Key Accreditation Publications
MSCHE has produced several publications that will prove very helpful to you in your role as ALO. To download any of these publications, click on the title:

Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education
This contains the fundamental accreditation standards that MSCHE expects every institution to comply with at all times. You should read Characteristics carefully and be prepared to be a resource on it for your institutional colleagues. This updated version contains detailed descriptions of the Commission’s 14 accreditation standards and their fundamental elements. Also included are the 10 Requirements of Affiliation, which were adopted during 2008-09 to replace the previous Eligibility Requirements. During 2013 the Commission and a special committee will review and make recommendations for potential changes to the current accreditation standards.

Becoming Accredited
Available in electronic form only, this publication contains useful information not only for staff at institutions seeking their initial accreditation, but also for newcomers to accredited institutions. Of special use are the initial sections that define accreditation and the role of accreditors.

Self-Study: Creating a Useful Process and Report
The Commission requires every institution to undertake a self-study and host an evaluation team visit at least once every 10 years. This is the manual for the institutional self-study process that is central to the decennial evaluation. Along with Characteristics of Excellence and Team Visits: Conducting and Hosting an Evaluation Visit, it helps guide institutions through that important peer review event. This latest version of Self-Study: Creating a Useful Process and Report, was produced during 2012.

Team Visits: Conducting and Hosting an Evaluation Visit
This helpful booklet guides institutions through the steps that are recommended to ensure a smooth and successful team visit. Updated in 2009, with some additional modifications during 2012, it includes useful guidelines on how to plan the team visit that will follow submission of the institutional self-study.

Handbook for Periodic Review Reports
The PRR Handbook guides institutions through the process of preparing their report for reaffirmation of accreditation five years after the decennial evaluation. It was last updated during 2011.
Other Documents
MSCHE has a range of other publications, covering such topics as Becoming a Peer Evaluator; History of Accreditation and MSCHE; Promoting Educational Excellence and Improvement: Facts About MSCHE; and more.

Statements of Accreditation Status
The Statement of Accreditation Status (SAS) provides information on an institution’s recent accreditation history. It includes notations about degree levels, branch campuses, additional locations, and other instructional sites included within the scope of the institution’s accreditation; whether the institution has been approved to offer distance education programs; and information on the years the institution’s next key accreditation events (self-study, PRR) are due. Your institution’s SAS, including a recent history of Commission actions involving your institution, is available by visiting the Institutions section of www.msche.org. Click on the first letter of your institution’s name, and then scroll down until you see your institution’s name. Click on Statement of Accreditation Status in the lower right to view your SAS. To verify the name of your designated MSCHE staff liaison, click on Detail View.

Your MSCHE Liaison
One of the central responsibilities of an ALO is to maintain contact with the MSCHE vice president who is assigned as your institution’s liaison. You should communicate with your MSCHE vice president as needed and respond promptly when contacted by that individual.

Policies, Guidelines, and Procedures
The Commission’s policies and procedures are either elaborations of the standards for accreditation set forth in Characteristics of Excellence, or they describe procedural requirements for institutions and for the Commission. Guidelines are based on best practices and provide advice to members for implementing the accreditation standards. To view all of the Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines, click here. Of special interest to ALOs are the following documents:

- Substantive Change Policy and Substantive Change Processes
  Certain institutional changes must be approved by the Commission before they are implemented. Failure to follow this process could impact an institution’s federal Title IV student financial aid. As ALO you should be aware of the policy and processes, and should ensure that all substantive
changes are submitted in a timely manner to the Commission for review and approval.

• **Degree and Credit Guidelines** and **Credit Hour Policy**
The Commission’s Requirements of Affiliation stipulate that accredited institutions comply with all applicable federal, state, and other relevant government policies, regulations, and requirements, which generally include requirements and expectations for degrees and credits. These guidelines provide an overview of federal and state definitions.

• **Range of Commission Actions on Accreditation**
As your institution’s ALO it is important for you to understand the types of Affirming, Monitoring, Procedural, and Non-Compliance actions the Commission may take.

• **Follow-Up Reports and Visits**
The Commission typically takes an accreditation action once every five years, following an institutional self-study and an on-site evaluation or periodic review report. Follow-up reports and visits may be requested when the Commission is concerned about current or future institutional compliance with one or more of the accreditation standards. This set of guidelines provides valuable information for an ALO whose institution is preparing for a follow-up report or for a follow-up visit.

• **Public Communication in the Accreditation Process**
The Commission has an obligation to share with the public essential information about its accreditation standards, its procedures, and the accreditation status of its member institutions.

• **Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status**
This policy describes in detail the key information that institutions are required by the Commission to include in their publications, whether in print or online. It also provides the framework for the advertising or promotion of the institution’s accreditation status and acceptable terminology.

• **Procedures for Appeals from Adverse Accrediting Actions**
This set of procedures describes in detail the steps to be taken if an institution wants to appeal an adverse accrediting action, including timelines, required documentation, and costs.
ALO Newsletters
During 2009 the Commission introduced its ALO Newsletter. To view the latest issue as well as back issues of both the ALO newsletter and the more widely disseminated “general” newsletter, click here. The ALO newsletter contains specific information that is especially useful to ALOs.

Professional Development Opportunities
Throughout the year MSCHE offers professional development opportunities for representatives of member institutions. These include one and two-day workshops, the annual conference, pre-conference workshops, the annual Chairs and Evaluators workshop, the Self-Study Institute, and the Periodic Review Report (PRR) workshop. To view the current schedule for these activities, click here.

The annual conference, held during December, also provides many opportunities to enhance your skills in a variety of accreditation-related topics. To view the latest information about the conference, click here.

The Higher Education Opportunity Act
In August 2008, the United States Congress passed the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA). The HEOA contains new requirements for accreditors and the institutions they accredit. These involve distance education, monitoring of enrollment growth, substantive change reporting, and transfer of credit policies. The Commission staff has developed a document that contains useful information for institutions that want to learn more about the accreditation provisions in the HEOA. It can be accessed by clicking here. For additional details on the HEOA, visit the U.S. Department of Education’s website, www.ed.gov.

Guidelines for Institutional Improvement
During 2009 the Commission added a new section to its website containing a diverse group of documents that provide Guidelines for Institutional Improvement. This section contains bibliographies with suggested readings on Assessing Institutional Effectiveness, Assessing Student Learning, Encouraging Faculty Engagement in Assessment, and Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning; a handbook on Understanding MSCHE Expectations for Assessing Student Learning and Institutional Effectiveness; a rubric for evaluating institutional student learning assessment processes; and more.
Recent Commission Actions
The Commission meets three times per year, in March, June, and November. The Commission has recently revised its website so it is now easier to access information regarding actions taken during the meetings of the full Commission, the Commission’s Executive Committee, and the Committee on Substantive Change. You can view recent actions of these groups by clicking here.

Frequently Asked Questions About Accreditation
The Commission has developed a comprehensive online section of Frequently Asked Questions. They can be accessed by clicking on https://www.msche.org/?Nav1=ABOUT&Nav2=FAQ

Glossary of Higher Education and Accreditation Terms
The Commission’s comprehensive online glossary of common higher education and accreditation terminology is especially helpful to individuals who are new to higher education and/or accreditation.

Some Other Things You Should Know

**Compliance Review**- The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 requires accrediting agencies to verify institutional compliance with several federal regulations. Although the requirement for verification of the Title IV cohort default rate has long been in effect, other areas are newer. Areas that became effective on July 1, 2011 are institutional verification of student identity in distance education and correspondence education programs, policies related to transfer of credits, and verification of institutional credit hour policies.

The Commission and its peer evaluators will initiate a new procedure to verify institutional compliance with the accreditation-relevant provisions of the HEOA. Institutional representatives currently verify compliance by signing the Certification Statement that is submitted with the Self-Study Report and the Periodic Review Report. This new process is more substantive than the Certification Statement.

The procedure requires a pre-verification of the required four components to be completed by an independent team of peer evaluators prior to a Self-Study team visit or completion of the PRR reader review. The evaluators will be comprised of institutional research and compliance personnel from peer institutions. Institutions undergoing review for initial accreditation and reaffirmation of accreditation will be directed to submit required data along with their Self-Study and Periodic Review Reports.

The compliance verification will concentrate on the following four areas: Student Identity Verification in Distance and Correspondence Education courses, Transfer of Credit, Assignment of Credit Hours, and Title IV Cohort Default Rates.
Once the relevant documentation has been reviewed by the designated compliance evaluators, a report will be submitted to the chair of the visiting evaluation team or the readers of the institution’s PRR. The compliance evaluation will be incorporated as an appendix to the regular team report before it is submitted to the institution for comments.

This process will become effective with institutions undergoing team visits during Spring 2013 and beyond. For institutions submitting PRRs, this new review will become effective with PRRs that are due to the Commission on or after June 1, 2013.

The Commission will review the initial implementation of the Verification of Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal Regulations and may modify or refine the procedure in the future. To view the procedures the Commission will follow in the first round of compliance review, visit https://www.msche.org/publications/ComplianceReviewBookletDec2012.pdf.

**Complaints and Third-Party Comments** - Federal regulations require accrediting organizations to review and respond to complaints and third-party comments regarding member and candidate institutions. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education has specific policies and procedures for such situations. If the Commission determines that a complaint or third-party comment requires a response from an institution, a letter will be sent to the institution’s president with a copy of the complaint or third-party comment and a list of information the Commission will need to complete its review. For further details, view the following:

Policy on Complaints Involving Member and Candidate Institutions

Policy on Third-Party Comment

**Using the MSCHE Logo** - The Middle States Commission on Higher Education allows member institutions to use the Commission logo in publications and on institutional websites. Certain restrictions apply. To request permission to use the logo, please contact Richard J. Pokrass, the Commission’s Director for Communications and Public Relations, at rpokrass@msche.org. If your request is approved, you will receive versions of the logo in EPS and JPG formats as well as a copy of the Commission’s acceptable use guidelines for the logo. Please note that under federal regulation, whenever an institution acknowledges its accreditor in print or electronic form, the institution is required to provide the accreditor’s full name, mailing address, and telephone number.