

The Visiting Committee Process

Appointment of the Visiting Committee: The Commission staff will consult with the head of school in identifying the chair of the visiting committee and determining the size of the committee and any special areas of focus. The selection of the visiting committee is the responsibility of the Commission staff.

Scheduling the Visit: Visiting committees are scheduled to arrive on a Sunday afternoon and depart on the following Wednesday afternoon. The school, in consultation with the Commission staff, should select the dates for the visit well ahead of time to facilitate planning. Fall visits are scheduled from the last week in September to the first week in November, and spring visits from the last week in March through the end of April.

Setting the Schedule: Once the chair of the visiting committee has been confirmed, the head of school should invite the chair to the school for a meeting to go over arrangements and schedule for the visit. The chair will identify meetings which should be scheduled during the visit and those people who should be available.

Accommodations: The school is responsible for arranging housing for all committee members for three nights. Accommodations should be in a local hotel or motel and provide a private room and bath for each member. In addition, the school should arrange for a meeting room for the committee at the hotel.

Meals: The school is responsible for meals. Details of the schedule should be worked out with the visiting committee chair, but, ordinarily, the committee will have lunches provided in their workroom at the school. If breakfast is not available at the hotel, it may also be provided at school. Most committees prefer to have working dinners on Monday and Tuesday, either at the hotel or a local restaurant. On Sunday the school customarily holds a reception for faculty and other members of the school community and hosts a dinner for the committee and a few select members of the school community. The committee has a great deal of work to accomplish in a short time and, therefore, social events and entertainment should be kept to a minimum and scheduled only in consultation with the chair. The school is expected to make the committee comfortable, but should avoid extravagant expense.

Arrangements at the School: The visiting committee must have a private meeting room at the school which is for their use only during the visit. Refreshments should be provided during the days of the visit. The visiting committee chair will discuss needed arrangements for access to computers.

What to Expect from the Visiting Committee: The committee will receive and study the Self-Study Report prior to their arrival. Their charge is to understand the school on its own terms, assess the accuracy of the Self-Study, determine compliance with Standards for Accreditation, review the Part II Report: Reflection, Recommendations, and Issues for Further Discussion, write a report that includes commendations and recommendations, and make a recommendation to the Commission regarding accreditation.

The school should expect visiting committee members to be at the school all day on Monday and Tuesday and some members may be at the school on Wednesday morning. While the presence of the visitors will obviously not go unnoticed, the school is asked to maintain as normal a routine as possible. Committee members will interview faculty, administration, parents, students, and board members. They will try to talk individually with all faculty and staff. A committee member responsible for reviewing a particular section of the self-study may seek out those who participated in drafting that section.

Members of the committee will visit classes in order to gain a flavor of the academic program. Teachers should not schedule tests, field trips, or films during these three days. The visitors will be observing interactions among students and between students and faculty. They will note teaching methods and instructional materials. Faculty should expect visitors to come for parts of classes. The visiting committee is looking at the entire program; they will not evaluate individual faculty, staff, or administrators and will not comment on the performance of any individual, or identify them by name in the visiting committee report.

The committee departs on Wednesday after they have completed a draft of their report. The committee is instructed not to share specifics of their report, however, since it has not been finalized. The chair and another member of the committee will meet with the head of school and one or two people on Wednesday afternoon to review major areas of comment in the report. Committee chairs are encouraged not to hold a meeting with the entire faculty, but rather to finalize the committee's report and submit it to the school at the earliest possible time so that everyone may read the whole and, therefore, view any recommendations in context.

Commission Action

The Commission will review the school's Self-Study, the report of the visiting committee and its recommendation concerning accreditation, votes on Standards for Accreditation, and the school's reaction letter at its next meeting after all these items are received (November, February, or June).

If a school recommended for initial membership does not meet all the Standards, action on their accreditation will be tabled until compliance has been documented. If a school approved for continued membership does not meet all the Standards, the school will be given one year to bring itself into compliance. The school will be expected at a given date to report on what action has been taken in response to the school's own recommendations and those of the visiting committee and the Commission. The Commission may ask the staff to follow-up with the school on particular concerns or may schedule a formal focused visit to inquire into progress the school has made.

In addition to any special reports or visits, all schools are required to file an Interim Evaluation Report after two and five years, which documents accomplishments in the follow-up process.

Budget for the Self-Study and Visit

The cost of the self-study will depend on how the school organizes the work. A large or complex school may find it necessary to grant a course reduction to the self-study coordinator or to hire someone familiar with the school to assume this role. If there is extensive editing to be done, this may call for additional compensation. Secretarial work may or may not fit into the regular schedule of school staff. The actual cost of duplicating the final report and mailing it to the committee members may be estimated.

The school may estimate its expenses for the visiting committee fairly accurately once the size of the team is known. The primary expenses are three nights lodging with a private room and bath for each committee member, a meeting room at the hotel, meals from Sunday dinner through Wednesday lunch, and travel expenses of committee members. The school is also responsible for the expenses of the visiting committee chair for a pre-visit and for preparing the visiting committee report.

The Commission requires an independent accountant's review with management letter, an audit, or an approved alternative report of finances at the time of the visit and with the Five-Year Interim Evaluation Report. The expense for this requirement should be anticipated.