



Accreditation Quick Guide
Preparing for the MSCHE Self-Study Site Visit
2023



BUFFALO STATE
The State University of New York

INTRODUCTION

Accreditation is an evaluation process that institutions of higher education undergo to maintain standards of educational quality agreed upon by members of an accrediting body. Accreditation assessments include self-study on the part of the institution as well as evaluations by representatives of peer institutions who belong to the same accrediting agency. Such assessments determine if an institution is in compliance with defined standards of quality in accomplishing its mission and meeting its strategic plan goals. Once achieved, accreditation is not permanent—it is renewed periodically to ensure that the quality of the educational programs and institutional operations are maintained. Accreditation is also a way to ensure that an institution is constantly challenging itself to improve, as well as an opportunity to showcase its accomplishments and achievements.

MSCHE ACCREDITATION

The [Middle States Commission on Higher Education \(MSCHE\)](#) is responsible for more than 525 accredited and candidate degree-granting institutions which offer one or more postsecondary educational programs, including those offered via distance education, of at least one academic year in length at the Associate's or higher level. Buffalo State is accredited through MSCHE. MSCHE, through accreditation, mandates that its member institutions meet rigorous and comprehensive standards, which are addressed in the context of the mission of each institution and within the culture of ethical practices and institutional integrity expected of accredited institutions. In meeting the quality standards of MSCHE accreditation, institutions earn accredited status, and this permits them to state with confidence: "Our students are well-served; society is well-served." MSCHE accreditation is an expression of confidence in an institution's mission and goals, its performance, and its resources. An institution is accredited when the educational community has verified that its goals are achieved through self-regulation and peer review. The extent to which each educational institution accepts and fulfills the responsibilities inherent in the process of accreditation is a measure of its commitment to striving for and achieving excellence in its endeavors.

MSCHE STANDARDS

MSCHE's Accreditation Standards and Requirements of Affiliation are comprised of seven standards and 15 requirements which serve as an ongoing guide for those institutions considering application for membership, those accepted as candidate institutions, and those accredited institutions engaged in self-review and peer evaluation. Accredited institutions are expected to demonstrate compliance with these standards and requirements, to conduct their activities in a manner consistent with the standards and requirements, and to engage in ongoing processes of self-review and improvement.

These standards affirm that the mission and goals of each institution remain the context within which these accreditation standards are applied. They emphasize functions rather than specific structures, recognizing that there are many different models for educational and operational excellence.

A comprehensive list of the MSCHE standards, including the criteria used to assess each standard, is accessible [HERE](#) and the standards are listed below.

STANDARD 1: MISSION AND GOALS

The institution's mission defines its purpose within the context of higher education, the students it serves, and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals are clearly linked to its mission and specify how the institution fulfills its mission.

STANDARD 2: ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

Ethics and integrity are central, indispensable, and defining hallmarks of effective higher education institutions. In all activities, whether internal or external, an institution must be faithful to its mission, honor its contracts and commitments, adhere to its policies, and represent itself truthfully.

STANDARD 3: DESIGN & DELIVERY OF THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

An institution provides students with learning experiences that are characterized by rigor and coherence at all program, certificate, and degree levels, regardless of instructional modality. All learning experiences, regardless of modality, program pace/schedule, level, and setting are consistent with higher education expectations.

STANDARD 4: SUPPORT OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Across all educational experiences, settings, levels, and instructional modalities, the institution recruits and admits students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals are congruent with its mission and educational offerings. The institution commits to student retention, persistence, completion, and success through a coherent and effective support system sustained by qualified professionals, which enhances the quality of the learning environment, contributes to the educational experience, and fosters student success.

STANDARD 5: EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS ASSESSMENT

Assessment of student learning and achievement demonstrates that the institution's students have accomplished educational goals consistent with their program of study, degree level, the institution's mission, and appropriate expectations for institutions of higher education.

STANDARD 6: PLANNING, RESOURCES, AND INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

The institution's planning processes, resources, and structures are aligned with each other and are sufficient to fulfill its mission and goals, to continuously assess and improve its programs and services, and to respond effectively to opportunities and challenges.

STANDARD 7: GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP, AND ADMINISTRATION

The institution is governed and administered in a manner that allows it to realize its stated mission and goals in a way that effectively benefits the institution, its students, and the other constituencies it serves. Even when supported by or affiliated with governmental, corporate, religious, educational systems, or other unaccredited organizations, the institution has education as its primary purpose, and it operates as an academic institution with appropriate autonomy.

THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

Internal Evaluation

A self-study requires an institution to engage in an in-depth, comprehensive, and reflective assessment process to identify institutional priorities as well as opportunities for improvement and innovation. A successful self-study leads to a reaffirmation of accreditation. The self-study process should be valuable to an institution, enabling it to demonstrate that it meets the Commission's expectations and to gain insights that will serve the institution well for several

years after the Self-Study Report and On-Site Evaluation Visit have been completed. Throughout the self-study process, the institution must provide evidence and document compliance with the Commission's standards for accreditation, requirements of affiliation, policies and procedures, and federal compliance requirements.

The Self-Study Design serves as a guide for the self-study process. An effective Self-Study Design states the intended outcomes of the institution's self-study; defines the approach the institution will take to engage in self-study; outlines the organizational structure of the Steering Committee and its Working Groups and how they will interact with each other; defines common formats for reporting; and addresses how the Evidence Inventory will ensure that all the applicable criteria of each standard are sufficiently addressed. [Buffalo State's Self-Study 2023 website](#) highlights details on the accreditation process and accomplishments.

Understanding the Institutional Self-Study

The self-study demonstrates an institution's commitment to continuous improvement and is used to strengthen and sustain the institution. In addition, institutions should be prepared to engage in a careful analysis of institutional priorities that it has selected in the interest of identifying mission-related areas of improvement, responding effectively to challenges, and identifying and adopting innovative practices to more readily achieve institutional mission, adapt to changes in the higher education sector, and to best serve students and society.

The institutional priorities guiding Buffalo State's self-study are identified below. These institutional priorities align with Buffalo State's Strategic Plan, accessible [HERE](#).

Buffalo State's Institutional Priorities

Priority 1: Long-term viability: Foster a culture of dynamic, evidence-based decision-making to ensure the sustainability of the college's mission, vision, and strategic priorities.

Priority 2: Student retention, support, and success: Improve student success as measured by students we admit, engage, retain, and graduate.

Priority 3: Serving as an Anchor Institution: Enhance opportunities for campus and community members to serve the City of Buffalo as active, inclusively aware citizens.

Priority 4: Academic and creative excellence: Intentionally commit to academic and creative excellence through socially just, reflective, and collaborative actions, policies, and practices.

External Evaluation

The peer review process begins when the Commission selects a team of trained, knowledgeable, and appropriate peer evaluators to visit the institution and conduct an on-site evaluation based upon the institution's Self-Study Report and the Commission's standards for accreditation, requirements of affiliation, policies and procedures, and federal compliance requirements. Evaluation Team members and the Team Chair are volunteers who are selected from the academic community within Middle States accredited institutions to assist in ensuring the quality of higher education institutions and to help them improve. The Team Chair and other members of the Team are expected to contribute to a thoughtful assessment of the institution within the framework of Commission expectations and within the context of the mission and goals of the institution. The Team will evaluate the analysis in the Self-Study Report and draw upon the insights they gain from on-site interviews.

During the visit, the Team assesses the institution in the context of the Self-Study Report. Team members meet with faculty, students, staff, administrators, trustees, and other members of the campus community to confirm and clarify the information provided in the Report and to gather additional perspectives, and in some cases, additional information that was not available to them prior to the visit. The Team examines the documentation and spends the latter part of the visit assembling its findings into a Team Report.

The principal activities for the on-site visit include interviews with groups and individuals on campus and scheduled daily team meetings. It is not unusual for the Team Chair to request adjustments to the schedule while onsite. All efforts should be made to accommodate the Team's meeting request changes. It is also common that the Team will request additional documentation while onsite.

PREPARING FOR THE SITE VISIT

Buffalo State faculty, staff, and students will have the opportunity to interact with the Evaluation Team during a site visit scheduled for March 12-15, 2023. The campus community will be informed of the Team's itinerary, which is subject to change, prior to the site visit. The Team will guide discussions and campus community members may be asked to comment on:

- How is Buffalo State supporting students?
- How is Buffalo State assessing the work being done?
- In what ways is Buffalo State continuing to improve?
- What additional changes does Buffalo State plan on making?
- In what ways do these improvements have a measurable impact?

Finally, [Buffalo State's institutional mission](#) is central to our self-study, it guides all that we do, and should also guide the Evaluation Team's review.

Buffalo State's Mission

Buffalo State is a diverse and inclusive university committed to the intellectual, personal, and professional growth of its students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Our mission is to empower students to succeed and to inspire a lifelong passion for learning. Buffalo State is dedicated to excellence in teaching, research, service, scholarship, creative activity, and cultural enrichment.

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