



*Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges
1866 Southern Lane
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097*

OBSERVERS ON REAFFIRMATION ON-SITE REVIEW COMMITTEES

Policy Statement

Institutions beginning their decennial review process leading to reaffirmation of accreditation may designate one person who would be allowed to accompany an On-Site Reaffirmation Committee to observe and learn from committee activities and from the review process experience of persons at the host institution. Requests to do so must be submitted to the Commission staff member assigned to the institution making the request and must be approved by the chief executive officer of that institution indicating acceptance of the conditions and policies listed below. Before the request can be approved, the staff member must obtain the approval of the host institution's chief executive officer.

An On-Site Reaffirmation Committee may have only one observer and that observer may not be from an institution located in the same state as the host institution. Off-Site Reaffirmation Committees will not have observers because the off-site review is only the first phase of external review and provides limited exposure to the entire reaffirmation process which, in effect, limits the learning experience of the observer. However, an institution's draft Report of the Reaffirmation Committee will be available to an observer on-site.

Conditions and Policies

1. Every effort will be made to insure that the observer receives, in advance of the visit, the same materials that are sent to regular committee members from the Commission on Colleges office, from the host institution, and from the chair of the visiting committee. This includes the Information Outline that provides basic information about when and where the first and last committee meetings will be held so that travel arrangements can be made.
2. The observer is expected to make his/her own travel arrangements and to inform the host institution regarding those arrangements. It is customary for the host institution to arrange to meet flights and transport committee members to the place of lodging. It will normally be possible to include observers in those arrangements.
3. Reservations for hotel rooms are normally made by the host institution. The Commission staff, in communicating with the host institution about the observer, will request that the host institution make reservations for the observer as well. If the observer elects to make other arrangements for housing, the Commission and the host institution need to be informed of that fact. It is recommended that the observer stay at the same housing facility as the visiting committee so as to facilitate prompt attendance at all committee meetings, make most effective use of local travel arrangements, and maximize interaction with the committee.
4. Neither the Commission on Colleges nor the host institution is responsible for any travel, lodging, meal, or other expenses incurred by the observer in connection with the visit. Those costs must be borne by the observer, the observer's institution, or through other arrangements. No "allowance for miscellaneous expenses" will be paid to the observer by the Commission on Colleges or the host institution.
5. The observer is expected to arrive in time for the organizational meeting on the first day and to be in punctual attendance at all committee meetings scheduled by the chair.

6. Observers should not be assigned any responsibility for data gathering, evaluation, or writing of the committee report. The extent of verbal participation by the observer in executive sessions of the committee is left to the discretion of the committee chair. *Observers are under the same obligation as committee members regarding the maintenance of confidentiality of institutional materials and the proceedings of committee executive sessions.*
7. The Commission wishes to optimize opportunities for observers to interact with faculty, staff, and students at the host institution. Commission staff will request the host institution to assist in scheduling an initial contact for the observer with the host Accreditation Liaison and other key personnel. However, first priority for scheduling appointments with host institution personnel must reside with members of the visiting committee. If conflicts of scheduling arise, the observer must defer to committee members and attempt to reschedule at another time. Visiting committee members have a very full agenda and limited time in which to carry out their responsibilities. It is anticipated that there will be ample opportunities for interaction with visiting committee members as they go about their review activities and with persons at the host institution; however, the observer must anticipate the need to be flexible on occasion.
8. If the observer arranges to accompany a visiting committee member on an interview, the observer should maintain a low profile so as not to interfere in any way with the committee member's ability to meet his/her responsibilities as an evaluator.
9. Normally, the Commission staff representative assigned to work with the host institution will be present for the entire visit. The staff person's responsibility is to serve as a resource person for the visiting committee and its chair, and to serve as a liaison between the visiting committee and the host institution. However, the observer is encouraged to ask questions of the Commission staff as needed to take best advantage of the observer's time with the committee and to achieve the objectives noted above.

This document will be made available to the observer, the visiting committee chair, and the host institution. Any questions should be directed to the Commission staff member assigned to the host institution.

Document History

Adopted: Commission on Colleges, June 2004

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