SACSCOC Peer Evaluators:
How To Become A Peer Evaluator? Who Are Peer Evaluators? What Do They Do?

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PEER Evaluators

• "As a faculty member, I'll be emphasizing that the process is conducted by our peers, not some fearsome 'they.'" (2012 Annual Meeting attendee)

• “Remind everyone that 'SACSCOC is us;' that it is a review by our peers to hold us to standards that support our students in a variety of ways.”
  (Institutional representative, 2012 Reaffirmation Cohort)

• 6,000+ Peer Evaluators representing member institutions
  – ~1,000 participate in the reviews annually
Session Outline
1. SACSCOC peer evaluation process
2. Snapshot of Peer Evaluator Registry
3. Staffing evaluation committees
4. Serving on reaffirmation committees: Key expectations and activities
5. Benefits of serving on the review committees

Handout Packet
• PPT slides
• How to Become an Evaluator
• Evaluator Information Form
• Ethical Obligations of Evaluators
• Reaffirmation Process: An Overview of Logistical Aspects
• Tips from Experienced Evaluators

1. A Brief Overview of the SACSCOC Peer Evaluation Process
**PEER Review Process**

The heart of the U.S. accreditation system

- "is the accreditation team itself:
  - a small group of peers from other institutions
  - who come together to assess a college’s compliance with accreditation standards"

(McGuire, 2009, p. 29).

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**Types of Peer Evaluation Committees**

- Candidacy
- Accreditation
- Off-Site Reaffirmation
- On-Site Reaffirmation
- Substantive Change
- Special

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**Three Stages of Reaffirmation Review**

I. OFF-Site Reaffirmation Committee (Track A=April; Track B=November)

II. ON-Site Reaffirmation Committee (Track A=Fall; Track B=Spring)

III. Board of Trustees C&R Committee (Track A=June; Track B=December)
What is the Composition of a Typical Reaffirmation Committee?

- Committee Chair
- Governance/Administration
- Academic (Administrators/Faculty) (~3*)
- Financial/Administrative Services*
- Institutional Effectiveness
- Student Services
- Educational Support
- Lead QEP Evaluator (On-Site only)
- SACSCOC Vice President (non-voting)
- Observer (On-Site and not involved in evaluation process)

Who Can Serve as an Evaluator?

- Presidents/CEOs
- Provosts/VPAAs
- Vice Presidents for Business and Administration/CFOs
- Assistant/Associate Vice Presidents
- Deans, Department Chairs, and Directors
- Faculty
- Institutional Effectiveness, Library/Learning Resources, and Student Affairs Professionals

What Are the Characteristics of Effective Evaluators?

- Integrity
- Expertise
- Communication Skills
- Thoroughness
- Efficiency
- Open-mindedness
- Objectivity
- Consistency
- Confidentiality
- Collegiality
- Decisiveness
How to Become an Evaluator?

- NOMINATED BY CEO (signs the Evaluator Information Form)
- Invited by Commission Staff
- Included in the Evaluator Registry

Where Can I Locate the Evaluator Information Form?

www.sacscoc.org/evalinfoform.asp

Training Opportunities and Resources

- Workshops/Training Sessions
  - Institutional Effectiveness Evaluators
  - Academic Evaluators (NEW)
  - Student Services Evaluators
  - QEP Evaluators
  - Finance Evaluators
- SharePoint training (off-site)
- Webinars (NEW)
- Evaluation Committee Resources webpage
  - www.sacscoc.org/committee_forms1.asp
2. Evaluator Registry: Key Descriptive Statistics (as of 10/2014)

Number of Evaluators

Institutional Degree Level
Gender

- Male: 49%
- Female: 45%
- Unknown: 6%

Functional Categories
(excluding chairs and QEP evaluators)

- Academics: 2,991
- Administrative Services/Finance: 1,752
- Educational Support/Library: 1,383
- Institutional Effectiveness: 1,296
- Organization/Governance (CEOs): 383
- Student Services: 494

Generational Change?

- 936 new evaluators (January-September 2014)
- ~15% of the total number of active evaluators
- ~700 evaluators de-activated
3. Staffing Evaluation Committees

Who and When Staffs Review Committees?

- **Off-Site Reaffirmation Committees**
  - Office of Training and Research
  - ~8 months prior to Atlanta meeting

- **All Other Committees**
  - Vice Presidents
  - ~6-10 months prior to visit

How Are Committees Staffed?

**Required Criteria**

- **Institutional Type**
  - Degree Level
  - Governance Control

- **Conflict of Interest**
  - Out-of-State
  - No prior employment or consulting
  - Other factors leading to actual or perceived conflict of interest
How Are Committees Staffed?

Preferred Criteria

- Similar Institutions
  - Mission
  - Academic programs
  - Size

- Committee Diversity
  - Demographic
    - Race/Ethnicity and Gender
  - Committee experience
    - ~25-30% new

4. What Do Evaluators Do?
Serving on Reaffirmation Committees

Key Tasks of the Peer Evaluator

- Analyze and Evaluate
- Make Professional Judgment
- Inform and Advise
Key Roles of the Peer Evaluator

- **Examiner**
  - Operate as an inquirer and/or investigator

- **Auditor**
  - Examine and verify core systems, policies, processes, records, and outcomes

- **Critic**
  - Provide evaluative analysis and judgment

- **Advisor**
  - Offer consultative feedback (esp. QEP)

Key Responsibility of the Peer Evaluator:

**PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT**

Key Activities:

**OFF-Site Reaffirmation Committee**

- Compliance Certification Report
- No more than three institutions in a cluster
  - *Off-site* document review and analysis
    (Compliance Certification Report and supporting evidence)
    - 10-15 Principles to review
    - ~2 weeks per institution
    - Conference calls (1-4)
    - Draft committee report (SharePoint system)
Key Activities:
**OFF-Site Reaffirmation Committee**

- **Time and Effort Commitment**
  - 43 hours on average (SD=34)
  - ~5 full working days

Key Activities:
**OFF-Site Reaffirmation Committee** (Cont'd)

- **Meeting in Atlanta**
  - Two days
  - Committee deliberations
  - Preliminary Reaffirmation Committee report

Key Activities:
**ON-Site Reaffirmation Committee**

- **Compliance + Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)**
- **One institution** (+ off-campus instructional sites if applicable)
  - **Pre-Visit document review and analysis**
    (Compliance Certification, Focused Report (if applicable), and QEP)
    - Up to 10-15 Principles to review + QEP
    - 4-6 weeks
    - Conference calls (1-3)
    - Draft committee report (SharePoint system)
Key Activities: 
**ON-Site Reaffirmation Committee** (Cont’d)

- **Campus Visit**
  - 2-4 days
  - Interviews and additional document review
  - Committee deliberations
  - Final Reaffirmation Committee report

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Key Activities: 
**ON-Site Reaffirmation Committee** (Cont’d)


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5. Why Serve on Peer Evaluation Committees?
Why Serve as a Peer Evaluator?

Service on accreditation review committees requires devoting days "to reading self-study documents, studying the publications and records of universities and colleges, and then yet more days visiting these institutions, days in which one meeting follows another, from before breakfast until after dinner" (Oden, 2009, p. 41).

• "Why would anyone ever agree to such service?" (Oden, 2009, p. 41).
• "Why should a faculty member or administrator agree to serve on an accreditation team?" (McGuire, 2009, p. 30).

Benefits

• Higher Education Community
• Institution Under Review
• Home Institution
• Evaluator

Higher Education Community

• Self-regulation
• Transparency
Institutions Under Review

- Gain access to the knowledge and expertise of others
- Receive evaluative yet collegial feedback on systems, processes, and outcomes
- Receive validation of effective practices
- Are encouraged to embrace best practices

Home Institution

- Increased visibility
- More knowledgeable employee:
  - The accreditation process
  - Commonly-accepted good practices
- More energized/motivated employee:
  - Apply new knowledge
  - Ensure compliance with reaffirmation requirements and standards

Home Institution

- Institutions with higher number of representatives who served on the review committees tend to have a lower number of citations of non-compliance at the Off-Site stage of review

[Graph showing average (mean) number of citations of non-compliance at the Off-Site stage of review (2013 Class)]
Evaluator

• Give back to the profession and support peer review process in higher education
• Increase knowledge of the accreditation/reaffirmation process
• Apply knowledge and commonly-accepted good practices in area of expertise
• Learn about new best practices in the field
• Practice building consensus
• Expand professional network

Evaluator

• OFF-Site Reaffirmation Committee (likely or very likely to serve again if asked)
  • Fall 2013 = 90.1%
  • Spring 2014 = 92.1%
• ON-Site Reaffirmation Committee (likely or very likely to serve again if asked)
  • Fall 2013 = 97.9%
  • Spring 2014 = 97.5%
How to Become an Evaluator

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) welcomes the nomination of individuals interested in participating on its various evaluation committees that conduct reviews of institutions. Those committees are essential to the process whereby institutions seek and maintain membership within the SACSCOC community of higher education institutions. SACSCOC is dedicated in its efforts to ensure the continuing vitality, value, quality and consistency of its peer review process that is of value to the institution and the Commission.

The process for nominating and selecting an individual to serve on a SACSCOC evaluation committee begins with the president of a member institution. The president nominates the individual to be considered for inclusion in the Commission’s Evaluator Registry. Each nominee completes the Evaluator Information Form and ensures that it is signed by the CEO of the institution. The completed Evaluator Information Form is sent to the Office of Training and Research at SACSCOC where it is reviewed by the SACSCOC staff. Based on its review of the upcoming needs of the Evaluator Registry, the particular areas of professional expertise and experiences of the nominee, and the overall profile of the institution’s representation within the Registry, the staff makes a determination as to whether to include the individual in the Registry. When a nominee is included in the Evaluator Registry, the individual is placed within a category such as the following:

- Academic Administration
- Academic Disciplines
- Administrative Services
- Continuing Education
- Developmental Education
- Educational Support
- Health Sciences
- Institutional Effectiveness
- Governance and Administration
- Student Services

Each of the categories listed above, as well as others within the Registry, are divided into various subsets based on the category as well as the characteristics of the nominee’s institution (governance, types of degrees offered, location, size, etc).

Individuals in the following areas receive the highest priority for inclusion in the Registry:
- Governance and Administration
- Administrative Services (financial resources)
- Faculty teaching in various academic disciplines (particularly areas such as education, business, theology, and medicine)
- Library/learning resources
- Institutional effectiveness
- Student Services
We do not frequently use such persons as institutional advancement officers, admissions personnel, counseling personnel, or assistants to the president (unless the person's title indicates a specific duty such as "assistant to the president for planning").

Once an individual is a member of the Registry, the Commission staff may select the individual to participate on an evaluation committee. Please note that inclusion in the Registry does not mean an individual will automatically be asked to serve on a committee; however, it is imperative an individual first be admitted to the Registry because that is the primary source the Commission uses to develop its evaluation committees.
EVALUATOR INFORMATION FORM
FOR VISITING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Directions: Complete Part A of this form on your computer. Print it out and have it signed by your CEO. Mail the form to the COC office at the above address in an envelope marked Attention: Office of Training and Research.

Part A

Form of Address (e.g., Dean, Dr.):

First Name: M.I.: Last Name:

Title/Position:

Institution:

Office Address:

Email Address: Office Telephone:

Fax:

Home Address:

Home Telephone:

Date of Birth: Gender: Ethnicity:

Check Areas Where Proficient:

Use of MSWord ☐ Use of Email ☐ Ability to Access Materials Electronically ☐
Foreign languages spoken fluently:

If duties include teaching, the level at which you have taught courses during the last two years:

Associate ☐ Baccalaureate ☐ Master’s ☐ Doctoral ☐

Postsecondary Education (most recent first):

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Minor</th>
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Experience in Education and Related Fields (most recent first):

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<th>Dates</th>
<th>Institution/Organization</th>
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Other relevant professional experience:

Describe experiences you have had with student learning outcomes and/or assessment:

Signature of evaluator: ________________________________

Signature of the CEO: ________________________________

Date: __________________

Part B – For Staff Use Only

Field/Area: ________________________________
Level: __________
ETHICAL OBLIGATIONS OF EVALUATORS

Policy Statement

Integrity, essential to the purpose of higher education, functions as the basic contract defining the relationship between the Commission and each of its member and candidate institutions. It is a relationship in which all parties agree to deal honestly and openly with their constituencies and with one another. Without this commitment, no relationship can exist or be sustained between the Commission and its member and candidate institutions.

Integrity in the accreditation process is best understood in the context of peer review, professional judgment by peers of commonly accepted sound academic practice, and the conscientious application of the Principles of Accreditation as mutually agreed upon standards for accreditation. The Commission’s requirements, policies, processes, procedures, and decisions are predicated on integrity. (Principles of Accreditation, p. 13)

A self-regulatory process, accreditation is based upon a peer review process that requires institutional representatives from all degree levels to review institutions and to make decisions about their accreditation status. In order to maintain the credibility of those decisions, not only must the Commission hold institutions accountable for integrity governing all aspects of their operations, but also must insure that evaluators and elected Commission Board of Trustee members responsible for making accreditation decisions maintain the highest level of integrity in all matters dealing with the decision-making process of the Commission and in matters dealing with their own institutions. Integrity of the process mandates at least the following ethical obligations and understandings.

Obligations to other Evaluators, Board Members, and Commission Staff

The process for the determination of an institution’s compliance with accreditation standards requires professional judgment of peers; in this context, professional judgment demands informed review, thoughtful analysis, and reasoned decision making. The collective professional judgment of peers determines the final report of a committee, and for Commission Board members, determines the accreditation status of an institution. Evaluators and Trustees have an obligation to represent all decisions as those of the total committee or the Commission and not those of particular individuals or groups. When making this collective decision, it is paramount that evaluators provide for each other an environment that supports a candid exchange of ideas, an opportunity for all opinions to be considered, a respect for individual differences and honest dissent, and a commitment to hold in confidence all such exchanges.

Commission staff members provide information and advice as is appropriate when assisting evaluators and Board members in making decisions on the accreditation status of institutions. Particularly germane are historical information on similarly situated institutions, and procedural and substantive advice on how the policies and accreditation standards have been interpreted and could be applied to an institution’s case, including possible action and follow up. Their role is an active one, providing advice that may include opinions on institutional patterns, institutional progress, and suggested action.
Although the staff’s role in the process does not supplant the peer review and decision-making process, evaluators and Commission Board members should take into account information and advice provided by staff in order to ensure strength and consistency in the process and to prevent decisions that could lead to effective legal action on the part of an institution. Evaluators and Trustees should support an environment that allows staff to provide relevant and candid advice and to carry out their responsibilities to the Commission and to their assigned institutions, including responsibility for informing an institution of Commission action and the rationale for such action.

**Ethical Obligations and Responsibilities Specific to Evaluators**

**Confidentiality**

Evaluators, including lead QEP evaluators, must maintain complete confidentiality in all accreditation activities and decisions. Confidentiality applies to all documents, correspondence, and discussions relative to all phases of the review. Moreover, peer evaluators are expected to maintain confidentiality regarding input from the staff just as they do regarding all other discussions conducted in the review process.

As examples, **evaluators may not disclose to anyone the following:**

1. information about an institutional case under review, including the analysis of institutional materials; committee discussions before and during the meeting; and the resource material constituting the case
2. information distributed by Commission staff and oral comments by staff
3. findings and recommendations of the committee
4. former decisions of the Committees on Compliance and Reports or of the Executive Council that may have been shared as part of the record for review
5. rationale for a committee recommendation pertaining to an institution

Without a commitment to confidentiality by all evaluators and in all aspects of the review process, peer evaluators cannot freely execute their responsibility to conduct themselves with professional integrity in accreditation activities and decisions.

**Conflict of Interest**

Commission policies provide appropriate safeguards against conflict of interest in arriving at accrediting decisions. Evaluators, including lead QEP evaluators, should not accept appointment to a review committee where conflict of interest, or the appearance of conflict of interest, exists. The Commission relies on the personal and professional integrity of individual committee members, expects them to be sensitive to potential conflicts of interest in the peer review process, and assumes they will act accordingly. If it is discovered that a conflict of interest situation may have significantly affected the evaluation of an institution by a visiting committee, the Chair of the Commission may ask that a further evaluation of the institution be initiated to determine the validity of the original findings of the visiting committee.

As examples, an evaluator would have a conflict of interest if he or she

1. is employed within a state where the parent campus of the institution is located;
2. has been a consultant at the institution within the last ten years;
3. has been an appointee of the institution within the last ten years (e.g., board member);
4. has been an employee of the institution;
5. has been a candidate for employment at the institution within the last ten years;
6. is a graduate of the institution;
7. has a close personal or familial relationship with persons at the institution or a strong bias regarding the institution;
8. is a stockholder or board member of the institution;
9. has any other relationship that could serve as an impediment to rendering an impartial, objective professional judgment regarding the accreditation of an institution; or
10. is a Board of Trustee member and has been invited to serve as chair or member of an evaluation committee scheduled to review the institution of another Board member.

Members of review committees must not give advice to or consult with the visited institution, in relation to any issues contained in the follow-up responses or monitoring reports submitted by the institution, until initial action has been taken by the Commission in connection with these issues. A committee member who violates this policy will not be used as an evaluator in the future. An institution is expected to respect the integrity of the accreditation process by not engaging any team member as a consultant, paid or unpaid, or as an employee for this period of time.

Conflicts of Interest and Undue Influence. An evaluator is expected to contact Commission staff when an attempt is made to influence the evaluator’s judgment or to influence an impending review. Examples of undue influence might include:

1. In advance of an off-site review, an evaluator is contacted by representatives of the institution to discuss the upcoming off-site evaluation;
2. A supervisor attempts to influence an evaluator reporting to the supervisor regarding an upcoming institutional review; and
3. In advance of an on-site review, an evaluator is contacted by representatives of the institution to discuss the upcoming on-site evaluation for reasons other than providing requested additional information or clarification.

Obligations Regarding Publicly-Traded Institutions

Institutions accredited by SACSCOC may be publicly traded corporations or may be owned by publicly traded corporations. The actions that SACSCOC may take concerning these institutions may affect the stock price of these corporations. This fact necessarily imposes certain obligations on SACSCOC Board Members, Staff, and Volunteers. A copy of this policy will be provided to all SACSCOC Board Members, Officers, Employees, and Volunteers upon their appointment, employment, or service.

Definitions

Publicly Traded Institution. A Publicly Traded Institution is a corporation that is or that owns an educational institution which is a member of or candidate for accreditation by SACSCOC, the stock of which is traded on any public stock exchange.

Immediate Family. An individual’s immediate family includes spouse, children, and parents.

Direct or Beneficial Ownership. Direct or beneficial ownership includes ownership in one’s name individually, through a closely held corporation or family partnership, by an individual retirement account or similar retirement vehicle, or by a trust. An individual is not considered a direct or beneficial owner of stock if that individual owns mutual funds that may own stock in a publicly traded institution. An individual is not considered a direct or beneficial owner of stock if that individual’s employer holds stock of a publicly traded institution in its endowment.

Persons Subject to this Policy. Persons subject to this policy are SACSCOC Board Members, Officers, Employees, Volunteers, and their Attorneys.

Obligations

Obligations concerning publicly traded institutions the stock of which is owned by individuals. No person who is subject to this policy may take any action or serve in any capacity concerning a publicly traded Institution the stock of which the individual or the individual’s immediate family owns directly or beneficially.

Obligations concerning publicly traded institutions subject to action by SACSCOC. No person who is subject to this policy may disclose to any person who is not subject to this policy any information concerning any action or proposed action by SACSCOC concerning a publicly traded institution except through a means that makes the disclosure available to the general public at the
same time; provided however, that SACSCOC may disclose such action or proposed action to representatives of the publicly traded institution in advance of the public disclosure.

Obligations of SACSCOC staff. SACSCOC staff shall make available to persons subject to this policy at least annually a list of all publicly traded institutions.

Participation Responsibilities of Peer Evaluators

When accepting an appointment to serve, a peer evaluator agrees to the following responsibilities:

1. Meeting Attendance. All evaluators are expected to arrive and depart on the dates and at the times specified by committee chairs or Commission staff. They are expected to participate in all scheduled meetings and conference calls.

2. Assignments. All evaluators are expected to analyze an institution’s compliance with specific accreditation standards, formulate recommendations or statements of committee findings, and write draft narrative that reflects the consensus of the committee. Fulfilling this responsibility requires completion of reading assignments, communication with other committee members and Commission staff, and professional conduct in executing the work of the Commission.

All committee members work under the leadership of the committee chair.

Document History
Approved: Commission on Colleges, December 2005
Updated in accord with the revised Principles: December 2006
Revised: SACS COC Board of Trustees, June 2009
Edited: January 2012
OFF-SITE REAFFIRMATION COMMITTEE REVIEW: An Overview of Selected Logistical Aspects (2013)

Timing

The work of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee will precede the visit of the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee and will typically occur as follows:

- Mid-March (February - beginning with the class of 2016) through early May (mid-April) off-site review for Track A institutions, which will host on-site reviews in the fall.
- Early September through early November off-site review for Track B institutions, which will host on-site reviews the following spring.

Information Received

- The SACSCOC Office of Training and Research (OTR) invites potential evaluators to serve;
- The Staff Cluster Coordinator (SACSCOC VP) sends general information about the review, a roster providing contact information for all committee members, the schedule for reviewing the institutions in the cluster, and review assignments for each committee member;
- The institutions in the cluster send their Compliance Certifications and supporting documentation;
- The SACSCOC Office of Commission Support sends information concerning hotel accommodations and a schedule for the meeting in Atlanta.

General Evaluators’ Tasks

- Make your own travel arrangements for the meeting in Atlanta;
- Review materials and engage in a thorough analysis prior to the meeting in Atlanta;
- Communicate electronically or by telephone with the other committee members and the chair;
- Post a draft of your work in the SharePoint system at times indicated on the schedule for review;
- Attend the meeting in Atlanta to review each institution and make final determinations relative to compliance;
- Participate in finalizing Part II of the Report of the Reaffirmation Committee for each institution;
- Put the expense on your expense voucher after the meeting.

Review Assignments

Review assignments provided by the Staff Cluster Coordinator (SACSCOC VP) may identify both a primary and secondary reader(s). The primary reader should contact the secondary reader(s) to discuss the review and the findings prior to drafting the text for the draft report.

When conflicting points of view occur, readers should work with each other and with the chair and staff to attempt to resolve the conflict before the meeting in Atlanta. If conflicting views persist, the rationale for each view should be presented to the entire committee in Atlanta for resolution.

Peer Evaluators’ Key Responsibilities Prior to the Meeting in Atlanta

- Review According to the Off-Site Review Schedule
  - Peer evaluators conduct assessment of compliance for each institution in the cluster according to the review schedule established and communicated by the Committee Chair.

For each institution, peer evaluators will have approximately two weeks to review and submit the draft report.

- **Getting Started**
  - Review the materials sent to you from the Commission offices. Carefully note your review assignments (they will typically be the same for all institutions in the cluster).

- **Preparing for Institutional Review**
  - Review the Institutional Summary Forms to get acquainted with the institutions included in the cluster.
  - Ensure that you have all necessary documents for each institution.
  - Note whether the institution submitted materials in hard copy or electronically or both.
  - Ensure that you can access any information provided electronically. If you have problems accessing electronic documentation, consult the institution's Summary Form for the name of the person designated to provide technical support, and contact that person. Immediately, inform both the chair of the Off-Site Review Committee and the Commission staff member about this problem.

- **Reviewing the Institution’s Compliance Certification and Documentation**
  - Apply the Principles of Accreditation and exercise your informed professional judgment in determining compliance or non-compliance.
  - Address questions or concerns about materials to the Chair of the Committee. Do not contact the institution to request additional materials that you would like to review.
  - Communicate electronically with other committee members, including the Commission staff member, as appropriate, to share your findings and consult about issues of compliance and non-compliance.

- **Drafting Review Findings**
  - Write a brief narrative for each section assigned to you explaining the rationale for marking compliance or non-compliance.
  - Post the draft in the SharePoint system.

- **Participating in a Conference Call(s)**
  - The Chair of the Committee is likely to arrange a conference call (or series of conference calls) to discuss the institutions in the cluster. If so, be prepared to discuss your preliminary findings and ask any questions you might have.
  - This is also an opportunity to call attention to any conflicting views among readers that have not been resolved.

**Peer Evaluators’ Key Responsibilities During the Meeting in Atlanta**

The meeting in Atlanta offers Committee members the opportunity to sit down together to take one final look at the compliance status of each cluster institution for each of the Commission's standards. In order for the Committee to be able to confirm its position on each of the standards in the time allotted, peer evaluators need to be prepared to:

- Present findings for each assigned section for each institution in a cogent and coherent fashion. Emphasize the documentation that convinced the evaluator that the institution is compliant or the reason(s) that you consider the institution to be non-compliant.
- Listen carefully to the ensuing discussion and modify the draft narrative as agreed upon by the entire committee. Hand these modifications to the Commission recorder so that they can be incorporated into the final report.
- Share your questions and concerns about the findings and narratives written by other committee members.

Logistical Challenges for the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee

The off-site review poses a number of challenges that are not experienced by the on-site evaluator. For example,

- Maintaining control of the myriad of details involved in the review of three institutions in the cluster, rather than just one;
- Scheduling time to review institutions over a two-month period and communicating with other committee members during the times specified on the Off-Site Review Schedule;
- Accessing materials transmitted electronically;
- Determining compliance based on paper or electronic submission of materials without benefit of direct discussion with representatives of the institution and without visiting the campus;
- Finalizing narratives for the reports of all of the cluster institutions during the meeting in Atlanta since no further review of off-site findings by the Committee takes place after the meeting.

What Happens After Review in Atlanta

Peer evaluators need to send expense voucher to the Commission office with receipts attached for reimbursement of expenses.

Peer evaluators’ work with the off-site committee is now complete. Should anyone from the cluster institutions make a contact, peer evaluators should not discuss the committee’s findings. Instead, that person should be referred to the Commission staff member (Vice President) assigned to the institution. Likewise, peer evaluators should not discuss the particulars of the off-site review with anyone who did not serve on the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.
ON-SITE REAFFIRMATION COMMITTEE REVIEW:
An Overview of Selected Logistical Aspects

Timing

On-Site Review Committee visits follow off-site review and typically occur as follows:
- Track A -- September and October following off-site review in the previous May (April).
- Track B -- February, March, and April following off-site review in the previous November

Information Received

- The SACSCOC staff member invites evaluators (by email) to serve on the committee.
- Approximately four to six weeks before the visit, the SACSCOC staff member sends a packet of information that typically contains:
  - Committee roster
  - Review assignments
  - Appropriate handbooks, forms, worksheets
  - Report of the Reaffirmation Committee, Parts I and II completed by the Off-Site Review Committee
- Approximately four weeks before the visit, the institution sends you its:
  - Focused Report
  - Quality Enhancement Plan.
- The SACSCOC staff member and/or the Committee chair sends you:
  - Information Outline for a Committee Visit
  - Tentative schedule for the visit.

Travel

Peer evaluators make their own travel arrangements and communicate them to the contact person at the institution (identified on the Information Outline for a Committee Visit) as well as to the Committee Chair.

Review Assignments

Peer evaluators are assigned Core Requirements and/or Comprehensive Standards to review consistent with their area(s) of expertise and dependent on the areas cited by the Off-Site Review Committee. The assignments are made and by the SACSCOC staff member.

It is critically important to remember that evaluation begins before the actual visit and communication with other Committee members as appropriate should begin before the visit. Peer evaluators should discuss analysis and findings relative to assigned sections with the entire Committee both before and during the visit.

Peer evaluators are responsible for presenting to the entire Committee an analysis of the institution’s compliance with the assigned Core Requirements and/or Comprehensive Standards. If the evaluator believes that the institution is not in compliance with a requirement/standard, then s/he is also responsible for formulating the wording of a Recommendation. The entire Committee will determine whether the Recommendation is warranted.

Since all decisions concerning compliance are made ultimately by the entire Committee, in addition to specific assignments, peer evaluators are expected to participate in the discussion of all accreditation issues considered by the Committee.

Peer Evaluators’ Key Responsibilities Prior to the Visit

- Note specific review assignments and identify any potential non-compliance issues relative to the assigned sections.
- Review the Focused Report submitted by the institution.
- Determine whether any issues of non-compliance appear to have been resolved.
- For issues that do not appear to have been resolved, note what needs to be reviewed on campus and who needs to be interviewed.
- Communicate desired interviews to the Committee Chair.
- Evaluate the acceptability of the Quality Enhancement Plan and draft consultative advice (if appropriate).
- Communicate with other committee members and the chair as appropriate about the analysis and findings regarding Compliance Certification and QEP.
- Develop a draft report with narrative explaining tentative conclusions.
- If the Chair schedules a conference call(s) before the visit, be prepared to discuss briefly your preliminary observations.

Peer Evaluators’ Key Responsibilities During the Visit

- Be prepared to discuss your assigned sections at the orientation meeting of the Committee.
- Review new documents provided on-site which might contain evidence establishing compliance.
- Discuss issues as appropriate with persons at the institution.
- Finalize your assessment of compliance with issues identified by the Off-Site Review Committee.
- Assess compliance if other, unexpected, issues of potential non-compliance arise.
- Review documents and talk with appropriate institutional personnel to assist in determining acceptability of the QEP. Coordinate QEP interviews and document reviews with other Committee members, especially the lead QEP evaluator.
- Finalize recommendations and narrative as appropriate for presentation to the entire Committee.
- The Exit Conference
  - At this meeting the Committee briefly presents its findings relative to compliance issues.
  - Also, this meeting provides an opportunity for the Committee, the President, and the institution’s Leadership Team to discuss the Committee's assessment of the QEP and its suggestions for strengthening the Plan. Typically this discussion is led by the QEP Lead Evaluator.

Logistical Challenges for the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee visit presents certain challenges. For example,

- Finding time during parts of three days to review both compliance issues and the QEP;
- Ensuring that recommendations and supporting narrative are clearly written and helpful to the institution in understanding why non-compliance has been determined;
- Ensuring that the narrative concerning the QEP is clear, comprehensive, and helpful to the institution.

What Happens After the On-Site Visit Ends

- Send expense voucher to the Commission office with receipts attached for reimbursement of expenses.
- Carefully, review the Committee draft report for accuracy when it is sent to you by the Chair and return it to the Chair with your edits.
- Peer evaluators’ work with the off-site committee is now concluded. Should anyone from the institution make a contact, peer evaluators should not discuss the committee’s findings. Instead, that person should be referred to the Commission staff member (Vice President) assigned to the institution. Likewise, peer evaluators should not discuss the particulars of the off-site review with anyone who did not serve on the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee.
### Managing Time

- “Off-site review takes an incredible amount of time. Do not agree to serve if you are not willing or able to devote the time to the review.”
- “Make a schedule to keep on track.”
- “Be sure your schedule can accommodate the many hours required to review 3 institutions, 6-8 hours of conference calls, etc.”
- “Set aside specific/dedicated time to spend reviewing the documents.”
- “The work is intensive and fast-paced, and you must be able to devote uninterrupted significant blocks of time during a 7-week span in order to get the work done.”
- “Manage time so you’re fair to all 3 institutions.”
- “Some [institutional reports] will take longer to review than others.”
- “You are only one of several committee members and all have schedules that are as busy as yours. You must be willing to adhere to the set schedules to get the work done.”
- “Finish your primary assignments early so you have time to be an effective secondary reader for your colleagues.”
- “Give secondary readers time to review your written opinions. A couple of days before a deadline.”
- “The committee can only move as fast as its slowest member. Deadlines are set and they are important. Realize that stuff happens in your day job and plan ahead to finish committee work accordingly.”

### Understanding the Principles

- “Make sure you know what each standard is asking.”
- “Keeping up-to-date with Commission policies, viewpoints, and current understandings.”
- “Understand deeply the intent of the SACS[COC] requirements and standards including their inter-relationships and distinctions between what they address and what they do not address.”
- “Read the Resource Manual and the SACS[COC] policy statements thoroughly before you begin.”
- “It was necessary for me to invest considerable time reviewing the Principles of Accreditation and the SACSCOC manual.”
- “Pay meticulous attention to the wording of each CR, CS, and FR, and address all aspects in each one of your assessments of compliance.”
- “Pay attention to each portion of the standard -- i.e., current, adequate, published – that all three need to be met.”

### Respecting Institution’s Mission

- “Seek to understand the institution’s mission …”
- “Open minded – Willing to consider compliance within the mission and environment of the institution.”
- “Remember that every institution does things a little differently.”
- “Do not evaluate the institution on your own institutional standards; follow the Principles.”
- “Recognize that there are many possible ways for an institution to comply with the Principles of Accreditation.”
- “…if an institution evaluates their mission every 3 years, and your school evaluates its mission every year, it is not for you to say that they are not evaluating their mission. That is their practice, and it passes the reasonableness test.”
- “[O]ur role in peer review is not necessarily make judgments about how the institution chooses to operate in those areas where it has autonomy, but is to ensure the institution has undertaken a thoughtful process to have policies, procedures, and systems that promote continuous improvement and student achievement.”
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<tr>
<th>KEY FACTORS</th>
<th>ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES FROM SURVEY RESPONSES</th>
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| **Applying Reasonable Expectations** | - “Keep an open mind and don’t be prescriptive.”  
- “Be fair, don’t have a ‘gotcha’ mentality.”  
- “Hold institution to appropriate level for compliance; not perfect but good.”  
- “Understand that the review is not a ‘graded process’, but an affirmation of meeting minimum standards of compliance.”  
- “Recognizing that we are providing constructive criticism. We’re trying to help improve our sister institutions, not nitpick them to death.”  
- “[T]his is a peer review process, and while the institution must demonstrate compliance; you want to evaluate them with the same fairness that you would want for your institution.”  
- “Use the reasonable standard when evaluating an institution. If their approach to satisfying a standard is reasonable as it aligns with good educational practice, then they should be fine. For example, if an institution evaluates their mission every 3 years, and your school evaluates its mission every year, it is not for you to say that they are not evaluating their mission. That is their practice, and it passes the reasonableness test.” |
| **Demonstrating Due Diligence in Review** | - “Willingness to read carefully and work hard to evaluate the content and quality of any report.”  
- “Read entire compliance document.”  
- “Read the complete text in your area several times over, with a good time interval between, to ensure your grasp of the material.”  
- “Be sure to read the responses to all the related standards to make sure the responses are consistent.”  
- “Review not only the sections assigned, but also related requirements or standards in the institution’s narrative. Sometimes an institution addresses in another requirement or standard what was not included in the assigned section, but perhaps should have been included.” |
| **Documenting Analysis** | - “Thoughtful consideration in documenting either compliance or non.”  
- “Keep good notes on what you find because by the time you’ve been through all of the assigned institutions things begin to run together.”  
- “Take systematic notes; write up bullets of key issues or problems...”  
- “Do your homework – be very specific in documenting your findings for each college as you go. Take your documentation with you to Atlanta to reference during the committee discussions. Being able to put your finger on specifics prevents the team from bogging down in discussions. Be able to defend your findings confidently.”  
- “I wish I had known that it is important to have detailed notes to defend my decision-making. I had some notes that were helpful but I felt underprepared for the defense of my narrative...I wish I had collected notes all along in the review process to help with the committee meeting in Atlanta.” |
| **Being Decisive** | - “Be open-minded, but ensure that the Principles are met.”  
- “The courage to be fair, but firm in applying the Principles.”  
- “It is the institution’s responsibility to make a case for compliance. It is not the committee’s responsibility to search out evidence to make the case for them.”  
- “Should not be hesitant to list Non-Compliance if case is not proven by the institution. The college will have an opportunity to correct those issues or provide proper documentation to the on-site team.”  
- “Give the institution an opportunity to make adjustments and meet shortcomings in the Focused Report, so review of QEP can be the focus of the on-site review.” |
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<td>Constructing the Report Narrative</td>
<td>- “Take time in writing the report to ensure that all items are addressed and evidence provided.”</td>
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<td>- “…the process of writing up the narrative helps to focus thought and issues; draft the narratives as soon as possible,...”</td>
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<td>- “Write with an ‘economy of words’ rather than novels.”</td>
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<td>- “In writing the reviews for each core requirement and comprehensive standard, the reviewer should indicate the evidence on which the evaluation was made without writing a ‘digest’ of the compliance report.”</td>
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<td>- “If the decision is ‘non-compliance,’ be sure your narrative includes enough detail that the institution will know exactly why you found them out of compliance. You can’t be prescriptive in what they need to do, but you should be detailed in letting them know what they didn’t do. They won’t be able to fix it if they don’t understand what’s wrong.”</td>
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<td>- “At first I assumed that my role was to edit the off-site committee’s work – I didn’t realize that mine was a separate contribution appended to previous work.”</td>
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<td>- “I know that next time I do this, I plan to better resolve the tension I felt between multiple audiences for my response: i.e., the institution vs. the onsite team. Each group needs to know different things for somewhat different purposes – so how to balance the judgment with the advice with the context for the judgment and so on. It’s a complex writing problem, though one I rather enjoyed.”</td>
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<td>- “Cut &amp; paste from a Word document so that the committee document is not locked for long periods of time when a reviewer is keying in comments directly.”</td>
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<td>- “Be sure to log off SharePoint when finished.”</td>
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<td>Seeking/Providing Feedback from/to the Committee</td>
<td>- “Willingness to listen to others’ input and arrive at a response that reflects the consensus of the committee.”</td>
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<td>- “When in doubt, ask the experienced evaluators or the chair. They have great suggestions.”</td>
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<td>- “Do not be afraid to ask questions of your chair and the vice president assigned to your cluster. Both can be immensely helpful.”</td>
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<td>- “Be present for conference calls or contact committee chair after the call if you have to miss it.”</td>
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<td>- “Use the common posting [SharePoint] to engage other reviewers and keep a list of special issues and difficulties to discuss with the chair and during conference calls.”</td>
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<td>- “Speak your mind. Don’t be afraid to make your points. May not be correct, but your opinion is as important as any other team member.”</td>
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<td>- “Communicate with secondary readers early and often.”</td>
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<td>- “Although there are primary reviewers for each item, there can be extensive discussion among the entire committee to help determine level of compliance and language to be used in the report.”</td>
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<td>- “…write up a very focused brief, this will help other members understand the issues and conclusions.”</td>
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<td>- “Expect to change your mind through interaction with other Committee members.”</td>
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<td>Logistics of Site Visit / Atlanta Meeting</td>
<td>- “Bring a laptop and the electronic files you want to reference.”</td>
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<td>- “Bring your laptop. Also, I brought some of my printed notes.”</td>
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<td>- “During my onsite reviews in the past, hard copies of all updated documentation were available to the team in the review workroom. This is not the process any longer...I would have printed out some things to bring with me before I arrived had I known.”</td>
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<td>- “I noticed another committee member who was very experienced with SACS[COC] visits also came to the site visit with a list of interview questions for each group/interviewee. I wish I had thought to do that because the site visit is so hectic and you’re often discussing multiple standards/issues with the same group. So that would have made my visit much more organized.”</td>
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