

INSTRUCTIONS FOR EVALUATORS

GENERAL

The purpose of the visit is to evaluate the institution as a whole in terms of the **Standards of Membership** for the Commission on Technical and Career Institutions of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. Although the Commission firmly believes that it is not possible to conduct a valid evaluation of an institution without carefully reviewing each of the institution's educational programs of study, the visiting team must bear in mind that the Commission accredits institutions and not programs. The team should ensure that the institution receives the kind of education audit that will

- identify areas for constructive action by the institution leading to its improvement
- serve as a sound basis for a recommendation to the Commission on Technical and Career Institutions

If an evaluation has served these purposes, the institution should benefit from a clarification of its mission and its attendant objectives, a realistic self-examination of its success in attaining them, and stimulation for a continuing study of ways by which it might increase its effectiveness in service to its students.

PLANNING THE VISIT

Each evaluator will receive from the Commission a letter of invitation to serve on the visiting team and a follow-up communication outlining details of the three and one-half day visit. When the membership of the visiting team has been established, it is the responsibility of the president of the institution to be evaluated to contact the chairperson of the team to discuss arrangements for the visit (housing, meals, plans and the particulars of the initial meeting with institutional personnel, schedules, etc.) Prior to the visit the chairperson will communicate with team members to establish contact and obtain any preferences and suggestions for the visit. Arrangements for the "housekeeping" of the on-site visit are the responsibility of the host institution, but they depend upon the receipt of appropriate information and direction from the visiting team chairperson. As an aid to the chairperson in organizing the visiting team for institutional evaluation, the Commission office will make available copies of **Evaluator Experience Summary Forms** to be completed by each team member and forwarded to the visiting team chairperson.

Experience has shown that it is preferable to have the visiting team housed in single rooms in one place. The host institution will have arranged to have a suitable work/meeting room for the team in the same place where it is housed. The latter should be private and should be provided with one or more computers and a supply of writing materials for use by the team. The institution will have available in the work/meeting room copies of current class schedules, staff directories, bulletins, and other institutional publications that may be of interest to the team.

BACKGROUND MATERIALS FROM THE COMMISSION

Approximately six weeks before the campus visit, the Commission office will forward to the chairperson copies of any appropriate evaluation reports developed by previous visiting teams representing the Commission on Technical and Career Institutions, as well as copies of correspondence and other pertinent information relating to actions by the Commission on Technical and Career Institutions. Copies of the Commission's current **Standards of Membership**, its policies and procedures, and its **Self-Study Manual** will also be forwarded at this time.

Each team member should become familiar with these background materials, giving particular attention to the findings of the most recent evaluation for possible items that may warrant special review in the current self-study and campus visit.

SELF-STUDY REPORT FROM THE INSTITUTION

The institution will forward to each team member, no later than one month prior to the campus visit, a copy of its completed self-study, current catalog, faculty handbook, student handbook, and any other relevant descriptive material. Each team member should read, analyze and begin to think about these materials before the visit. The following questions may be of help in the analysis of material received:

- What additional information is needed?
- Which material requires interpretation?
- What appear to be strong points? Weak points?
- How do the parts fit together in viewing the institution as a whole?
- Which people should be interviewed during the campus visit?
- Are the institution's recommendations for its improvement realistic and thorough?
- Is there sufficient narrative to give the team the information it needs?

If this review suggests that additional or clarifying information would be helpful to the team, the evaluator should communicate this feeling to the chairperson. It is the chairperson's responsibility to convey any requests for further information to the institution as soon as possible so that the material can be available for the team's use by no later than the time of its initial meeting on the campus.

When the chairperson has carefully reviewed all background materials (previous visiting team reports, the current self-study, evaluator experience summary forms), he/she will then communicate with fellow team members to make preliminary assignments of areas for special attention by individual team members.

DURING THE VISIT

Throughout the visit, each team member must keep in mind that the visiting team member's role is that of colleague and friendly consultant. If any word should characterize the nature of the visiting team experience, it may be professionalism.

INITIAL MEETING OF THE VISITING TEAM

The initial meeting of the visiting team takes place at the hotel or motel at 3:00 p.m. on the Monday afternoon prior to any meeting with institutional personnel. At that meeting, the Commission Director or his designee will conduct an orientation to the peer review accreditation process, followed by an organizational meeting conducted by the visiting team chairperson. Each team member should get acquainted with other team members, understand his/her place on the team, and share with others preliminary impressions of the institution gained from a review of background materials.

INITIAL MEETING WITH INSTITUTIONAL PERSONNEL

The initial meeting of the team with key institutional personnel, arranged through earlier discussions between the chairperson and the president, should occur no later than Monday evening (this session is typically a reception/dinner meeting). At that time the visiting team should receive whatever additional orientation, of either a general or specific nature, the institution deems appropriate to the evaluation. (For example, it might wish to use this occasion to elaborate on its mission and objectives and how it seeks to carry them out.) Above all, this first meeting with institutional personnel should be informal, and all members of the visiting team should attempt to allay any tensions and fears and set an atmosphere of professionalism.

VISITING TEAM ACTIVITIES AND CONFERENCES

In the course of the visit, team members should seek opportunities to meet with representatives of the faculty, students, and administration; to visit classes and the library; and to see other aspects of the physical plant.

In addition to the meeting room at the hotel, the institution will provide a meeting room at the institution, which will serve as home base for the team. The meeting room will contain one or more computers and various materials to facilitate the visit. The institution is expected to provide the team with appropriate clerical support. The chairperson will set specific times for visiting team conferences during the visit. Reports and observations from individual team members should be discussed. Most teams work informally and reach decisions by consensus.

At or near the end of the visit, a "wrap-up" conference of the visiting team should occur. By the end of this session, the visiting team should seek to come to consensus on major issues. Most teams find it helpful to have a rough draft of the various sections of the report completed before the team disbands and leaves the campus. Regardless of the procedure that a particular team chooses to follow, it is most important that the team be in general agreement as to the subject

matter of its report and recommendation to the Commission. Each member of the team should have a clear understanding of individual team member responsibilities with respect to the preparation of the report.

The visiting team recommendation concerning accreditation should be based on options described in the Commission's document **Range and Meaning of Commission Actions Affecting Institutional Status** and, whenever possible, tied to Commission standards, policies or procedures.

It should be noted that the recommendation to the Commission is **confidential** and must **not** be divulged to the institution.

EXIT INTERVIEW WITH THE PRESIDENT

Before leaving the campus, the visiting team chairperson should give the president (and whoever the chairperson and president decide should be included in the meeting) an oral preview of the team's findings. This conference is probably the most difficult, yet one of the most important aspects of the evaluation.

By its very nature the exit interview cannot be a courtesy call; it must truly be a conference in which the host institution has ample opportunity to talk and discuss the summary of the report presented. If any points appear to be on "shaky" ground, this is the time to make sure of the facts.

No indication should be made to the president or to anyone else at the institution visited what the recommendation of the team is going to be. The Commission requests that this procedure be followed because it may modify the recommendation of the visiting team, which could cause considerable embarrassment if this custom of privacy is not strictly observed.

The visit typically concludes in the early afternoon of the fourth day, usually on Thursday.

AFTER THE VISIT

PREPARATION OF THE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION TO THE COMMISSION

Three documents are prepared for the Commission's review as a result of a site visit to an institution: the **Evaluation Report; Strengths, Concerns and Recommendations**; and the formal and confidential **Letter of Recommendation** from the team to the Commission.

Each team member is responsible for preparing an initial draft of those sections of the report concerning his or her assigned areas of responsibility. Depending upon the decision of the team, this may or may not be accomplished prior to the team's departure from the host institution. It is strongly recommended that all elements of the evaluation report be completed and in the possession of the chairperson before the team disbands.

The organization of the report should follow the order of the Commission's **Standards of Membership** as published.

Every effort should be made to submit a report that is both scrupulously fair and factually accurate in describing the institution and its operations as they were observed by the team during the visit. In an era of heightened public interest and growing concern for consumer protection, it is likely that the visiting team report will be read and referred to by lay as well as professional parties unknown to the team or the Commission. The report should be a professional document in every respect and should never refer to individuals by name. **Recommendations concerning possible changes in institutional policies or procedures should not be offered in the body of the report**, but rather should be submitted to the Commission in a separate communication (see below).

The chairperson typically writes the introductory and concluding sections and edits the drafts of other team members so that the final report is a cohesive representation of the institution as a whole. **The report should be double-spaced on one side of the paper.** The introductory section and the **Mission** report are particularly important, for they set the stage for the rest of the report. The chairperson should carefully analyze the institution's concept and understanding of its mission, its general educational philosophy, and any conclusions arrived at by the visiting team apropos the extent to which it is meeting its mission.

As soon as the chairperson has completed the editing of the **Evaluation Report** and the **Strengths, Concerns and Recommendations** document, the corrected draft of the **Evaluation Report** and the **Strengths, Concerns and Recommendations** document should then be forwarded to the president or director of the institution evaluated who will have an opportunity to identify errors of factual accuracy and/or misinterpretation. The final draft of the **Evaluation Report** and the **Strengths, Concerns and Recommendations** document will then be prepared by the chairperson. It should be duplicated and twenty (20) copies forwarded to the Director of the Commission.

The **Strengths, Concerns and Recommendations** document should include

- a listing of the institution's strengths and areas of concern as observed by the visiting team.
- recommendations for change that the visiting team may wish to offer; These recommendations should relate directly to the Commission's **Standards of Membership**.
- suggestions for change the visiting team may wish to offer; these suggestions should represent perceptions that, if acted upon favorably, would improve programs or the institution. Typically, they will not relate directly to the **Standards of Membership**.

The final printing of both the **Evaluation Report** and the **Strengths, Concerns and Recommendations** document will be shared with the institution evaluated prior to Commission deliberations.

A separate single copy communication is to be forwarded by the visiting team chairperson to the Director of the Commission with the visiting team recommendation for accreditation on the basis of options indicated by the visiting team chairperson. The visiting team chairperson will ensure that the contents of this communication are kept absolutely **confidential** and only for the eyes of the Commission and its Director.

When the **Evaluation Report** and the **Strengths, Concerns and Recommendations** document are received in the Commission office, the Director of the Commission will ensure that a copy of each is in the possession of the institution. The Commission reserves the right upon deliberation to request further information from the institution if deemed necessary.

DISCUSSING THE REPORT WITH THE COMMISSION

Visiting team reports are scheduled for review and discussion by the Commission at one of its regular meetings. In special circumstances, the visiting team chairperson is invited to join the Commission for a discussion of the team's report. Arrangements should be made for another member of the visiting team to be present at the Commission meeting whenever the visiting team chairperson cannot attend.

The chairperson and visiting team colleagues have discharged their responsibilities to the Commission with the presentation of the report. All correspondence thereafter should be directed to or from the Director of the Commission.

MISCELLANEOUS

Use of a personal automobile in connection with an evaluation visit is reimbursed at a rate to be set by the Association's Board of Trustees.

Members of evaluation teams serve without honoraria. However, the institution pays for their lodging, meals, and out-of-pocket expenses (including transportation). These costs are in addition to the evaluation fee paid to the Association. It is the responsibility of the visiting team chairperson to collect expense vouchers from the team members and submit them to the chief executive office of the institution. It is the responsibility of the institution to process these vouchers for payment within two weeks of their receipt. In unusual circumstances, and with prior approval of the Commission Director, expense vouchers may be submitted to the Commission office for reimbursement to the team members. In such cases, the Association will bill the institution as an accreditation expense. Please note that reimbursement through the Association is the exception. Reimbursement should occur at the institutional level in a timely fashion.

If emergencies arise with respect to any aspect of the evaluation process, the chairperson should not hesitate to telephone collect the Director of the Commission.