



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

Site Visit Protocol for Program Directors **Updated 10.20.08**

Note: This document should be use in conjunction with the sample Detailed Site Visit Schedule, available on the ARC-PA web site, as programs prepare for site visits.

As Program Directors and administrative staff 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 and should have internet access available either in room and lobby.

Hotel should have restaurant or one should be in close proximity. Since most teams will choose to have breakfast before departing for their morning meetings, choosing a hotel that has dining facilities or serves a healthy option breakfast is appreciated.

- 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.
- Program personnel should not meet or transport visitors from the airport. 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. The program personnel should arrange for transportation back to the airport at the conclusion of the visit and often provides this transportation themselves for the team.
- 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 visitors 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 team with a list of restaurants in the area. Please 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.

- Be mindful of the weather in the area and inform the site visitors if they need to prepare for rain or snow.
- Provide the team chair with a telephone number (ideally the department chair's home number) that can be used should the need arise.
- 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.

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 provided site visit agenda template, but work out specific times and sequencing of events for the visit with the site team chair. Adherence to the template is appreciated.
- On the printed agenda provided to the visitors, include the names, degrees (MD, PhD, EdD, etc.) and position titles or teaching assignments of each person with whom the team will be meeting. For students provide the names and the year in program. For graduates provide the names and year of program completion.
- Provide the team a private dedicated space, such as a conference room, where the site visits can conduct most interviews, executive sessions, and review materials. This room should have all required program documents as well as internet access. Having a computer and printer can be helpful if the program has many of its materials on-line.
- Schedule rest breaks for the team between meetings.
- Schedule adequate time for the team to review the documents the program has so laboriously compiled. Mark the documents with post-it notes/sticky flags indicating parts that are important for the visitors to review. Plan for some review of documents on day one and day two. Some teams may ask to review materials on the day prior to the actual visit if their travel plans result in extra pre visit time.
- Schedule a time before the team completes its reports for the visitors to again meet with the program director and core faculty to clarify issues or answer questions they may still have. This is built into the ARC-PA 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

- 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 site visit agenda but often the materials and individuals involved necessitate last minutes changes.
- The program should have light snacks and beverages available for the site team throughout the visit, preferably in the room where the visitors will be meeting..
- The site team chair will want to meet with senior administration, faculty and students without core 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.
- Students should be selected randomly for their meetings with visitors. This may be done in several ways and should be discussed with the site visit team chair. Some team chairs will ask the program to select students using a specific method, for example, every third student alphabetically. Others will ask the program to have the students decide who from their class will meet with the team. If the chair does not indicate a preference, be prepared to describe the method that was used to select students.
- The team may ask for additional material or clarification of material already provided. Sometimes it may seem as if they are asking for material that has already been provided. Please assist the team in finding the materials they need.

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.

- 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.

Concluding the Visit:

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 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 evaluation report. 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 must be directed to John McCarty, 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 an evaluation form 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.

Please note that the team members also evaluate each other in order to provide the ARC-PA with quality improvement data to improve our work with programs.