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The site visit is a great opportunity to show an institution's strengths and aspirations to others and to benefit from the site visit team's collective expertise.

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Preparing for the Site Visit— The President's Role

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Presidential
Guidelines
Series, Vol. 4
March 2007

This Guideline focuses on the site visit by an accrediting team—the president’s or chancellor’s role in selecting the team, preparing for a visit, and hosting the visit.

A site visit is required by nearly every accrediting organization, occurring at least every 10 years and more frequently in some circumstances and for some organizations. The president or chancellor has the responsibility of assuring that the campus is ready for the visit and that all participants are properly informed and prepared to do their part in making the visit a success.

Every accrediting organization has its own guidelines and protocols for site visits. The comments and suggestions that follow, therefore, are not intended to supersede any suggestions or requirements of an accrediting organization. In each case the president or chancellor and the self study chair should be familiar with the policies and procedures of the visiting accreditor.

Presidential Leadership

Presidents and chancellors provide leadership to assure that all campus representatives who meet with the team are well informed about the purposes of accreditation in general and any specifics that have arisen as a result of the institutional or program self study. They encourage a climate of openness and candor in all interactions with the visiting team. The president or chancellor can show leadership by being well informed about the self study and its preparation, by demonstrating interest in the accrediting process as a means toward institutional or program improvement, and by showing appropriate hospitality to the site visit team.

Presidents and chancellors also play an essential role in establishing what counts as success for the visit. What is the institution or program seeking to accomplish? How can accreditors provide assistance? Do faculty and administrators share the chief executive’s vision of success?

Attitude

Accreditation is a means by which an institution or program holds itself accountable for achieving its goals, serving society and serving its students. Its purpose is both to assure quality and to improve quality. A campus community should therefore be prepared to learn as well as to report during a site team visit. While preparation for a site visit can require a great deal of time and planning, most campuses are invigorated by the experience. It is, after all, a great opportunity to show the institution’s strengths and aspirations to others and to benefit from their collective expertise.

Preparing the Campus

The president or chancellor should take the lead in setting the tone for the campus to make the most of the site team visit. Open meetings on the campus to review key points of the self study document prior to the team visit will be helpful, and anything the president or chancellor can do to encourage all personnel to be both friendly and open with the team is time and communication well spent.

The Timetable

Too early is better than late in setting the date for a site team visit. Most accreditors visit a number of institutions in any given cycle; therefore, it is wise to get on the calendar early. Furthermore, establishing the date early on the institutional calendar will help everyone on campus with their planning.

Team Selection

The appointment of team members is done by the accrediting organization, but the institution has the responsibility of checking the list and informing the accreditor of any perceived conflicts of interest. The

institution also has an opportunity to reject team members on other grounds, e.g., the absence of fit between the experience of a team member and the institution or program under review. The final decision about team makeup, however, rests with the accrediting organization.

Logistics

The first consideration in hosting the site visit is to make living and working as easy as possible for the team while it is on campus. That includes comfortable hotel arrangements (including a suitable, private meeting space in the hotel), appropriate meeting and work space on campus, internet access and an IT staff person to serve the team, and for larger campuses, guides to help the visitors find their way around.

Hospitality

Accrediting organizations do not expect lavish hospitality for site visit teams, but most institutions want to make a good impression. Any social activities should be restricted to the first evening of the visit, however, out of respect for the team members’ time and the amount of work they need to do.

Follow-Up

The team leaving the campus triggers the next set of leadership responsibilities for a president or chancellor. These include working with the accrediting organization as it moves from team report to commission action, determining the extent to which the judgments of the accrediting organization will be publicly shared and using the final report and action as a basis for future planning and budgeting.
