



Accreditation Review Commission on Education  
for the Physician Assistant, Inc.

**CONTINUING ACCREDITATION**  
**ARC-PA Site Visit Rationale for Sessions**  
October, 2011

A site visit team can conduct a thorough and accurate assessment of the educational program for physician assistants within two days or less. Site visits should provide the site visit team members information on the program, and should provide the team the opportunity to meet and discuss the program with its administration, faculty, staff, instructors, preceptors, and students.

***The primary responsibility of the site visit team is to verify, validate, and clarify, if necessary, the information supplied by the program in its application materials.*** The purpose of the site visit is to assess the program's demonstrated compliance with the *Standards*.

Site visitors should have a private conference room for use throughout the visit.

**NOTE:** The outline below provides the rationale for each session of the site visit. This is for the program's use in understanding what to expect from each session.

Programs with distant campuses should use this only as a resource for the rationale for the types of sessions conducted during the visit and should refer to the site visit template for the visit on the ARC-PA web site for designing the site visit schedule.

The actual schedule **should not** vary from the ARC-PA template, without discussion with the assigned site visit team chair, from the model posted on the website. It represents a starting point for programs to use as they prepare to discuss the schedule with the site visit team chair.

This rationale document is best reviewed and used in conjunction with Site Visit Protocol document, the Site Visit Schedule Template that is used to develop the actual agenda that will be provided to the visitors, and the Organizing Materials Document. Those documents are also available on the ARC-PA web site.

The Program Director **must** consult with the site visit team chair before final scheduling occurs. This is best handled when the team chair has a copy of the proposed schedule.

**EVENING BEFORE THE SITE VISIT BEGINS:**

**Meeting of Members of the Site Visit Team**

Purpose: Allows visitors to meet one another, review the site-visit schedule, discuss their perspectives of the program on the basis of the information provided in the application, and identify areas which merit special attention. (This is customarily a dinner meeting and is *restricted to site visit members*. The site visit team chair coordinates this activity.)

**NOTE:** *The Site Visit Team/Program should construct the visit in such a way that the team can*

*begin its review of documents either late afternoon or early evening the day of arrival or as the first order of business on Day One. The team can usually review documents that are presented in an organized fashion in about 90 minutes. Visitors have found that reviewing the documents prior to meeting with program faculty and students is very beneficial. This approach can provide the team with information that allows for more productive visits with key individuals during the visit. It also provides an opportunity for the team to indicate to the program which documents it may not be able to locate, thus giving the program time to assist the team in finding what it needs to make its assessment.*

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**FIRST DAY:** The program is expected to arrange for transportation of visitors from the hotel to the program offices.

### **Meeting with Program Director**

Purpose: To review the schedule for the first day, as planned by the program, and make desired adjustments when feasible and not excessively disruptive.

### **Review of Documents, Files, and Records Maintained in the Program's Offices on the Students and the Curriculum**

Purpose: To assess the adequacy of syllabi, exams, student manuals, student files, policies and other documentation requested in the application that must be available for visitors on site.

This may be divided into two blocks of time, such as 60 minutes in the morning of the first day and 30 minutes later in the day and should be discussed with the site visit team chair. The team continues its review of documents on the second day. Additionally, the team may also request that documents be available the evening before the visit begins.

### **Clarification of Program Objectives, Content, and Processes**

Members of the site visit team meet with the Program Director, Medical Director, and program Faculty<sup>1</sup> for the program.

Purpose: To allow the evaluators to state briefly the function of the site visit visit, the ARC-PA, the type of accreditation status available to the program, and what that status represents.

The responsibility for the format of session rests with the site visit team. This session provides the team an opportunity to discuss and clarify the program's application and supporting materials with the program officials in order to obtain a more complete understanding of the program. This includes reviewing program goals, philosophies, course objectives, operational procedures, student selection criteria, student evaluation protocols, preceptor selection criteria, processes for monitoring preceptors' performance, etc. Additional supporting documentation maybe required to be reviewed or provided as a result of this session.

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<sup>1</sup> Limited to those individuals that the program identifies as principal faculty

**Meeting with Key Senior Institutional Officials** (such as President, Dean, whomever the Institution wishes to represent the sponsoring institution)

Purpose: To assess institutional support for the program and clarification of institutional information that appears in the application.

**Luncheon Team Executive Session**

(The program should make arrangements for the working lunch)

Purpose: To allow the team time to discuss the progress and findings of the visit to date and plan for remainder of visit.

**Interviews with Members of the Didactic Faculty**

(Members of the program faculty are not to be present during these conversations)

Purpose: To discuss the course selection and content, the instructional objectives and methods, the frequency and means of assessing and reporting to students on their progress and instructional related information.

Interviews may be in groups or individually, as preferred by the site visit team, with four to six key instructors for the didactic courses and supervised units of instruction which are designed to teach laboratory and other clinical skills

**Interviews with Students Currently Enrolled In the Didactic Phase of the Program**

Purpose: To obtain perceptions of the program from **randomly selected** students and to gain an understanding of the organization and quality of instruction they have received.

Program directors should consult with the team chair prior to student selection regarding the number of students to be selected and the selection process used to assure students are randomly selected. The evaluators' interviews with the students should also provide them with an idea of the students understanding of their role as PA's. (Members of the faculty are not to be present during these conversations)

**Interviews with Students Currently Enrolled In the Supervised Clinical Practice Component of the Program**

Purpose: To obtain students' assessment of the program from selected students who are in the supervised clinical practice components of the program. Discussion with students in clinical settings should allow the visitors to obtain their perceptions of the program, the curriculum, the quality of teaching, the types and frequency of evaluation of their progress, major challenges and related topics. Visitors should also obtain impressions of students' practical skills, as well as their clinical understanding, knowledge, and judgment of their limitations and the character of their interaction with others in the clinical setting.

Efforts should be made to select such students randomly, depending on the clinical students' availability. The number of students selected and the process for selecting

them should be discussed with the site visit team chair. (Members of the faculty are not to be present during these conversations)

### **A Brief Tour of Facilities**

Purpose: To familiarize evaluators with the classroom, laboratory and library facilities used by students during the didactic and supervised practice components of the curriculum.

This may be eliminated for longstanding programs without facility changes since the last site visit. Review with site visit team chair

### **Brief Meeting with the Program Director and Staff**

Purpose: To obtain and clarify information and to review the schedule for the second day of the visit.

**ADJOURN FIRST DAY** (Program is expected to provide transportation back to hotel and confirm time for pick-up on next day of visit.)

### **EVENING OF THE FIRST DAY:**

Purpose: The evaluators use the dinner and evening hours for discussion of the information they acquired throughout the day; to identify areas requiring further review and exploration the following day; and to begin preparing a draft of the site visit report. The latter process serves to highlight what additional information or clarification is needed.

**SECOND DAY:** The program is expected to arrange for transportation of visitors from the hotel to the program offices. The visit should conclude by mid-afternoon and *no later than 3:30 p.m.*

Purpose: The initial and major portions of the morning are to be devoted to understanding and assessing the supervised clinical practice components of the curriculum. Since the time required for visits to clinical practice sites will vary due to factors such as the travel time, it is typically more efficient to have preceptors and others who the visitors need to interview travel to the institution or be available by phone. Thus, it is quite possible that a site visit team member may not visit any clinical sites. The site visit team chair will determine the need for visits to clinical sites in his or her discussions with the program director prior to the visit.

If sites are to be visited, one visitor may travel and the second remain at the program to meet with or call preceptors and others. The visitor who remains at the program may also use this time to review files and program documentation.

### **Interviews with Preceptors Currently Involved In Teaching and Supervising Students in Supervised Clinical Practice Experiences**

Purpose: To provide the site visitors an understanding of the nature of the supervision provided to students, the character and/or range of clinical experiences students encounter during their clinical experiences, and the clinical abilities of students. Visitors should also be able to determine the preceptors' understanding of their teaching

responsibility to the students; their contacts with the program administration; their teaching methods; the nature of supervision, direction and evaluation they provide to students in the clinical setting.

### **Interviews with Physicians Who Have Employed Graduates of the Program**

Purpose: To obtain information about graduates' performance in working relationships. These physicians should be able to report on the degree of the graduates' preparation while in the program, the degree to which the graduates have impacted their practice, the graduates' acceptability to patients and other health workers with whom the PA has come in contact, and the confidence the physician has in the PA.

### **Interviews with Graduates of the Program Presently Employed As Physician Assistants**

Purpose: To provide the evaluators with an opportunity to assess the graduates' satisfaction with their education. For example, the degree to which the program prepared them to assume the functions they perform in their employment position, their impressions of patient acceptance of them and their experiences with other health workers in the community.

### **Final Meeting with Program Director and/or Other Program Faculty or Staff Members for Clarification of Issues.**

Purpose: To allow team to meet with individuals to clarify issues that remain unclear.

### **Preparation of the Site Visit Report (Working lunch)**

The program is expected to provide lunch as requested in advance by site visit team. Lunch should be a simple one of sandwiches and a beverage in the conference room, thereby maximizing the time available for preparing their report. The site visit team may complete its work prior to lunch)

The Program Director should be available to the site visit team in the event questions arise or if clarification is needed.

### **Closure:**

The site team indicates it is ready to depart the program. The site visit team will take a few moments to express thanks to the program for its assistance in facilitating the team's completion of its task. *Transportation arrangements for the visitors should have been previously arranged by the program.*

The ARC-PA does not give an oral exit report at the conclusion of the site visit.

Ten days to two weeks prior to the program's site visit the designated senior institutional official(s) will be notified of the upcoming visit by the ARC-PA. The notification letter will detail the process and address the fact that the ARC-PA does not give an Oral Exit Report.

The site visit team does not have the authority to speak on behalf of or bind the ARC-PA regarding a program's compliance with the *Standards*, as these responsibilities and

decisions rest solely with the ARC-PA.

The filed written report of observations submitted by the team will be sent as an attached e-mail document to the Program Director from the ARC-PA within 7-10 days of the visit in most cases.

The Program will be offered the opportunity to respond to any of the observations noted in the site visitor report. Again, the purpose of the program's response is to eliminate errors of fact, or challenge perceived ambiguities and misperceptions.

Any communication about the visit after the visit must be directed to the executive director of the ARC-PA, not to the site visitors.

Programs with distant campuses should use this only as a resource for the rationale for the types of sessions conducted during the visit and should refer to the site visit template for the visit on the ARC-PA web site for designing the site visit schedule.