



EHAC Site Visit Guidelines

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Introduction

An on-site visit by a team of qualified peer reviewers is a critical part of the procedure used by the Council in the accreditation of undergraduate and graduate environmental health science and protection programs. We thank you for agreeing to serve on a site visit team and trust that the following will enhance the quality of that effort.

The accreditation decision is the responsibility of the entire voting membership of the Council. However, Council members rely on the site visit team for an objective assessment of how well the school or program meets the criteria for accreditation.

Individuals selected for service on a site visit team, particularly first-time visitors, often have questions about what is expected of them. The following guidelines are intended to provide answers to the common concerns raised by site visitors. The overriding advice, of course, is to use common sense. Individuals are selected for site visitation teams because they have the professional respect of their peers. The good judgment and sense of fair play that contribute to that professional respect will serve the visitor well throughout the accreditation site visit.

Composition of the Team

Teams are composed of at least two members, an academician and a practitioner.

Members are selected for the particular perspective they can contribute to the team, as well as geographical considerations related to the site under review. Team members will not be selected from the same state as the program under review. Consideration will be given to selected team members familiar with the general region of the program under review, and not so distant as to present an unreasonable travel expense. Each team

member will meet the minimum qualifications required for membership on the Council. One member will be identified as site visit coordinator; this member will have previous experience with accreditation site visits. Making arrangements for site visits is the responsibility of the Vice-Chair for Undergraduate or Graduate Programs, as appropriate.

The Academician is expected to have special knowledge about environmental health science and protection education and training, as well as the broader related educational concerns. This individual should be skilled in assessing such programmatic elements as institutional governance, programmatic relationships within the larger university, methods of financing, linkages between knowledge and skill development and the institutional milieu.

The Environmental Health Practitioner may or may not have detailed knowledge about educational institutions, but he or she will always be able to contribute the essential element--the relevance of the instructional programs to the world of environmental health science and protection practice. The practitioner should be in a good position to assess the appropriateness of the program's service activities to the community and the professional. He or she should be in a position to assess whether or not the educational thrust of the program is satisfactorily translated into knowledge and skills normally expected of entry-level environmental health employees.

Role of Coordinator

The coordinator for the site visit is the key agent in assuring that the site visit is effective and fulfills its intent. The coordinator's responsibilities include:

Confirming the site visit schedule and dates with the institution and the other team member prior to the visit.

Clearing travel and housing arrangements with the other team member(s) and the institution in order to assure the integrity of the site visit schedule.

Coordinating the site visit activities while at the site.

Directing the preparation of the team's site visit report for submission to the Council at their next regular meeting. No later than four weeks after the site visit, a copy of the team's draft report will be submitted to the institution's Program Director for review (for substantive errors only) before the final report is prepared. The report will address the team's observations relative to the strengths and weaknesses of the institution with respect to the accreditation guidelines and to institutional plans or proposals for strengthening the program where need is identified. It will also contain recommendations of the review team.

Ensuring that the Council Secretary receive all documents that will be retained in Council permanent files.

Meeting with the Council and presenting the team findings at the next regular Council meeting.

Preparing for the Visit

It is essential that all team members come to the visit well prepared. Preparation must include thorough reading of all self-study materials, and consideration of concerns and questions of other Council members (not on the site visit team) reviewing self-study materials.

A conflict of interest form must be signed prior to the visit. Individuals should decline from serving on a site visit if they have a conflict of interest, or if prior associations could lead to a perception of a conflict of interest. Because clues to potential conflicts may only emerge through a review of the program self-study, early reading of that document is important.

In reviewing the self-study materials (and during the site visit), it is particularly important to look for such things as, although not limited to, the following: (These are not listed in any order of priority.)

Administrative Placement in the Organizational Structure of the Educational Institution. Administrative placement has important influence on program status within the institution, and also the status of the Program Director/Coordinator, budgetary allocations, policy determinations, etc.

Academic Ranking of the Program Director/Coordinator and Instructors, and Administrative Titles. A Program Director/Coordinator must have a faculty appointment. It is important that the Program faculty are actively involved in the educational process.

Adequacy of the Curriculum. Courses included in the curriculum must meet the Council's guidelines. Additional required courses should be reasonable and pertinent, and contribute to the overall quality of the program. Prerequisite courses should be clearly stated. Cooperation should be evident among other departments offering courses for students in environmental health science and protection. Opportunities for electives chosen by the students should be examined.

Adequacy of the Budget to Meet the Program's Needs. This determination should include consideration of the budget preparation and approval process, and what the program budget includes. Faculty workload should also be examined.

Student Internship Experiences. Internships should be examined to determine if they provide appropriate experiences for the students. Methods of evaluation of students, and of sites, should be explored. Student satisfaction with their experiences should be evaluated.

Physical Facilities and Equipment. Classroom and laboratory space should be examined to determine if available space is adequate. Similarly, equipment needed for course instruction should be assessed with regard to adequacy.

Review of Student Performance. Records of graduates should be examined to determine if they are meeting stated criteria for graduation. Student input should be obtained regarding their perception of the adequacy of their program. Information should be obtained on the success of graduates finding appropriate employment or opportunities for graduate education.

The Site Visit

Most colleges and universities enjoy a high level of autonomy over their internal organization and programming. While there are various norms and patterns which academic institutions generally observe, each one becomes highly individualized with respect to how they satisfy these norms and standards. Where they locate programs, how they fund and administer programs, how they package courses and allocate instructional responsibilities, and how they provide for the programmatic infra-structure will vary from school to school. Likewise, the accreditation criteria represent a norm or pattern for structuring and administering an accreditable environmental health science and protection program. There are many variables as to how this may be accomplished. The task of a site visitor is to determine how well the school is satisfying the minimum criteria, to identify where their strengths lie, and to explore how they plan to strengthen their weaknesses. These observations will be shared with the school during the exit interview.

Following are some suggestions which may be useful during the site visit.

Be a gracious guest. Remember that you are an invited guest and that you represent the profession of environmental health science and protection as a select observer.

Cooperate as a team. Draw on each others strengths and avoid public confusion over interpretations of accreditation criteria. Take advantage of opportunities when apart from school representatives to seek accord on points of concern and to resolve misunderstandings.

Be attentive. Your job is to solicit information that will validate the school's self-study. Time is precious and discussions will be pointed and intense. Your attentiveness will reflect the importance of the site visit.

Carry your share of responsibilities in questioning various school constituents. The burden of responsibility is heavy and intense during a site visit, and it should be shared if the best outcome is to be achieved.

Be an active participant in the decision-making process. Generally, consensus can be obtained for decisions regarding individual criteria, but should there be unresolved disagreement, this should be shared in a report to the Council.

Do not be combative in your style of questioning, but be inquisitive. It is absolutely necessary to ask the hard questions, but do so in a polite and respectful manner.

Do not pursue your own ideological or pedagogical preferences unnecessarily. Remember, there are many ways to accomplish the same ends. Be open minded and remember that the school is being evaluated on how well it meets its own mission. Your task is to look for the results.

Do not be effusive in your praise of the school or the manner in which it carries out its programs. Recognize strengths but avoid encouraging unrealistic expectations.

Avoid discussion which questions the Council's criteria if at all possible. These have been developed over a long period of study and are the basis upon which the review will be judged. Any concerns you may have can be shared later with the Council.

Avoid excessive comparisons with your own school or program. While it is sometimes useful to draw upon your schools programming and operation as a point of reference for discussion of how this school addresses the same area of responsibility, it is never appropriate to hold your school up as a model to be pursued. The school being reviewed should be assessed upon how effectively its procedures accomplish the intended purposes set forth in the self-study.

Be as helpful to the school as possible. Site visitors sometimes face the dilemma of being placed in the role of a consultant, as well as an evaluator. The Council believes that the entire accreditation process should be helpful to the school, including the site visit. Caution should be exercised, however, to avoid conflict with the major objective of verifying the self-study document, and assessing compliance with the accreditation criteria. Consultation-type activities should not be pursued to the point of compromising the team's ability to exercise independent and honest judgments.

Attempt to assess progress in meeting earlier recommendations included in the previous accreditation report. It is important to recognize progress where it is found, and of equal importance to cite failure to comply.

Prepare complete notes of your observations while on site. These notes will become the basis for the exit interview, where they can be double checked to assure that there is no misunderstanding or substantive error. These notes become the basis for the site visit coordinator's preparation of a report.

Do not divulge to the school the team's specific recommendation regarding accreditation. The team's recommendation is not presented during the exit interview nor should it be contained in the written report. This will be conveyed by the coordinator of the site visit at the time the decision is made. Pre-mature disclosure could compromise or embarrass the Council, particularly should subsequent knowledge significantly alter the fact upon which the report or decision is based. Under the rules of due process, the school will have an opportunity to review the site report and respond to the Council. They may submit

additional information of substantive nature relating to subsequent actions which may alter the basis of the site team recommendations, and thus, persuade the Council to a different course of action than that recommended by the team. The Council relies heavily upon the site visit team for its major assessment, but the team's role will always remain advisory to the Council.

Provide accurate feedback to the school during the exit interview. Summarize the team's findings succinctly. The content should be straight forward but with sufficient detail so that the school will know exactly what to expect in the written report.

Do not allow the exit interview to be used for debating the issues raised by the team. This is a time for reporting the team's findings. There will be ample opportunity for the school to respond to the team's findings and conclusions after the school receives the written report.

After the Visit

The site team's report, in draft form, should be sent to the Program Director by the team Coordinator within four weeks of the visit. Guidelines for this report are provided in a separate document.

The Program will have an opportunity to review the report, and suggest appropriate corrections of fact. Upon return to the Coordinator, appropriate changes will be made and the document distributed to the entire Council, site visit team and the Program Director. The Program is invited to respond to the report, and must have a representative present at the Council meeting when the report will be reviewed.

Each team member should submit an expense voucher. The voucher will be submitted either to the Treasurer of the Council or to the program seeking accreditation, depending on arrangements made prior to the visit. If the site visitor submits expenses to the program seeking accreditation, they should follow the guidelines set by the program and should expect reimbursement within four weeks. If the site visitor submits expenses to the Treasurer of the Council, the Council will reimburse for travel, meals and housing expenses incurred during the visit. In turn, the Council will reimburse the site visitor within two weeks and bill the Program for all expenses. Alternative arrangements can be made through the mutual consent of all involved parties.

The Council greatly appreciates the contribution of the site review team to the accreditation process. The Councilors rely on the team for major input to the accreditation decision, including their involvement during the final hearings on the application. The continued interest and commitment of the team members to the accreditation process is important to both the school involved and the Council if a well informed decision is to be made.

Declaration of No Conflict of Interest

Site Visitors are required to decline participation in a site visit team when any of the following actual or potential conflicts of interest exist: Individual has a current or previous affiliation with the institution under consideration, including as an administrator, faculty, staff, employee, appointee, or as a current or former candidate for any of the previously mentioned positions.

Individual is an employee of or is in some way affiliated with an institution or program in geographic proximity of or in direct competition with the program/institution under consideration.

Individual currently serves or previously served (during the past three years) as a consultant to the institution/program under consideration.

Individual is or was a student of or is a graduate of the institution under consideration.

Individual has a member of his/her immediate family with a relationship to the program/institution.

Individuals selected for a site visit team will notify the Council within 10 days of actual or potential conflicts of interest with that program/institution so that substitutions can be made in the composition of the team.

Should unforeseen conflicts develop during the site visit or before the final decision is made on the accreditation of the particular program, an individual is required to notify the Chair of the Council.

Signature of site visitor: _____

Printed name of site visitor: _____

Printed name of College or University under review: _____

Date: _____