

Guidelines for International Travel and Committee Visits To Member Institutions

A Guide for SACSCOC Evaluators Charged with Reviewing Sites Located Outside of the United States

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) accredits degree-granting institutions in the Southern region of the United States and in select international countries. Institutions may have academic programs or consortial relationships with entities located outside of the United States of America that must be reviewed and approved. SACSCOC is committed to the peer review process that permits such evaluative committee visits to occur; however, this process is limited to safe and secure locations. Moreover, the member institutions must bear the cost of reviews. SACSCOC does not accredit institutions in countries that are in violation of fundamental human rights or that present potential danger to peer evaluators or SACSCOC staff.

When reviewing off-campus instructional sites during the established periodic reviews, a sample of international off-campus sites will be visited just as a sampling of domestic off-campus sites are visited during the review of an institution. If a site is located in an area where unsafe or inadvisable to travel, staff and evaluators may develop alternate plans for reviewing the site(s) either electronically or using virtual technologies. The SACSCOC Board of Trustees will authorize the President to approve alternate plans for site visits to international locations where the U.S. State Department has issued a Level 3 (Reconsider Travel) or Level 4 (Do not travel) travel advisory or where there is political unrest.

This Guide provides assistance for evaluators and SACSCOC staff when preparing to visit sites located outside of the United States. It should be used in conjunction with *The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*, the *Resource Manual*, and the *Handbook for Review Committees* as well as all relevant SACSCOC policies. Note: This Guide does not apply to Candidate Institutions and Initial Accreditation. (See the policy, “Accreditation Procedures for Applicant and Candidate Institutions.”)

Definitions

Alternate plan for review: When the SACSCOC staff deems an area unsafe for travel, then the Vice President in consultation with the institutional officers, the host location staff, and the committee chair may develop an alternate plan for reviewing the location. Alternate plans may include visiting the closest safe location where institutional instruction is also occurring, conducting the review using virtual technologies from a domestic location, or suspending program offerings at that location until it’s safe to travel. These plans must be approved by the President who will inform the Executive Council of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees.

International Travel: Any instructional sites located outside of the United States is deemed international travel for purposes of these Guidelines.

Unsafe or inadvisable travel: If the U.S. Department of State (<https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/alertswarnings.html>) has issued a Level 4 (Do not travel)

travel ban or posted a Level 3 (Reconsider travel) travel warning to a country or area where on-site visit is planned, this is deemed to be an area that is “unsafe or inadvisable travel.” An alternate plan is permissible.

Protocols for Visits Deemed Inadvisable or Unsafe

Advisory visits: If the US Department of State (<https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/alertswarnings.html>) has issued a Level 3 or Level 4 travel warning, SACSCOC staff will conduct advisory visits virtually.

Substantive change visits: Institutions may not establish a branch campus nor acquire/merge/consolidate with another institution or part of an institution if the US Department of State has issued a Level 3 or Level 4 travel warning. Such a warning would deem the location as unsafe or inadvisable for travel, prohibiting the required site visit to evaluate the location. For domestic institutions with new international off-campus instructional sites and/or new academic programs requiring a site visit, the committee may travel to the main campus of the international site and conduct the required visit virtually. For international institutions undergoing a substantive change that requires a site visit (new off-campus instructional site, new academic program, and/or level change), the committee may conduct the visit virtually from an agreed-upon domestic location.

Reaffirmation visits to international institutions: These visits require an in-person visit if at all possible. If there is a Level 3 or Level 4 travel warning making travel unsafe or inadvisable, decisions regarding the impact on the reaffirmation of accreditation process will occur on a case-by-case basis. SACSCOC staff will confer with the SACSCOC President who will make a recommendation to the Chair of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees regarding future action. The Executive Council of the Board of Trustees decision will direct the actions of the SACSCOC staff. If the Executive Council of the Board authorizes the use of an alternate plan, the staff and the committee chair will develop such a plan which may include authorization of a virtual visit or identifying an alternate location where the in-person visit may occur. If the institution is located where travel precautions are recommended, but travel is not prohibited (Level 2: Exercise increased caution or Level 3: Reconsider travel), SACSCOC staff, the committee chair and the host institution will make arrangements to limit evaluators or staff to an unsafe or inadvisable location.

If committee site visits were planned and a travel ban or warning is issued within two (2) weeks of the scheduled travel, then any of the above visits would serve as an “alternate plan.” Such a plan requires prior approval by the SACSCOC President.

Travel Procedures for Evaluation Committees Visiting International Sites

Insurance Coverage for Traveling Staff and Evaluators

SACSCOC, through its insurance provider AIG, affords evaluators *Travel Guard, Global Assistance Services*. This plan covers evaluators when traveling on SACSCOC business. Coverage is provided door-to-door (from the time the individual leaves their personal residence for business travel through their return to their residence or business).

Travel Guard provides travel medical assistance (including emergency medical evacuation transportation assistance, physician/hospital/dental/vision referrals, repatriation of mortal

remains, emergency prescription replacement), emergency travel assistance (including emergency return travel arrangements, roadside assistance), worldwide travel assistance (including lost passport/travel documents, emergency cash transfer assistance, emergency telephone interpretation assistance), concierge services, and personal security (including security evacuation and immediate 24 hour support services). Cards and policy information are available from the SACSCOC Business Office.

No policies nor procedures are established for cases involving ransom/kidnapping and will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Procedures for emergencies during travel

All evaluators should have the SACSCOC staff member's cell phone number in the case of emergencies. Staff members should have emergency contact information for each evaluator of someone to inform in case of an emergency. SACSCOC staff and evaluators should enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) prior to international travel (www.STEP.state.gov).

Procedures for risk assessment

SACSCOC staff will review the U.S. Department of State alerts and warnings prior to travel. If necessary, SACSCOC staff may request the host institution to provide maps, addresses and travel routes, and monitor the local safety and security situation.

TRAVEL EXPENSES

Passport and visa information

SACSCOC will reimburse evaluators for expenses incurred for conducting the review and in accordance with the "Reimbursement for Expenses" policy. (See www.sacscoc.org). SACSCOC will not reimburse evaluators for the cost of securing a passport. If a visa is required for entry into the country, SACSCOC will reimburse evaluators for the processing costs of the visa.

Telecommunications, emails, text services, and internet communication

Evaluators are responsible for all costs related to an international phone plan, text messages, data charges and internet or WIFI service charges (if not provided by the institution).

Transportation Expenses

If international air travel is required, prior to securing tickets, the SACSCOC staff will discuss with the institution regarding their willingness to support air travel in business class for SACSCOC staff and evaluators. It is generally expected that institutions will support business class air travel. If the institution does not support business class travel, an additional overnight hotel stay may be required in order to provide for a more appropriate visit schedule that would allow for evaluators and staff to perform at an optimal level of effectiveness.

Upon arrival, the institution will support any and all ground transportation from the airport to the hotel accommodations, to the meeting site(s), any other travel required, and the return to the departing airport. Schedules and logistics will occur in consultation with SACSCOC staff and the committee chair.

SACSCOC will reimburse evaluators for hotel and other accommodation charges in accordance with its “Reimbursement for Expenses” policy.

Document History

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