



Procedures for the Substantive Change Evaluation Visit

Commission policy and federal guidelines stipulate that certain types of substantive change require a visit to assess implementation. These include, but are not limited to: moving to the higher degree, establishing a branch campus or additional instructional location, establishing an overseas location, moving to a new location, and undergoing a change in control. The substantive change evaluation provides a means of monitoring the institution's capacity to implement the change at an acceptable level of quality. When the Commission requires a substantive change evaluation, the institution prepares an update on its implementation of the change, and a small team visits the institution to validate the information provided in the update, evaluate the institution's success in implementing the substantive change, and report its findings and recommendations to the Commission. The Commission considers the institutional update, the team report and confidential recommendation, and the institution's response to the team report and takes action.

Notification to the Institution

Several months before the visit, the Commission President sends a reminder to the institution about the upcoming evaluation and works with the chief executive officer on the selection of dates for the visit. Typically, visits to assess a move to the higher degree are two days in length, while visits to assess new U.S. locations may be accomplished in a single day. Depending on the circumstances, such visits may run from morning to night or from noon to noon, in cases where an off-campus location offers evening programming. Visits overseas are typically two days in length, excluding travel time.

The Commission staff selects a prospective team to conduct the evaluation and requests the chief executive officer's comments on the proposed team before appointing its members. The size of the team, typically one to three persons, reflects the complexity of the change, based on Commission experience. When the team is complete, the institution and team members are informed, and appropriate evaluator materials are sent to the team from the Commission office.

Arrangements for the Team Visit

Upon receipt of the team list, the institution contacts the team chairperson/evaluator to discuss the schedule for the visit, accommodations (if needed), and other arrangements. The institution notifies each team member directly about accommodations and communicates with the team chairperson about all other matters related to the visit. 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 team members' out-of-pocket expenses, primarily travel costs. Reimbursement should be made directly and promptly to the team. In keeping with Association policy, the Commission office bills the institution for the substantive change evaluation fee.

Materials

At least four weeks in advance of the evaluation visit, the institution sends to the visitor(s) a copy of its original substantive change proposal, together with an update regarding steps taken to implement the proposal and any other new information it believes useful. At the same time, the institution sends an electronic copy (single, searchable pdf file) and four (4) paper copies of these same materials to the offices of the Commission.

The update should reflect and assess the institution's experience in implementing the substantive change and should address any areas of emphasis identified by the Commission in its letter approving the institution's plans. Relevant enrollment and financial information should be included. The institution is also asked to include information about its plans for continued implementation of the substantive change under review as well as its plans, if any, for additional substantive changes. Attention should be given to the institution's capacity to implement these plans.

The update should include a cover page with the institution's name and location, the date, and a brief summary of the subject(s) of the report. The update should be single-spaced, printed on both sides of the paper, and neither stapled nor bound. Please do not use three-ring binders or elaborate printing options.

An institution scheduled for a substantive change evaluation is urged to contact Commission staff for assistance in developing its update and making preparations for the evaluation.

Conduct of the Visit

During the on-site evaluation, the visitor(s) meet with institutional representatives who can provide information about the implementation of the substantive change 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, students, and members of the governing board. Depending on the circumstances, visits to assess implementation of off-campus locations may not involve a visit to the institution's main campus. The visit may conclude with a meeting between the team chairperson/evaluator and the institution's chief executive officer to review the major findings of the evaluation.

For most substantive change evaluations, a preliminary visit by the team chairperson/evaluator is unnecessary. However, regular communication by phone should be initiated by the institution, and the chairperson/evaluator should feel free to contact the institution to discuss arrangements in detail or to request additional materials if team members see a need for them.

Preparation of the Evaluation Report

Within a month of the visit, the team/evaluator prepares a narrative report of no more than 5-6 pages that describes the institution's success in implementing the substantive change under review, with particular attention to any areas identified for emphasis by the Commission. The report should conclude with a list of identified strengths and concerns related to the institution's implementation of the substantive change.

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 team report.

Team's Confidential Recommendation to the Commission

In keeping with Commission procedures, the team/evaluator develops a confidential recommendation based upon its findings in evaluating the substantive change. The recommendation should contain the following elements:

1. The team's recommendation on whether the substantive change should be included in the institution's accreditation.
2. The team's recommendation on the timing and content of any follow-up reporting on the implementation of the substantive change. A recommendation for subsequent progress reports related to the substantive change is advisable if the team 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.

Four (4) paper copies and an electronic copy (single, searchable pdf file) of the team's report and the team's recommendation should be submitted to the Commission office.

Commission Action

The team report and confidential recommendation, along with the institutional materials and response, are considered by the Commission at its earliest possible meeting. Typically, the institutional chief executive officer and team chairperson/evaluator are not requested to attend the meeting when the substantive change evaluation is reviewed. The institution and team member(s) are informed of the Commission's action shortly after the meeting.

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