

Procedures for the Review of Off-Campus Sites At the Time of the Interim Report For Institutions with General Approval

Commission policy and federal regulations stipulate that institutions with general approval for off-campus programming involving 50% or more of an academic program or a degree-completion program require a visit at the time of the institution's interim (fifth-year) report to a representative sample of locations added since the last comprehensive evaluation. The evaluation provides a means of monitoring the institution's capacity to administer its off-campus sites ensuring that the academic programs offered meet the standards of quality of the institution and the Commission's standards and policies. The visit by an evaluator is required to confirm inclusion of the institution's off-campus locations within its accreditation so that students at the sites remain eligible for federal financial aid.

Notification to the Institution

Several months before the visit, Commission staff will contact the institution to determine the off-campus sites to be visited. Typically, visits to assess off-campus locations are one to two days in length depending on the number of sites to be visited and the distances involved.

At the same time, the Commission staff selects a prospective evaluator to conduct the evaluation and requests the chief executive officer's comments on the proposed evaluator before extending an invitation. When the evaluator is confirmed, the institution is informed and appropriate evaluator materials are sent from the Commission office.

Arrangements for the Evaluator Visit

Upon confirmation, the institution contacts the evaluator to arrange the dates of the visit, discuss the review schedule, accommodations (if needed), and other arrangements. The institution arranges to have all hotel accommodations and meals, if possible, billed directly to the institution. After the visit, the Commission bills the institution for the evaluator's out-of-pocket expenses, primarily travel costs. Reimbursement should be made directly and promptly. In keeping with Commission policy, the Commission office bills the institution for the evaluation fee.

Regular phone/email communication with the evaluator should be initiated by the institution, and the evaluator should feel free to contact the institution to discuss arrangements in detail or to request additional materials if there is a need for them.

Materials

At least four weeks in advance of the evaluation visit, the institution sends to the evaluator a brief report that reflects and assesses the institution's experience in implementing its off-campus locations. For each location being visited, a summary of the site's history, relevant enrollment and financial information, courses offered, faculty involved, and a description of how student services are made available should be provided. In addition, the report should address the institution's plans, if any, for additional instructional locations. The report is typically 5-6 pages but may be longer depending on the number of to be sites visited. At the same time, the institution submits an electronic version (single, searchable pdf file) of its report to the Commission through the NECHE Institution Portal.

The report should include a cover page with the institution's name and location, the date, and a list of the off-campus sites being visited.

Conduct of the Visit

During the on-site evaluation, which in most cases begins with a visit to the institution's home campus, the evaluator meets with institutional representatives who can provide information about the implementation of the off-campus instructional location under review. Depending upon the circumstances, these include, but are not limited to: the chief executive officer, chief academic officer, off-campus location site coordinator, faculty, staff, and students. The visit concludes with a meeting between the evaluator and the institution's chief executive officer to review the major findings of the evaluation.

Preparation of the Evaluation Report

Within a month of the visit, the evaluator prepares a narrative report, generally 5-6 pages, that describes the institution's success in administering its off-campus instructional locations ensuring that the academic programs offered meet the standards of quality of the institution and the Commission's standards and policies. The report concludes with a list of identified strengths and concerns related to the institution's implementation of the sites.

The institution is provided an opportunity to review a draft of the evaluation report for factual accuracy and to write a substantive response to the evaluator's report.

Evaluator's Confidential Recommendation to the Commission

In keeping with Commission procedures, the evaluator also develops a confidential recommendation based upon the findings of the evaluation. The recommendation should contain the following elements:

1. The evaluator's recommendation on whether the institution's general approval for off-campus programming and inclusion of the instructional locations added since the institution's last comprehensive review should be confirmed.
2. The evaluator's recommendation on the timing and content of any follow-up reporting on the institution's administration of off-campus instructional locations. A recommendation for subsequent progress reports related to an off-campus site is advisable if the evaluator concludes that further monitoring of the specific situation is necessary.
3. The rationale for the recommendations. Reasons should be given in narrative form for both components of the recommendation.

Commission Action

The evaluator's report and confidential recommendation, along with the institutional materials and response, are considered by the Commission at the time of its review of the institution's interim (fifth-year) report. The institution and the evaluator are informed of the Commission's action shortly after the meeting.

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