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ABSTRACT

This manual is designed to provide guidelines for evaluation teams conducting evaluation visits for the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. The evaluation visit is the peer review portion of the Middle States accreditation process, which consists of a self-study and a peer review. The manual clarifies how evaluators should prepare for and conduct the evaluation visit. It explains the context in which the evaluation occurs and indicates how team members are affected by the work of other participants in the process. Section 1, "Preparing for the Team Visit," focuses on evaluation team ethics, the team composition, and team preparation. Section 2, "The Team Visit," describes team meetings, campus interviews, expectations for discussions and evaluations, and discusses things to be avoided and the team visit schedule. Section 3, "The Team Report and Beyond," discusses writing the evaluation report. (SLD)

Handbook for

EVALUATION TEAMS

Sixth Edition

Middle States Commission on Higher Education

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This manual should be read, in its entirety, in conjunction with the Commission's primary document, ***Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*** and with ***Designs for Excellence: Handbook for Institutional Self-Study***.

Introduction

The accrediting process brings into constructive interaction many individuals and many institutions from the academic community of the Middle States region and throughout the nation. The primary function of the Commission on Higher Education is not to be an agency for enforcing government policies, except through those regulations specifically promulgated for accrediting organizations. Neither does it apply an inflexible set of standards to every institution. Rather, it is a membership organization which adopts standards for accreditation and relies heavily on the work of its volunteer evaluation team members and Chairs.

The accreditation process consists of two interrelated phases: the self-study and peer review.

First, an institution spends at least 18 months conducting an intensive self-study. The purposes of self-study are to clarify the institution's mission and objectives, to conduct a thorough analysis of its resources and effectiveness in attaining those objectives and fulfilling its mission, and to identify ways in which the educational effectiveness of the institution can be increased.

An ideal self-study involves as many faculty, administrators, trustees, and students as feasible in order to reflect on purposes, performance, and effectiveness; to examine strengths as well as weaknesses; and to begin to work on solutions to challenges for improving the institution. A well-planned and clearly focused self-study culminates in a report which constitutes a realistic planning document.

Second, peer review begins when the Commission selects a team of experienced educators to visit the institution and conduct an on-site evaluation, based upon the institution's self-study report and the Commission's primary document, *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*. The team members, selected for their qualifications, are essential to the accrediting process. They are expected to contribute to a thoughtful assessment of the institution's quality and integrity, measuring the validity of the analysis in the self-study document and drawing upon the insights the team gains from on-site interviews.

Peer review continues when the Commission and its committees consider the team report. The Commission's primary emphasis is on strengthening the quality and integrity of educational institutions, approaching evaluation in terms of a qualitative assessment of each institution's own objectives and achievements, with support for educational innovation and experimentation. In applying its standards, the Commission makes responsible judgments about educational effectiveness, consistent with the mission and other unique characteristics of each institution. Moreover, the Commission expects all institutions to develop learning environments that are characterized by equity, justice, and academic excellence.

In the evaluation process, interaction between the Commission and an institution can be summarized as follows:

- The institution examines itself and speaks to its internal and external constituents and to the Commission through the self-study document.
- A team of academic colleagues, appointed by the Commission, appraises and advises the institution through the evaluation team report.
- The institution replies to the team report in a written response addressed to the Commission.
- The team Chair submits a brief to the Commission, summarizing the team report.
- The Commission staff and the Commission's Committee on Evaluation Reports carefully review the institutional self-study document, the evaluation team report, the institution's formal response, and the Chair's brief to formulate a recommendation to the Commission.

- The full Commission, after considering information gained in the preceding stages, takes formal accreditation action.
- The institution continues to consider and act on the results of its own self-study and the advice it has received as part of its on-going self-study and planning process.

This manual is designed to provide guidelines for evaluation teams, clarifying how they should prepare for and conduct an evaluation visit. It explains the context in which the evaluation occurs and indicates how team members are affected by the work of other participants in the process.

I

Preparing for the Team Visit

A successful evaluation team is one that not only respects and follows the ethical guidelines established by the Commission but also conscientiously prepares itself by studying, in advance, the background materials and other information received about the institution and the responsibilities of each team member.

Evaluation Team Ethics

Evaluation teams must adhere to the following guidelines on conflicts of interest, confidentiality, and personal conduct.

Conflicts of Interest. The Commission relies on the personal and professional integrity of individuals to refuse any assignment when there is even the slightest potential for a conflict of interest to exist. The Commission staff will not knowingly assign, as a participant in an evaluation, a person:

- whose home institution is in the state in which the institution to be visited is located;
- who has expressed personal opinions bearing on the accreditability of the institution;
- who has been or is a candidate for employment in the institution to be visited within one year of the evaluation visit to that institution;
- who has been recently an appointee or employee of the institution, or who has close relatives who are appointees, employees, or candidates for employment in the institution; or
- who is a graduate of the institution.

Only in rare cases will exceptions be made and, then, only in consultation with the institution to be visited.

To ensure that evaluation team chairs and team members understand the Commission's policy on conflicts of interest, each person will receive a copy of the policy statement and be asked to sign a "Conflict of Interest Statement."

Employment at Institutions. To avoid even the appearance of a possible conflict of interest, no member of a visiting team may serve as a consultant to the institution for a period of one year following the official accrediting action. Nor should the institution consider for permanent employment, within one year of the evaluation, any member of the evaluation team.

Personal Conduct. The Commission on Higher Education will not tolerate any instance of unprofessional or unethical conduct, including instances of substance abuse or of sexual or other forms of harassment.

Communication and Confidentiality. For the evaluation process to be effective, the Commission seeks to maintain complete openness of communication. On one hand, each member and candidate institution is required to provide all of the information that is pertinent to a determination of its accreditation or other recognized status. Failure to give the Commission information is sufficient reason for reconsidering an institution's status.

On the other hand, all evaluators and the Commission are obligated to maintain inviolate the confidentiality of information they receive, consistent with the Commission's policy statement, "Collegiality and Public Communication in the Accrediting Process." This confidentiality extends to a wide range of items, including all evaluation materials provided by the institution, exhibit files, notes and observations from interviews, discussions of team members, discussions with state higher education representatives, team observations and recommendation to the Commission, and the Commission's action.

Team Composition

Team Members. The Commission staff discusses the requisites for team membership, *but not specific persons*, with the officers of the institution. The staff then assembles a team in light of the current situation at each institution, ensuring that the Chair and team members are acceptable to the institution. If appropriate, changes will be made in the team composition, upon request from the institution's chief executive officer or designee and/or the team Chair. However, the final decision about team membership remains with the Commission and its staff.

If the institution is having a collaborative evaluation visit (i.e. with Middle States and one or more specialized program accreditors), the team will include individuals selected by the specialized accreditors. For more information about collaborative visits, see the publication Collaborative Evaluations by *Regional and Specialized Accrediting Agencies: Guidelines and Procedures.*

While most of the team members come from Middle States institutions, some may be from other regions. A few also will be serving as evaluators for the first time and may be less familiar than others with specific Commission policies, but all must be ready to work according to those policies.

At the very beginning of the preliminary visit, the Chair and the institution should reach a full understanding on the nature of the team assignments and the contributions each person will be expected to make to the final evaluation report, including assignments to visit branch campuses or other off-campus programs.

Other Team Participants. Many Middle States teams are accompanied by one or more representatives from the following groups: the appropriate state higher education agency or a state system of colleges and universities, or an evaluation team associate.

Over the years, the Commission has maintained a good working relationship with the state departments of education and university systems in the Middle States region and would like to maintain these relationships, without compromising its independence as a non-governmental agency. Therefore, the departments or agencies are notified when the evaluation schedule is prepared each year. Their representatives frequently will have specific responsibilities that are different from those of the team members. Their presence is beneficial in providing information on the relationship between the institution and either the state department of education or the system's administration as well as providing assistance in interpreting state education laws. They frequently are assigned to specific programs, and they are free to make their own report to their respective agencies.

Teams also may be accompanied by an evaluation team associate. The associate may be a faculty member or administrator of a candidate or member institution who recognizes service on a Middle States evaluation team as an opportunity for professional education. The associate also may be an educator from a higher education association or from overseas who is interested in the process. If the host institution and Chair have agreed to have an associate join the evaluation team, the associate will be present at the expense of his or her own institution. Arrangements should be made for the associate to work with other team members, and the Chair should give some time to help him or her understand the evaluation process.

Both the Chair and the host institution will receive specific information about the role of an associate, when one is assigned.

When the Commission receives, in a timely manner, the names of interested individuals from appropriate state agencies or other organizations, those names will appear on the official roster.

It is the policy of the Commission that team participants who are not full team members, work *with* a team. They have access to all materials relevant to the evaluation and may participate freely in all team discussions, but they do not contribute directly to the team's report to the institution, nor do they have a voice in determining its recommendation to the Commission regarding accreditation.

Team Preparation

Team members should prepare themselves for their role as evaluators by studying the advance materials forwarded by the Commission staff, the Chair, and the institution, giving particular attention to understanding the institution's self-study document. The Commission considers this preparation so essential that any team member who cannot undertake it should withdraw from the team.

First-time team members and first-time Chairs are invited to attend a training workshop for an orientation to the process, with special emphasis on evaluating the self-study report. Commission staff also extend the invitation to team members who have not served in recent years.

Advance Materials

At least six weeks prior to the evaluation team visit, the Commission staff will send team members a roster identifying who will be their colleagues on the team as well as a copy of the *Handbook for Evaluation Teams*, a copy of *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*, and other pertinent documents. Team members should begin studying these documents, in preparation for the visit, as soon as they are received.

Staff also may send team members copies of policy statements that relate to the accreditation process in general or to the particular circumstances of the institution being evaluated. These Commission policy statements are not inflexible standards against which every institution must be measured. Rather, they identify principles and describe practices, drawn from the cumulative academic experience, that have proven to be useful guidelines. They all require thoughtful study, because they affect the work of the team.

Also six weeks prior to the visit, the institution will send team members a copy of its self-study document, the institution's catalog(s), a budget summary, an organizational chart that includes the names and titles of administrators, and faculty and student handbooks. These materials, which should be reviewed as soon as they are received, will provide team members with a general idea of the nature of the institution, the structure of its governance, the style of student life, and the scope of the institution's programs.

At least four weeks in advance of the visit dates, the institution should send each team member a detailed campus map, instructions for getting to the campus, transportation information—including specific details related to parking, meeting trains, planes, and buses—and a request that team members inform the institution of travel plans. It is important for team members to respond immediately, informing the host institution how and when they plan to arrive so that necessary arrangements can be made to transport them to the campus.

Team Assignments

The team Chair will send team members information about where they will be housed, the time and place of the first meeting, and when they should expect to complete the visit.

The Chair also will identify special areas of responsibility for each team member and will consult with each team members before making assignments. However, each person must be flexible and be prepared to cover multiple areas. Receiving a specific assignment does not diminish the need for each team member to study thoroughly the entire self-study document.

First-time evaluators may be assigned to work with an experienced evaluator, who will help to provide an orientation to the process.

Understanding the Self-Study

In preparation for the team visit, team members must review the institution's self-study document. This report is the major source of information about the institution. It defines the context in which the institution will be examined and is the focus of team discussions during the visit. It represents a serious effort on the part of the institution and, therefore, requires an equally serious response, as team members or other participants prepare for the evaluation visit.

It is important to note, at the outset, the type of self-study the institution has prepared: whether it is a comprehensive, comprehensive-with-special-emphases, selected topics, or alternative self-study. An institution seeking initial accreditation will conduct an in-depth assessment of all aspects of the institution, but an institution being evaluated for reaffirmation may conduct a self-study which best serves its current needs.

The traditional self-study is a *comprehensive* one, providing an in-depth analysis of the institution's purposes, programs, services, resources, structures, and functions.

Many institutions have used a *comprehensive-with-special-emphasis* self-study. It examines all aspects of the institution but focuses in detail on one or more of its components. The topic may be one of the categories from Characteristics, or it may be an issue which is common to several categories of special interest to the entire campus, such as general education, computers and other technologies, or outcomes assessment.

The *selected-topics* self-study also provides a comprehensive overview but is more narrowly focused on certain selected areas, units, or other aspects of the institution that may be subsets of a larger component. For example, an institution may consider the institution's current strategic planning process, in the context of such challenges as retention, fiscal restraints, or faculty diversification; or it may consider a multi-phased study that does not fall within the conventional 18-month period.

An alternative model may be substituted, after prior consultation with Commission staff and a determination that the institution has met criteria specified in *Designs for Excellence*. For example, an institution may rely on the results of a special study that has been completed or is in progress, such as a curricular review, or on a series of institutional audits carried out over several consecutive years. It need not necessarily be a self-evaluation conducted primarily for the purpose of reaccreditation by the Commission.

In addition, because the Commission accredits the whole institution, not just some of its parts, the alternative self-study must contain a section that provides an institutional overview, containing sufficient information for the visiting team to understand the general functions of the university and assess the institution's progress toward its major goals and objectives.

The purpose of the team visit is to validate the institution's self-study. The dynamic nature of the self-study process means that changes will be made in the original design once the process begins. However, any such changes should be referenced in the self-study document and brought to the attention of the Chair and the Commission staff.

Because the type of the self-study provides the specific context for the evaluation, serious problems may arise if the team misunderstands the model that has been selected or does not respect the premises of the institution's self-study. On the other hand, having fully considered the model and premises of the self-study as presented by the institution, the team may demonstrate the relevance of other factors in their deliberations and recommendations.

For a complete description of various self-study models, see *Designs for Excellence: Handbook for Institutional Self-Study*. For multi-campus or other complex institutions, additional procedures affecting the self-study design and the self-study document are outlined in the statement, "Accreditation and Evaluation of Multi-Unit Institutions."

Team members should bear in mind that, in planning its self-study, an institution is urged to address the following questions:

- What are this institution's mission, goals, and objectives, and what educational obligations has it assumed?
- Are these appropriate in its present time and place and for its present constituency?
- Are all the institution's activities consistent with its mission, goals, and objectives?
- Are its programs and activities designed to achieve its goals and objectives?
- Is there solid evidence that they are being achieved?
- Are the human, physical, and fiscal resources needed to achieve institutional aims available now? Are they likely to be available for the foreseeable future?

Team members should prepare, in advance of the team visit, their comments on the above questions. In addition, team members should prepare their answers to the following questions in order to ensure that the institution has adhered to the Commission's standards and expectations:

- Did the institution involve at least its internal constituents throughout the self-study process? The involvement of external constituents also may be considered appropriate.
- What else is there to know about the institution, and where on campus should additional information be sought?
- What are the institution's strengths and weaknesses?
- Is the evidence on outcomes adequate to support a judgment on the institution's effectiveness in achieving its objectives?
- How do the parts of the document fit together?

- At what point(s) does the self-study need further interpretation?
- Are there inconsistencies which need clarification?
- Who are the people to be interviewed?
- What additional documents should be examined?

By being prepared, team members will be better able to take systematic notes during the visit, develop insights based on their on-site observations, and participate with focus in the team deliberations. The questions and comments of team members also will constitute the nucleus of the written report each member makes to the Chair, before leaving the campus at the end of the visit.

Travel and Housing

Travel. Team members and others who work with the team should make their travel arrangements at an early date.

In selecting an arrival time, it is important that everyone is present for the opening session arranged by the team Chair.

For all who travel on Commission business—team members and some Commission associates but not others who work with teams—it is the Commission's policy to pay reasonable travel expenses, including transportation, meals and lodging. In the choice of means of transportation, a balance must be struck between the need for economy and the efficient use of time. Team members are urged to use public transportation whenever possible, and air and rail travel at coach fare rates. The document, "Travel Expense Guidelines," submitted with the initial materials that the Commission distributes, contains instructions relating to travel and housing.

Housing. Single rooms will be reserved for each team member by the host institution, which normally pays for all meals and room charges directly, unless the Commission has made special arrangements. If the latter applies, team members will be so apprised by the team Chair.

II

The Team Visit

The team visit begins with an initial team meeting, the host's get-acquainted program, and the first working session of the team. The principal activities for the next two days include interviews and visits with people on campus, followed by daily team meetings. In the final stage of the visit, team members prepare their individual reports and assist in preparing the Chair's oral and written reports. Team members also should be aware of what is expected from team participation and the types of activities that should be avoided.

Team Meetings

Initial Team Meeting. The Chair calls an initial team meeting in order to introduce the team members to each other, provide them with a general orientation to the process, gather their first impressions about the institution's self-study, confirm the team assignments that were previously mailed to team members, and establish a preliminary itinerary and timetable.

Host's Get-acquainted Program. The host institution, usually on Sunday, sponsors a get-acquainted program, which may be a reception, a dinner, or both. Team members are guests and colleagues, invited by the institution to discuss the self-study and offer the kind of rigorous constructive criticism that comes from informed, objective colleagues. During an evaluation visit, team members and campus personnel engage in a professional dialogue that may include technical, discipline-specific, and management discussions. Such useful exchanges begin in the informal setting of the get-acquainted program, which is the team's first contact with the institution and sets the tone for the evaluation. The Commission and the Chair make certain that the institution understands the need for the program to be simple and brief, not elaborate or expensive. Because the team visit is not a social occasion, it is important to guard the team's time and the institution's financial resources.

First Working Session. The team's first formal working session usually occurs on a Sunday evening, after the host institution's get-acquainted program. Its purpose is to develop a more detailed itinerary for the visit, make arrangements for the initial campus interviews, and reach agreement among the team members on their individual responsibilities.

The Chair may meet with first-time evaluators on Sunday, immediately before or after the first working session of the team, to give them a special orientation.

Campus Interviews

The institution's officers, division and/or department heads, and faculty members should be interviewed, paying careful attention to balance and representation in the sampling.

One of the strengths of the evaluation process is the variety of approaches, backgrounds, and experience brought to it by team members. The Commission expects the team to conduct interviews as inquiries in the spirit of professional peers, rather than as censorious inspectors, and to ascertain how well educational goals and objectives are realized in campus practice. Therefore, the substance and form of interviews should be related directly to the self-study and based on questions and concerns identified in preparing for the visit.

In scheduling, time must be left to follow leads, to collect impressions widely, ***to check information adequately***, and to compare perceptions from and with all concerned. An earnest effort must be made to circulate about the campus, meeting people and gathering information. Every team member should talk with as many students as time permits, and group interviews are often both productive and time-saving. Careful notes must be kept, building on or modifying those made during the first analysis of the self-study document.

Expectations for Discussions and Evaluations

Team Discussions. In team discussions during the visit, team members combine their observations and expertise, question one another, and discuss issues until they become clear and the team's point of view emerges. By this dialectic method, rather than by voting, a team reaches consensus on major issues. These discussions also are a key part of preparing team members for their role in developing the final report that will be written by the Chair.

The final team session provides a special opportunity to clarify the substance of the evaluation report and reach a consensus. At this meeting, the Chair reviews with the team the proposed content of the entire team report, including a summary of major findings and suggestions, to ensure that these are stated accurately and clearly. It is imperative that no team member leave before this summary conference, because the Chair must meet a tight deadline for completing the final report.

Team members should remember that accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education always applies to the institution as a whole; the Commission will not accredit or reaffirm one part and not the remainder. Accreditation attests to the judgment of the Commission that an institution is guided by well-defined and appropriate educational objectives, that it has evidence of substantially achieving those objectives, and that it can be expected to sustain its level of achievement.

Strengths and Weaknesses. A fair evaluation assesses strengths as well as weaknesses. Noteworthy achievements and/or special potential should receive praise. If team members give the impression that their purpose is to uncover weaknesses, more harm than good will be done. Institutions expect and deserve the assistance of honest, constructive criticism; but neglecting the positive side of an evaluation can diminish both the usefulness and validity of negative observation.

Focusing the Visit. Institutions of higher education increasingly are being challenged by their various internal and external stakeholders to demonstrate, in meaningful ways, that the institutions are effective in accomplishing their goals and objectives, especially with regard to teaching, learning, and overall institutional effectiveness. The Commission believes that evaluation can be done best by focusing on planning for instruction; how plans for teaching and learning are implemented to achieve course, program or institutional goals and/or objectives; and specifically the institution's progress in implementing and utilizing outcomes assessment.

The Commission has identified certain basic characteristics of an institution's outcomes assessment activities. Although it does not prescribe specific methods or approaches for assessment, it offers general guidelines on outcomes assessment in *Characteristics of Excellence*, the Commission's primary statement of standards; in its 1995 policy statement on outcomes assessment; in its 1996 handbook, *Framework for Outcomes Assessment*; and in its 1998 guidelines, *Outcomes Assessment Plans*.

There should be evidence that students are at least required to think logically, write effectively, and demonstrate substantive learning. Visitors should review samples of student work—such as examinations, research papers, theses, dissertations, portfolios, or scientific projects—noting their type and quality.

Off-campus Sites. Evaluators assigned to visit branch campuses or other off-campus sites, including study abroad locations, should consult the appropriate publications that Commission staff will provide. In some instances, these evaluators may not be able to join the main campus site visit, and the Chair will provide specific guidance for this aspect of the evaluation and report writing.

Level of Effort. Team members should be prepared to work steadily and hard during the evaluation visit. There is no time for anything except the team task. If it appears that team discussions are continuing too late into the night, the matter should be discussed with the Chair.

The rewards of the experience usually are greater than the demands it makes, including interaction with campus people and team colleagues, the opportunity to gain a thorough knowledge of an institution other than one's own, and involvement in a significant effort to improve higher education in the Middle States region. While a team visit is helpful to team members and the host institution, it is also an extremely valuable professional experience for visitors.

To Be Avoided

Classroom Visits. During the evaluation, it is not productive for team members to make classroom visits. Reliable judgments on the quality of instruction characteristic of an institution as a whole rarely can be made through a few visits to a few classes. Site visitors must rely on other methods to provide a good basis for assessing the quality of the teaching/learning process.

Analysis of outcomes data pertaining to student learning and achievement, as presented in the self-study and available on the campus, usually will provide more trustworthy evidence. Discussions with students about the quality of their learning experiences and with faculty members about their attitudes towards teaching and their students also will be revealing.

Comparisons with Other Institutions. Team members must not compare the situation they are observing with their home campus, but must concentrate on the local context. They must keep in mind, as they talk with people on campus, that the Commission is not a standardizing agency. Instead, it evaluates institutions based on evidence of the demonstrated achievement of stated objectives. Therefore, the central question team members seek to answer in all instances is whether a given program, procedure, curriculum, or other activity functions effectively in light of the institution's stated mission, goals, and objectives; if not, why not.

Specific Approaches. Team members must not be drawn into debate on the relative merits of specific approaches to certain problems. As representatives of the Commission, team members should be ready to make clear, for example, that the Commission takes no position on such issues as unionization or collective bargaining, and it endorses no formulas regarding teaching loads or class size. It *is* concerned, however, with the impact that arrangements the institution has adopted have on the quality and effectiveness of its educational work. Team members should be on the alert for the disgruntled people who are eagerly awaiting an opportunity to relieve their burden of accumulated grievances, whether real or imagined.

Team Visit Schedule

An evaluation visit usually extends through four days, as illustrated in the table below.

	MORNING	AFTERNOON
Sunday		• Arrive • Initial Team Meeting *(Orientation)* • Institution's Get-acquainted Program • First Working Session *(Review of Self-Study; Planning)*
Monday	• Interviews and Visits • Brief Team Meeting *(Optional)*	• Lunch with Campus People *(Faculty/staff/students/trustees)* • Interviews and Visits • Team Dinner • Team Meeting *(Review, discuss, plan)*
Tuesday	• Interviews and Visits • Brief Team Meeting	• Lunch with Campus People *(Faculty/staff/students/trustees)* • Interviews and Visits • Team Dinner • Team Meeting *(Review findings, reach consensus)* • Independent Report Writing
Wednesday	• Finish Independent Report Writing	• Team Lunch *(optional)* • Oral Summary for Institu-

III
The Team Report and Beyond

Developing the findings that appear in the final team report, as presented by the Chair, concludes the work of team members. However, the Chair also makes three additional presentations of the team's findings: in an oral report to the institution, the final written report, and a written brief to the Commission. The process terminates with a critique of the team chair, the reporting of expenses, and Commission action.

The Evaluation Team Report

Writing the final evaluation team report is one of the major responsibilities of the Chair. It is an organized, coherent document, addressed directly to the institution and presenting clearly the major findings and suggestions of the team. It is developed from the Chair's notes on team discussion, interviews, and the individual reports prepared by all team members. While the final report must reflect faithfully the team's conclusions and points of consensus, the Chair relies extensively on the written reports from team members and is not bound by a verbatim transcription of their words.

Content and Format of Individual Reports

Before leaving the campus, team members must write their reports on assigned areas of responsibility and any other areas they care to discuss, submitting them to the team Chair. The Chair's final report can only be as good as the information team members provide.

Chairs vary in their preference for the format of individual team member reports, and they will present an outline of their preferred format at the first team meeting.

The baseline requirements for individual team member reports should include the following:

- Each area of responsibility should be presented on a separate sheet of paper.
- **Suggestions**. Team members may make suggestions for institutional improvement, based on the collective professional experiences of the team members or based on the Commission's non-binding recommendations in its various published guidelines which have been developed with peer input.
- **Requirements**. Team members should specify the aspects of the institution where improvement is required to meet the Commission's standards in *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*. The team report should state specifically in what ways the institution fails to meet the standards and, when appropriate, it should specify any particular steps that should be taken.
- In the context of these suggestions and/or requirements, as appropriate, the team should address the institution's performance with respect to student achievement, teaching, and overall institutional effectiveness.
- General observations about the institution and about the quality and substance of the self-study should be included.

- Specific documents or other evidence must be cited as justification for *all* observations, conclusions and recommendations.
- All of the individuals interviewed should be listed, in a manner to be determined by the Chair.

The Team Recommendation

The team is expected to reach a consensus on which action to recommend that the Commission take. The range of actions the Commission may take is listed in the policy statement, "Range of Commission Actions," and these should be written out as complete text, not merely referred to by number. The team's recommendation, however, does not appear in the final evaluation report.

Follow-up Reports. Requests for follow-up reports should not be included as a *pro forma* or routine part of a team's recommendation. The team should bear in mind that each accredited institution must submit a Periodic Review Report in the fifth year following reaffirmation of accreditation. This report provides the Commission with an overview of the institution and responds to the report of the last evaluation, unless an earlier response has been requested. The Commission may decide, in the light of the Periodic Review Report, that an evaluation is needed earlier than normally would be the case, but under no circumstances will more than 10 years elapse without an evaluation visit to any institution, nor more than five years following initial accreditation. These circumstances may influence the team's decision on requesting a follow-up report.

The challenge to the team is to achieve a balance between recommendations that provide for appropriate and necessary follow-up and recommendations that may unduly burden an institution because they require reports or visits which appear to be an imposition, rather than a means for further assisting the institution. Here, the Chair's judgment and experience must serve as guides. The Commission, of course, will exercise its own discretion in every case.

Confidentiality

At no time should any team member or persons working with the team communicate the specific recommendation the team plans to make to the Commission regarding accreditation; it must be held in strictest confidence.

This caution in no way suggests that the Commission will fail to take the team's recommendation seriously; however, the recommendation is only one factor the Commission must weigh in its decision-making process, which judges institutional effectiveness as responsibly as possible. The team's recommendation is subject to possible modification by the Commission. Confusion and embarrassment could be created by communicating the recommendation to the institution.

Oral and Written Reports

Oral Report. In a final session with the president and other representatives of the host institution, the Chair orally presents a candid preview of the written evaluation report. All team members must be present at this briefing. During this oral presentation, the Chair makes no reference to the team's recommendation regarding accreditation.

In preparing for the oral report, the Chair will discuss the presentation with the team to ensure consistency of findings and to promote collegiality.

Written Report. After the oral report, the Chair submits the written, final team report to the institution, and the institution sends its formal written response and the final report to the Commission for consideration.

A copy of the final report is sent to each team member but not to associates or other visitors, unless the institution so chooses.

Chair's Brief. In addition to writing the evaluation team report to the institution, the Chair will prepare a concise summary of that report, referred to as the Chair's "Brief," which is sent to the Commission. The brief also must be consistent with the content and tone of the team report, and it must contain the team's formal recommendation to the Commission regarding the specific accreditation action which best reflects the evaluation of the institution.

Completion of Responsibilities

Once team members have submitted their final reports to the team Chair and have attended the Chair's oral report to the institution, their responsibility to both the institution and the Commission for the assignment has ended. Each team member assigned by the Commission will receive a copy of the team report and will be informed of the action taken by the Commission. Questions thereafter about any part of the evaluation process should be directed to the Commission office. Any inquiries from the press or other agencies or persons should be directed to the executive director of the Commission.

After the Team Report

Once the team report and other materials have been submitted to the Commission, the process concludes with a critique of the Chair, the reporting of expenses, and the Commission's decision.

Critique of the Team Chair

Team members assigned by the Commission will receive, in their initial packet of materials, a form requesting a brief and candid assessment of the team Chair. This form, to be completed after the evaluation, will be held in confidence. The Chair submits a similar critique of team members.

First-time evaluators who attended a training workshop sponsored by the Commission will receive a second form, requesting comments on the orientation session, such as whether the session helped in preparation for the team work, what suggestions team members have for improving the sessions, and whether the handbook for team members was useful.

Reporting Expenses

Team members will be reimbursed for their expenses, and evaluators assigned by the Commission will receive a modest honorarium to defray some of their personal expenses. Evaluators are expected to pay for personal items, such as newspapers, bar bills, and dry cleaning or laundry. All charges for these items will be deducted from claims. Telephone calls and certain other items are subject to the current guidelines published in "Travel Expense Guidelines: Evaluators, Associates and Consultants," available from the Commission office.

The packet of materials initially sent by the Commission staff to each team member includes an expense voucher for the evaluation visit. These vouchers will not be included in mailings to individuals listed on the roster as "working with the team." Each team member should submit to the Commission office a voucher with appropriate receipts, immediately following his or her return to home campus. Under no circumstances are expenses to be reported directly to the host institution. Evaluators should neither ***expect*** nor ***accept*** any form of honorarium, reimbursement or other payment from the host institution.

Receipts must accompany all vouchers. Failure to submit expense vouchers within one month of the final date of the evaluation could result in forfeiture of reimbursement. However, the honorarium will still be paid.

The Commission's Decision

The decision-making process involves many people. For example, when the team evaluation has been completed, the Commission staff and Commission's Committee on Evaluation Reports review the institution's self-study document, the team report, the institution's formal response to that report, the Chair's brief, and team's recommendation. At these meetings, team Chairs present their briefs and discuss in detail the rationale for their team's recommendation. Acting on this study of all relevant documents and with thorough deliberation, the committee formulates its recommendation to the Commission.

When the Commission meets to make formal accreditation decisions, it reviews the relevant material and recommendations from both the team *and* the committee before taking final action based on the policy statement, "Range of Commission Actions." In the event of a negative action, an institution may elect to appeal under the Commission's published guidelines.

Emergencies

If emergencies arise at any time during the process, team members should telephone the staff of the Commission at once.

Commission office phone: (215) 662–5606. Fax number: (215) 662–5501

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