

6. Undergoing an On-Site Visit

Procedures and Guidelines for an On-Site Visit

When planning for the on-site visit, a mutually convenient date is coordinated by the Commission staff and with the institution. The Commission staff then selects the members of the examining committee and prepares an Examination Schedule. The Examination Schedule lists the names, addresses, and biographies of the examiners and observers, the date of the examination, the name and address of the hotel where the Committee will be staying, the time of the Committee's breakfast meeting, and the approximate time when the Committee will be arriving at the institution. The Examination Schedule is sent to the institution along with a statement for required visitation fees. These fees must be paid by the date shown on the statement before the visit can take place.

The **purpose** of the on-site visit is for the Examining Committee to verify the information in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and to gather any additional facts for the Accrediting Commission.

(NOTE: Initial applicants must undergo a Readiness Assessment before a full on-site visit will be conducted.)

Before the Visit

- An accreditation examination **presumes** that the applicant institution has a permanent physical office or location where an accrediting Committee can physically visit to conduct its examination of executives, staff, appropriate faculty, and also view curricula, records, and technology used to teach and service students. Where space is at a premium, please coordinate with the DETC staff on possible options.
- Have key personnel of the institution present and available to be interviewed by members of the Examining Committee throughout the day of the on-site visit. All chief executives, operating officers, managers, and an appropriate representation of instructional faculty must be present on the day of the visit. Outside accountants and others not in attendance must be briefed on the events of the visit and be available by telephone to talk with examiners during the course of the on-site visit. It is **very important** to have a sufficiently representative number of faculty who provide academic counseling/services present during the visit. Prepare name badges for all school personnel to wear on the day of the visit. Failure to have key personnel present at the time of the scheduled visit is grounds for terminating the visit.
- The successful conduct of an accrediting on-site review rests on the performance and cooperation of the institution being visited. A successful visit can be ensured when the institution has not only provided the visiting Committee **in-person** access to **key personnel** during the visit, but also makes it easy for the Committee members to access all relevant **business and academic records** that are required by DETC accrediting standards and policies, i.e., Policy C. 21. Easy access to all student records is a top priority for every Committee.
- Demonstrations of online learning platforms or other computer-based learning offerings should be arranged for in advance of the visit and such demonstrations can be made available to the Committee on a schedule that they determine.
- Arrange to have a private meeting room or conference area for the Examining Committee to use during the on-site visit. One complete set of each course/program, including tools, kits, equipment, advertising materials, and examinations, should be on display in the meeting room. A complete copy of the institution's Self-Evaluation Report should also be in the room.

- Arrange for coffee, tea, and water to be available to the Committee members throughout the day. Have menus ready so that the Committee members may place their lunch orders when they arrive.
- Read and review any subject specialist reports and student surveys sent to you by the Commission's staff. Be ready to discuss any concerns with the on-site examining committee. If there were any "partially meets" or "does not meet" ratings, you must respond in writing explaining your changes to correct the deficiencies. Your responses must be available to the team when he/she arrives.
- Provide a contact person for **each** Standard. If you did not list the person in your Self-Evaluation Report, please provide the visiting team with a list when they arrive. This will help the evaluators to determine whom to interview during the on-site visit.

During the Visit

- Greet the Committee members when they arrive and immediately show them to the private meeting room so that they can leave any materials they brought with them. The CEO/President should make brief introductions of key staff members. The Chair of the Committee will introduce the examiners (who will all be wearing name badges prepared by DETC's staff). The CEO/President should give a brief statement (10-15 minutes) about the institution's philosophy and purpose, describe the institution's organization and types of programs offered, and give an overview of the layout and locations of the facilities.
- It's helpful if you give the Committee a "Welcome Kit," which includes a layout of your facilities (with offices marked with names and titles), key phone numbers, schedule for interviews (if you have people available only during certain times), a copy of your organizational chart, a list of exhibits, a list showing who is responsible for information for each Standard, and copies of responses to off-site subject specialists reports. You should also provide the supporting documents for any changes you might have made since the SER was shipped. In addition, you should provide the menus for the Committee's lunch.
- Ask the Committee members to place their orders for lunch. Ask them to write down their orders, including what they want to drink.
- Give a brief tour of the facilities. The tour should take no more than 20 minutes and end back at the meeting room. The examiners will note where key officials and/or staff are located so that they can interview them later. The Committee members are trained to **not** ask questions during the tour. It is helpful to have extra copies of the office layout (including names) that were supplied in the institution's SER available for the Committee members.
- After the tour, the Committee will meet in the meeting room to review any exhibits or additional materials the institution did not provide with its SER. They will divide up to work in their own areas of expertise. Each examiner has his or her individual duties to perform. Most interviews are conducted on a one-on-one basis. However, in large institutions, an examiner may on occasion interview small groups.
- During the visit, the Committee members work from documents, take notes, examine files, review records, verify data, and assemble relevant information to aid in preparing their reports. School personnel should be properly briefed and be able and willing to answer appropriate questions from the Committee members. Staff should also cooperate when asked for additional reports or documentation. All key personnel should be available during the visit.

- Lunch should be ready and delivered to the meeting room at noon. The Committee will return to the meeting room for an executive session as they work through lunch. The lunch is typically one hour, and then the examiners continue their interviews. School personnel should also be finished with their lunches and ready to answer questions at the same time the Committee is finished.
- The Committee usually estimates at lunch time how much longer they will need to complete their examination, and a time is set to meet back at the meeting room. When the Committee is ready to leave, the Chair meets briefly with the CEO/President. At this time the Chair will ask for any additional information which the Committee may need for their reports and informs the CEO of an approximate date when he or she may expect to receive a copy of the Chair's Report. The Chair thanks the CEO for the cooperation and hospitality received. Because judgment regarding accreditation rests solely with the Accrediting Commission, neither the Chair nor any member of the Committee is authorized to say anything that implies acceptance or rejection of the institution by the Commission.
- Do not give the evaluators any types of gifts, favors, or services. This is not allowed.

After the Visit

- After the visit, the institution will receive an acknowledgment letter from the Commission thanking them for their hospitality and inviting them to make comments prior to the receipt of the Chair's Report. As soon as the Commission staff receives a copy of the Chair's Report, it is forwarded to the institution's CEO/President for comment. The CEO/President is given 14 days to respond to the comments and statements in the Chair's Report.
- After the Accrediting Commission meets (normally in January or June), the institution will receive a letter setting forth the Commission's decision. The institution may appeal or request reconsideration of the Commission decision. If the institution is denied accreditation or if accreditation is withdrawn, the institution must wait one year from the date of the Commission's decision before applying application for accreditation again.

All accrediting decisions of the Accrediting Commission are final. They are not subject to review or veto by the DETC members, officers, or Board of Trustees.

If you have any additional questions or need assistance as you prepare for your on-site visit, please feel free to call the Commission's staff at 202-234-5100.

Checklist for the On-Site Visit

Before Visit

- ___ Pay visitation fees.
- ___ Contact key personnel and ask them to be present and available on the day of the visit.
- ___ Coordinate interview schedule with DETC for those personnel who will only be available during limited times. Be certain to include faculty members.
- ___ Brief key personnel on what will happen on the day of the visit.
- ___ Have CEO/President prepare a 10-15 minute briefing on the institution's philosophy and purpose, describe the institution's organization and types of programs offered, and give an overview of the layout and locations of the facilities.
- ___ Prepare name badges for school personnel.
- ___ Make arrangements for a private meeting room for the Committee to use while at the institution.
- ___ Have on display in the meeting room one complete set of each course, including tools, kits, equipment, advertising materials, and examinations.
- ___ Have a complete copy of the school's Self-Evaluation Report in the meeting room. Include a contact person for each Standard.
- ___ Prepare extra copies of the organization chart and the office layout (including names) supplied in the SER and put in the meeting room. Have a list of key interoffice telephone numbers in the Committee meeting room.
- ___ Have two copies of the exhibits available in the meeting room.
- ___ Have coffee, tea, and water in the meeting room.
- ___ Get menus so Committee members will be able to order their meals on the day of the visit.
- ___ Review any student surveys and subject specialist reports received and have written response to any "B" or "C" ratings.

During Visit

- ___ Make certain school personnel are wearing name badges.
- ___ Greet Committee members and show them to the prearranged meeting room.
- ___ Do introductions and provide each member with a "Welcome Kit."
- ___ Take lunch order from the Committee members.
- ___ Have CEO/President give 10-15 minute brief on institution.
- ___ Give tour of institution.
- ___ Have school personnel present and available for interviews by Committee members.
- ___ Have lunch delivered and ready in the meeting room by noon.
- ___ Assure that school personnel finish their lunches by 12:30 p.m. and are available for interviews.
- ___ Have CEO/President available for short meeting with Chair at the end of the visit.
- ___ Supply any additional information requested by Committee members and get an approximate date to receive a copy of the Chair's Report.
- ___ Say good-bye to the examiners.

After Visit

- ___ Comment on visit prior to receipt of Chair's Report.
- ___ Receive Chair's Report and prepare and send response to Commission by date requested.
- ___ Receive letter on Commission decision.