



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

Site Visit Protocol for Program Directors

October, 2011

As Program Directors prepare for the site visit, they should keep the following in mind.

Before the Visit

- Arrange convenient, comfortable accommodations for the site team. These need not be luxurious but should include a place for the team to work together in the evenings comfortably, with internet access. Hotel should have restaurant or one should be in close proximity. Arrange for late arrival.
- Most teams will choose to have breakfast before their morning meetings. Choose a hotel that has dining facilities or serves a healthy option continental breakfast. Discuss breakfast preferences with the site visit chair in advance to avoid ordering food that may not be needed.
- Since most hotels now have appliances such as hair dryers or irons, if the hotel chosen is unable to provide these items, inform the team members of this in advance.
- Ordinarily program personnel should not meet or transport visitors from the airport. (In unusual circumstances, such as limited ground transportation options, delayed flights, etc., it may be necessary for program personnel to provide this transportation.) However, the program should ensure that team members know what transportation options are available from the airport to the hotel. If any member of the team is renting a car, make sure that accurate, detailed maps to the hotel are provided.
- Transportation from the hotel to the first meeting of the morning should be arranged by the program director. Even if the hotel is a short distance from the campus, do not assume that the team members will walk. If any of the team has rented a car, it may not be necessary for the director to arrange transportation, however, the program should ensure that they have an accurate map of the route from hotel to campus with appropriate directions to the meeting site and specific parking instructions. Program directors should discuss this with the team chair in advance.
- It is helpful to provide the visitors with a list of restaurants in the area of the hotel. It is also helpful to the team to verify the hours of operation and need for reservations for the list provided.
- Most site visitors are exquisitely sensitive to the appearance of favor or bias and anything that might be construed as such is best avoided. Although baskets of fruit, etc. are generally only meant as evidence of hospitality, they are probably not a good idea. Often members of the institutional senior administration are

accustomed to providing "amenities" for site visitors from other accreditation agencies. The relative austerity with which PA accreditation site visits are conducted can sometimes be difficult to grasp.

- Inquire into special needs or dietary restrictions for site visitors. This is important for the snacks and lunches provided.
- Be mindful of the weather in the area and inform the site visitors if they need to prepare for rain or snow when packing.
- Dinner the first evening is designed for the site team to meet and discuss the application material. For that reason, it is always held for the team only, without program faculty or institutional officials. While some institution senior administrators may have had experiences with other agencies that include a first dinner meeting of both school and accreditation representatives, this is not the format for ARC-PA site visits.
- Eight weeks before the visit, the following must be received by the ARC-PA office.
 - application materials as detailed in the application and as directed in the email from the ARC-PA
 - payment to cover the accreditation site visit invoice sent from the ARC-PA
 - site visit schedule/agenda (draft working copy)
 - hotel confirmation information
 - day and evening emergency phone numbers for the Program Director
 - telephone numbers where calls may be directed to the site visit team during the day.

Scheduling the Activities

As program directors begin developing the agenda for the site visit and thinking of the details of the visit, they should remember the following:

- Start with the ARC-PA site visit preferred agenda template on the webpage, but work out specific times and sequencing of events for the visit with the site team chair.
- On the final agenda, include the names, degrees (MD, PhD, EdD, etc.) and position titles or teaching assignments of each person with whom the team will be meeting.
- Schedule rest breaks for the team between meetings.
- Schedule adequate time for the team to review the documents the program has so laboriously compiled. Plan for some review of documents on day one and day two.

- Visitors arriving the day before the visit will often ask to have access to some documents prior to the visit officially beginning. Having materials in advance is very helpful to visitors. Program directors should discuss this option with the site visit team chair.
- Schedule a time before the team completes its reports for the visitors to again meet with the program director and program faculty to clarify issues or answer questions they may still have. This time is built into the template.
- The program director should be available as the visitors write their report to the ARC-PA in case needed for last minute clarification.
- Communicate with the team chair more than once prior to the visit! If the program director has not heard from the chair about confirming the schedule, he or she should contact the chair as opposed to waiting for the chair to initiate contact.
- Copies of the agenda, schedule changes, accommodation information, etc. should be provided to the other site visitor(s) as well as to the chair.
- Faculty and students should be made available for the entire interview period for which they are scheduled, with their pagers and cell phones turned off.

During The Site Visit

Conference Room

- Arrange for a quiet conference room from which the team can operate.
- Provide computer with internet access to assist team in reviewing web based materials. Provide any passwords that may be needed.
- Provide pens, paper, sticky pads, paper clips, and stapler for site visitors to use.
- Provide **paper copy** of syllabi, manuals, catalogues, documents as indicated in application.
 - **Make it easy for the visitors to find what they need.** Remember it is the program's responsibility to demonstrate compliance. Use colored sticky tabs, clips, and highlighting to mark **specific areas** of syllabi and catalogues that demonstrate compliance with **cross reference to specific Standards as appropriate.**
 - Additionally, providing a master tabular display of where materials demonstrating compliance are found in the documents provided in the room, i.e., pages in a catalogue with harassment policy, objectives related to genetics scattered across several courses is helpful. Be sure to flag and/or highlight the **specific areas and the associated Standards** referred to from the table, especially in cases where there may be objectives over several courses dealing with a specific required topical area found in the *Standards*.

- The program may choose to compile a document listing where specific objectives from several courses for a topical area as defined in the *Standards* may be found. The program may also create a document that lists these objectives by course, with **reference to specific *Standards***.
- Having light snacks and beverages available for the site team throughout the visit is helpful. Lunches are often less about eating than about gathering or reviewing information and the amount of speaking that the visitors must do insures their thirst.

The Visit Schedule

- Be prepared for changes! The team recognizes that the site visit is a stressful time for program faculty and staff. Nevertheless, it is the team's responsibility to insure that they speak with the people, see the facilities and read the documents that will give them the fullest, most accurate picture of the program. The site team chair will do everything in his or her power to follow the agenda as agreed to with the program director in advance of the visit, but often the materials and individuals involved necessitate last minutes changes.
- The site team chair will want to meet with senior administration, faculty and students without program faculty present. Be prepared to take the site visitors to the meeting place, introduce the parties involved to one another and remain outside until the meeting is concluded.
- Depending on the size of the class and the team, some team chairs will ask to meet with all students in a class. Others will ask the program to select students using a specific method, for example, every third student alphabetically. If the chair does not indicate a preference, use a similar random method.
- The team may ask for additional material or clarification of material. Sometimes it may seem as if visitors are asking for material that has already been provided. Sometimes, the manner in which the material is organized may require clarification or appear to the site visitors to be incomplete. Please understand that the team members want to insure that programs are given every opportunity to demonstrate compliance with the *Standards*. If the team's requests are unclear, seek clarification.
- The team has limited time to review materials. The application submitted by the program/institution is the document of record for the comprehensive review process including the site visit. The team may not accept additional materials voluntarily provided by the program which the team did not request. However, the team may ask the program to submit additional materials to the ARC-PA offices in the program's response to the site visit observation(s). It is the responsibility of the program not the responsibility of the site visitors, to submit those additional requested documents to the ARC-PA. The program should only send materials to the office if the team so requests.

- Program personnel, who may provide transportation for the team between the campus and the hotel at the end of the day, should not ask the team to share their impression or findings.

Visit Conclusion

The ARC-PA site visitors do not conduct a formal exit report before departing from the program. The site visit team will take a few minutes at the conclusion of the site visit to express thanks to the program for its assistance in facilitating the visit. The following points are important as the visit ends:

- The filed written report submitted by the team will be sent from the ARC-PA to the Program Director, and to the individual to whom the program director reports, as identified by the program director on the program data sheet, usually within 7-10 days of the visit.
- The Program is offered the opportunity to respond to any of the observations noted in the site visit report. Again, the purpose of the program's response is to eliminate errors of fact, or challenge perceived ambiguities and misperceptions.
- 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.
- Any communication about the visit after the visit should be directed to the executive director of the ARC-PA, not to the site visitors.

After the Visit

After the visit, the ARC-PA will ask the program director to complete a web based evaluation about the visit process and the visitors. This evaluation is especially helpful to the ARC-PA as part of its ongoing internal review of processes and individuals. The ARC-PA urges the program to complete the evaluation as fairly and candidly as possible. Feedback and comments will remain anonymous and will in no way effect the ARC-PA's decision about the program's accreditation status.