Site Visit Protocol for Program Directors
October 2020
Clinical Postgraduate

As program directors prepare for the site visit, keep the following in mind.

Before the Visit

- Arrange convenient, comfortable accommodations for the site team. These need not be luxurious but should include a place for the team to work together in the evenings comfortably, with internet access. The hotel should have a restaurant or one should be in close proximity. Arrange for late arrival.

- Most teams will choose to have breakfast before their morning meetings. Choose a hotel that has dining facilities or serves a healthy option continental breakfast. Discuss breakfast preferences with the site visit chair in advance to avoid ordering food that may not be needed.

- Since most hotels now have appliances such as hair dryers or irons, if the hotel chosen is unable to provide these items, inform the team members of this in advance.

- Ordinarily program personnel should not meet or transport visitors from the airport. (In unusual circumstances, such as limited ground transportation options, delayed flights, etc., it may be necessary for program personnel to provide this transportation.) However, the program should ensure that team members know what transportation options are available from the airport to the hotel. If any member of the team is renting a car, make sure that accurate, detailed maps to the hotel are provided.

- Transportation from the hotel to the first meeting of the morning should be arranged by the program director. Even if the hotel is a short distance from the campus, do not assume that the team members will walk. If any team member has rented a car, it may not be necessary for the director to arrange transportation; however, the program should ensure that those driving have an accurate map of the route from hotel to campus/hospital with appropriate directions to the meeting site and specific parking instructions. Program directors should discuss this with the team chair in advance.

- It is helpful to provide the visitors with a list of restaurants in the area of the hotel. It is also helpful to the team to verify the hours of operation and need for reservations.

- Most site visitors are exquisitely sensitive to the appearance of favor or bias and anything that might be construed as such is best avoided. Although baskets of fruit, etc. are generally only meant as evidence of hospitality, they are not a good idea. Often members of the institutional senior administration are accustomed to providing "amenities" for site visitors from other accreditation agencies. The relative austerity with which PA accreditation site visits are conducted can sometimes be difficult to grasp.

- Inquire into special needs or dietary restrictions for site visitors. This is important for the snacks and lunches provided on site.

- Be mindful of the weather in the area and inform the site visitors if they need to prepare for rain or snow when packing.

- Dinner the first evening is designed for the site team to meet and discuss the application material. For that reason, it is always held for the team only, without program faculty or institutional officials. While some institutional senior administrators may have had experiences with other agencies that include a first dinner meeting of both school and accreditation representatives, this is not the format for ARC-PA site visits.

- **Twelve** weeks before the visit, the application materials as detailed in the application and as directed in the email from the ARC-PA must be received by the ARC-PA office.

- **Eight** weeks before the visit, the **site visit schedule/agenda** must be emailed accreditationservices@arc-pa.org **and** to the site visit team chair.

- **Eight** weeks before the visit, a copy of the completed **Information Summary Sheet** (found on the ARC-PA website at http://www.arc-pa.org/accreditation/postgraduate-programs/postgraduate-site-visit-materials/) must also be emailed to accreditationservices@arc-pa.org only. The Information Sheet includes program contact, travel and hotel information for the site visitors.

Scheduling the Activities

As program directors begin developing the agenda for the site visit and thinking of the details of the visit, remember the following:

- Start with the ARC-PA site visit preferred agenda template on the webpage, but work out specific times and sequencing of events for the visit with the site visit team chair.
    - For provisional and continuing site visits: http://www.arc-pa.org/accreditation/postgraduate-programs/postgraduate-site-visit-materials/

- On the final agenda, include the names, degrees (MD, PhD, EdD, etc.) and position titles or teaching assignments of each person with whom the team will be meeting. Be sure to include the names of the graduates (with year of graduation), PA trainees and preceptors on the agenda (as needed and as identified on the template).

- Schedule short (10-15 minutes) rest breaks for the team between meetings. The site visit chair will adjust the schedule as needed.

- Schedule adequate time for the team to review the documents the program has so laboriously compiled. Plan for some review of documents on day one and day two.

- Visitors arriving the day before the visit will often ask to have access to some documents prior to the visit officially beginning. Having materials in advance is very helpful to visitors. Program directors should discuss this option with the site visit team chair.

- Schedule a time before the team completes its reports for the visitors to again meet with the program director and program faculty to clarify issues or answer questions they may still have. This time is built into the template.

- The program director should be available as the visitors write their report to the ARC-PA in case s/he is needed for last minute clarification.

- Communicate with the team chair more than once prior to the visit! If the program director has not heard from the chair about confirming the schedule, s/he should contact the chair as opposed to waiting for the chair to initiate contact.

- Copies of the agenda, schedule changes, accommodation information, etc. should be provided to the team chair who will share the information with the other site visitor(s).

- Faculty and PA trainees must be available for the entire interview period for which they are scheduled, with their pagers and cell phones turned off.

During the Site Visit

Conference Room

- Arrange for a quiet conference room from which the team can operate.

- Provide a computer and internet access to assist the team in reviewing web-based materials. Provide any passwords that may be needed.

- Provide telephone access and logistical information regarding scheduled telecommunications.

- Provide pens, paper, sticky pads, paper clips, and stapler for site visitors to use.

- Provide a hard copy of the complete application with all appendices (identical to the electronic copy submitted to the ARC-PA).

- **Make it easy for the visitors to find what they need.** Remember it is the program's responsibility to demonstrate compliance. Use colored sticky tabs and highlighting to mark **specific areas** of syllabi, handbooks and catalogues to demonstrate compliance with **cross reference to specific standards as appropriate.**

- Additionally, provide a master tabular display indicating where materials demonstrating compliance are found in the documents provided in the room, i.e., pages in a handbook with harassment policy, objectives related to instruction to prepare the PA trainee to provide medical care to patients from diverse populations scattered across several courses. Be sure to flag and/or highlight the **specific areas and the associated *Standards*** referred to from the table, especially in cases where there may be objectives over several courses dealing with a specific required topical area found in the *Standards*.

- The program may choose to compile a document listing where specific objectives from several courses for a topical area as defined in the *Standards* may be found. The

program may also create a document that lists these objectives by course, with **reference to specific standards**.

- Having light snacks and beverages available for the site team throughout the visit is helpful. Lunches are often less about eating than about gathering or reviewing information.

The Visit Schedule

- Be prepared for changes! The team recognizes that the site visit is a stressful time for program faculty and staff. Nevertheless, it is the team's responsibility to ensure that they speak with the people, see the facilities and read the documents that will give them the fullest, most accurate picture of the program. The site team chair will do everything in his or her power to follow the agenda as agreed to with the program director in advance of the visit, but often the materials and individuals involved necessitate last minute changes.

- The site team chair will meet with senior administration, instructional faculty and PA trainees without program faculty present. Be prepared to take the site visitors to the meeting place, introduce the parties involved to one another and remain outside until the meeting is concluded.

- The team chair will ask to meet with all PA trainees in a class.

- The team may ask for additional material or clarification of material. Sometimes it may seem as if visitors are asking for material that has already been provided. Sometimes, the manner in which the material is organized may require clarification or appear to the site visitors to be incomplete. Please understand that the team members want to ensure that programs are given every opportunity to demonstrate compliance with the *Standards*. If the team's requests are unclear, seek clarification.

- The team has limited time to review materials. The application submitted by the program/institution is the document of record for the comprehensive review process including the site visit. The team may not accept additional application materials voluntarily provided by the program which the team did not request. However, the team may ask the program to submit additional materials to the ARC-PA in the program's response to the site visit observation(s). It is the responsibility of the program, not the responsibility of the site visitors, to submit those additional requested documents to the ARC-PA. The program should only send materials to the ARC-PA if the team so requests.

- Program personnel, who may provide transportation for the team between the campus and the hotel at the end of the day, should not ask the team to share their impression or findings.

Visit Conclusion

The ARC-PA site visitors do not conduct a formal exit report before departing from the program. The site visit team will take a few minutes at the conclusion of the site visit to express thanks to the program for its assistance in facilitating the visit. The following points are important as the visit ends:

- The filed written report submitted by the team will be sent from the ARC-PA to the program director, and to the individual to whom the program director reports, as identified by the program director on the program data sheet, usually within 21 days of the visit.

- The program is offered the opportunity to respond to any of the observations noted in the site visit report within 21 days of receipt of the report. The purpose of the program's response is to eliminate errors of fact, or challenge perceived ambiguities and misperceptions, providing clarification as the program sees fit. The program may not respond with new information or changes made since the site visit.

- The site visit team does not have the authority to speak on behalf of or bind the ARC-PA regarding a program's compliance with the *Standards*, as these responsibilities and decisions rest solely with the ARC-PA.

- Any communication about the visit after the visit should be directed to the ARC-PA Accreditation Services staff (accreditationservices@arc-pa.org), not to the site visitors.

After the Visit

After the visit, the ARC-PA will ask the program director to complete a web-based evaluation of the visit process and the visitors. This evaluation is especially helpful to the ARC-PA as part of its ongoing internal review of processes and individuals. The ARC-PA urges the program to complete the evaluation as fairly and candidly as possible. Feedback and comments remain anonymous and will in no way effect the ARC-PA's decision about the program's accreditation status.

APPLICATION OF RECORD:
The application submitted by the program to the ARC-PA office is considered the program's application of record. It is one component of the official program record used by the commission throughout the accreditation review process. Site visitors have been instructed not to accept any new or revised application materials from the program at the time of the visit. If, during the process of the visit, the site visitors suggest additional information or materials be submitted to the ARC-PA office, these materials should be sent with the program's response to observations.