

Puerto Rico Council on Higher Education (PRCHE)

and

Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)

Checklist for Collaborative Reviews

The Memorandum of Understanding reaffirmed in December 2003 by the Puerto Rico Council on Higher Education (PRCHE) and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) provides for an institution of higher education (IHE) in Puerto Rico, accredited by the MSCHE and holding a Renewal License from the PRCHE, to submit petitions for joint visits by both reviewing entities, validation of MSCHE accreditation for PRCHE licensure purposes, and follow ups and other required reviews to be conducted collaboratively.

The following descriptive chronology of events is intended as a guide to assist both PRCHE and MSCHE staff, evaluation team members, and institutions in the process of a collaborative evaluation. However, it is important to understand that each case might present particular or exceptional circumstances relative to the individual evaluation, requiring that PRCHE, MSCHE, or both, deviate from the general process described below.

Though this checklist describes the many issues that should be agreed upon in advance by the IHE, PRCHE, and MSCHE, an IHE may opt to have a collaborative review involving more than two organizations. The decision about which and how many organizations to invite should be based upon careful consideration of the IHE's specific situation and its objectives for the review in question and the policies, procedures, and standards of the partnering agencies. All participants must consent to the collaborative review.

It may be that collaborative reviews proceed more efficiently with only two collaborating partners. However, collaboration of more than two organizations is possible. When more than two organizations will be involved, they should consider why collaboration among these organizations might be beneficial to the institution and how the organizations might best work together.

I. Joint Evaluation Visits

Petition process

- The petition for a joint visit shall be submitted by the IHE simultaneously to MSCHE and PRCHE, at least two years prior to the review date. The institution should be MSCHE accredited and should hold a renewal license from PRCHE.

- Once the petition is approved by both entities, a calendar of events shall be established. Staff liaisons for PRCHE, MSCHE and the IHE should be appointed and identified. Both PRCHE and MSHE will make reasonable efforts to adjust its respective activities and protocols to allow for an effective collaborative process.
- The denial of a petition for a joint visit by either PRCHE or MSCHE is final, and the evaluation process will continue as required by the applicable regulations and proceedings of both reviewing entities.

Activities prior to the joint evaluation visit

- Institution's President/Chancellor notifies MSCHE and PRCHE of its interest in a collaborative evaluation.
- MSCHE and PRCHE approve the request.
- MSCHE and PRCHE staff liaisons discuss agenda and possible format for self-study preparation visit, design, and reporting parameters. Institutional representatives should be included in planning for the staff visit.
- Staff liaisons visit institution to prepare institution for self-study.
- MSCHE, PRCHE and the institution discuss terms and protocol of the collaborative evaluation.
- A letter of agreement or other written summaries of agreed upon terms are sent to the institution and agency liaisons for review. MSCHE staff liaison will take the lead by developing the initial draft agreement. Such documents should demonstrate how the standards of each agency will be addressed and should include the following: team composition, structure, organization, length, and style of self-study design and report; schedule timetable, deadlines, billing procedures; materials to be distributed or provided; exit interview and final report format and scope. (See *Reference Guide for an Institutional Evaluation Process Agreement*.)
- Self-study design is submitted to respective agencies for comment, review and final approval. Addendums may be necessary to demonstrate how the institution will address criteria required by PRCHE.
- Chair and/or Co-Chair(s) are selected by MSCHE and PRCHE respectively, and are submitted for approval to the institution (January) prior to the year of the scheduled evaluation. In most cases, MSCHE will select the Chair and PRCHE will select the Co-chair.
- Site visit is scheduled.

- Staff liaisons select evaluation team (February-April). Once the team is confirmed, the roster is shared with the institution's President/Chancellor, Team Chair and Co-chair.
- Chair and/or Co-chair(s) and President/Chancellor approve team.
- Chair and/or Co-Chair(s) are mailed pertinent documents, including documents of agreement/protocol, self-study design, draft of self-study, pertinent accreditation documents from both accrediting organizations, institutional catalogs, and handbooks prior to chair's preliminary visit (usually occurring three (3) months prior to evaluation visit).
- Chair and/or Co-Chair(s) conduct chair's preliminary visit. MSCHE and/or PRCHE staff liaisons may participate in some instances.
- Chair and/ or Co-Chair(s) contact team members to offer welcome, introduction, possible roles, background information, etc.
- Chair and/ or Co-chair(s) discuss and finalize schedule, in cooperation with institutional representatives.
- Chair and/ or Co-chair(s), MSCHE and PRCHE staff liaisons, and institutional representatives determine whether special orientation or training of team members is warranted; and, if so, how, when, and by whom this is to be provided.
- PRCHE and MSCHE will forward to ALL team members its accreditation standards, licensure requirements, protocol agreements, and related self-study publications.
- At least six (6) weeks prior to the actual visit, the institution distributes to MSCHE, PRCHE, and team members, the self-study, collaborative visit protocol, the institution's catalogs/handbooks, and other documents that have been agreed upon.
- Team members prepare individually for the review visit and keep confidential communications amongst them prior to the visit.

Activities during the team joint evaluation visit

- MSCHE and PRCHE team members meet prior to the evaluation visit to discuss visit strategies, self-study, assignments, issues, concerns, and exit interview protocol.
- Team members arrive at institution.

- Team members conduct the evaluation in a collaborative manner, following agreed upon protocol and guidelines.
- Before leaving the campus, team members provide text for areas of responsibility to the Chair and/or Co-Chair (s). One single report will be written; addenda addressing specific agency standards may be required.
- Chair and/or Co-Chair(s) finalize draft, and distribute draft (optional) to team members for comments.
- Chair and/or Co-Chair(s) submit draft report to President/Chancellor for review of factual errors only. President/Chancellor returns draft to Chair and/or Co-Chair(s) with comments within 10 days.
- Chair and/or Co-Chair(s) submit final team report to the President/Chancellor with copy to MSCHE and PRCHE staff liaison. The institution is responsible for distributing final team report to all parties required.
- The President/Chancellor sends an institutional response to the final team report to each agency.
- Chair and/or Co-Chair(s) will submit separate confidential briefs and recommendations to MSCHE and PRCHE for action, but it is hoped that the joint nature of the process will promote agreement among the organizations on recommended actions, to the extent that their standards and processes overlap in such areas of joint concern as general education and the assessment of student learning. Recommendations in the report refer to each organization's standards and will describe specific areas for improvement. Each commission or agency may adopt similar decisions, but they will do so independently of each other.
- In **rare** instances involving serious divergence among the proposed actions that team members appointed by MSCHE and PRCHE recommend to their organizations, the staff of the participating organizations should work together with the chair and/or co-chair(s) to identify issues and to resolve differences prior to the exit interview, and certainly before the meeting of the decision-making body for each agency. The team chair and/or co-chairs have/has ultimate responsibility for the decision-making process as representatives of their respective agency.

Commission /Agency actions

- MSCHE and PRCHE take separate actions, based on the team report and related confidential briefs.
- MSCHE and PRCHE inform each other regarding formal commission/agency actions.

- IHE may request that required follow-up visits, Periodic Review Reports, or other reviews be conducted collaboratively. Such requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis by each agency, and each has discretion to refuse the request.

II. Use of Findings and Determinations of MSCHE Accreditation for PRCHE Validation and Licensure Purposes

Petition process

- The petition for a validation, or use of finding and determinations of MSCHE accreditation for licensure purposes by PRCHE shall be submitted by the IHE to the PRCHE at least **one year prior to the review date**. The accreditation must be in effect at that time.
- Applications must follow Sections 83 and 84 of the PRCHE *Regulations Governing the Issuance of Licenses to IHE's operating in Puerto Rico*.
- A written statement describing how the institution meets each of the evaluation elements required by PRCHE must be submitted by the IHE, with specific references to sections and/or page numbers of pertinent documents where evidence of compliance is located.
- The institution must inform MSCHE of its petition to PRCHE for validation or use of MSCHE accreditation findings and determinations. A copy of the letter must be sent to the PRCHE.

Review of the petition for validation or use of findings and determinations

- PRCHE appoints an evaluation team to review the petition and make recommendations to PRCHE.
- The evaluation team considers the documentation provided by the institution in support of the petition. Additional information or meetings with institution's officials may be required for clarification.
- The evaluation team issues a final report to the PRCHE with recommendations whether to grant the petition for validation or use of findings and determinations of the accreditation status completely, partially, or to deny the petition. A copy of the report should be sent to the institution.

PRCHE Actions

- If upon the recommendation of the evaluation team, the PRCHE determines that a **validation** petition should be granted, a Renewal License will be issued.

Licenses issued through a validation process shall expire 5 years upon the issuance, or on the expiration date of the accreditation, whichever occurs first.

- If the PRCHE determines that the validation should not be granted, it may proceed to use the findings or determinations of the accrediting entity, or deny the petition.
- When MSCHE's **findings and determinations** are accepted by PRCHE for evaluation purposes, the institution must be advised as to what additional documentation, visit(s), and additional review requirements may be needed to evaluate its full compliance with those minimum requirements that are not addressed by MSCHE in its findings and determinations in keeping with Section 84 of the PRCHE *Regulations Governing the Issuance of Licenses to IHE's operating in Puerto Rico*. The evaluation commission or a review team will be appointed to assist PRCHE in the evaluation.

III. Follow-up Reports, Visits, and other Reviews

- Institutions may submit requests to PRCHE and MSCHE that the process for follow-up visits, reports or review processes other than the full institutional evaluation for reaccreditation or licensure renewal be performed collaboratively. Such requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis by each agency, and each has discretion to refuse the request.
- Requests must be submitted in writing to PRCHE and MSCHE at least six months prior to the review or reporting date.
- Following the agencies' approval, PRCHE and MSCHE staff will coordinate reporting schedules, report contents and evaluation visits, if applicable, with the institution.
- PRCHE and MSCHE may consider creating written agreements on protocols for such processes as discussed in the MOU. The *Reference Guide for an Institutional Evaluation Process Agreement* may be used to assist all parties.

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