the individual has a personal, business, consultative, or other interest in or relationship to the institution under review and consideration that could affect his or her objectivity;
- the individual's institution has a material interest in a positive accreditation outcome based on a significant business or other fiduciary agreement (excluding routine articulation or similar inter-institutional agreements);
- the individual has a family member who is an employee, board member, candidate for employment, or student at the institution;
- the individual has expressed personal opinions bearing upon the accreditability of the institution;
- the individual is an alumnus or alumna of the institution; or
- in the individual's judgment, there is any other circumstance that could be perceived as a conflict of interest.

In addition, Chairs, team members, PRR readers, substantive change committee members, finance reviewers and others usually may not serve in any capacity if the individual's home institution is in the same state in which the institution being reviewed is located.

In some cases, exceptions may be made to these policies after consultation with the institution to be visited.

## Consulting

To avoid the appearance of possible conflict of interest, no member of a visiting team may serve as a paid consultant in any area related to accreditation to the institution being visited for a period of one year following the official accrediting action. The institution is expected to respect the process by not engaging any

team member as a consultant for one year following evaluation or considering any team member for permanent employment within one year of the evaluation.

Commissioners may not receive consulting fees or any other form of remuneration for any accreditation-related consulting from any Commission member or candidate institution.

Seminars or workshops for faculty or administrators to share institutional or discipline-related information or expertise are not considered to be accreditation-related.

## Commissioners

Each Commissioner is expected to submit a conflict of interest statement annually, or when a change occurs. No Commissioner will knowingly be assigned as a Commissioner-reader or reviewer of any institution for which a conflict exists.

Commissioners absent themselves during any substantive discussion and recuse themselves from any decision involving an institution with which they have a conflict.

Commissioners may not receive honorary degrees from any Commission member or candidate institution.

Commissioners may not be employed by the Middle States Association or the Commission on Higher Education within a one-year period following their tenure in office.

# Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement

**I**n accord with the Commission’s policy statement, “Conflict of Interest,” please **read carefully the disclosure statement below** and, to the best of your judgment, **disclose any conflicts or potential conflicts of interest at the bottom, and sign and return the form to the Commission office as soon as possible.** The Commission will use the information provided to help control the compilation and distribution of information for participants in the accreditation process, to monitor the participation of readers and representatives on visits, and to determine who participates in discussions or decisions concerning institutions. If, in your opinion, you are not involved in any situations or circumstances which would be considered conflicts or potential conflicts of interest, simply write “None” on the form.

***Please indicate your participation in the accreditation process.*** You may be asked to complete a form each time you participate in a different aspect of accreditation. Please also indicate whether you are being considered as a Public Representative.

## Disclosure

<p><i>I am serving as a:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Commissioner</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Commissioner <i>Pro Tempore</i></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Team Chair</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Team Member</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Substantive Change Committee Member</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> PRR Reviewer</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Finance Associate</li></ul>	<p><i>If you are serving as a commissioner, please indicate your status:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> I <b>am</b> being considered as a Public Representative of the Commission</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> I <b>am not</b> being considered as a Public Representative of the Commission</li></ul>
--	--

I have read and fully understand the attached conflict of interest guidelines.

To the best of my knowledge, I have disclosed below all situations and circumstances which may be considered conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest. Also, during my service to the Commission, I will voluntarily disclose any situation or circumstance which may, in my judgment, be considered a conflict or potential conflict of interest as it arises.

*Attach separate sheet(s), if necessary:*

---

---

**Signature:**

---

Please print or type:

---

Date:

---