III.5 Role and responsibilities of the ERP

The ERP plays a critical role in the accreditation process. It is appointed by and reports to the COA. The ERP serves as the COA's agent during the site visit. The ERP's tasks include the analysis of the Self-Study, the verification of evidence presented in the Self-Study, the collection of additional evidence through the site visit, and the presentation of its findings to the COA in the form of an ERP Report. The COA uses this report in making decisions about accreditation of the program.

The ERP has a responsibility to report areas of both strength and limitations, any areas that may not be in compliance with the *Standards*, and to identify areas for improvement. The ERP's evaluation must of necessity be founded on the *Standards*, although areas of strength and innovation may and often do reach beyond the requirements as articulated by the *Standards*.

The Office for Accreditation website has a number of resources for External Review Panelists to help with the responsibilities of panel members. There are additional resources available for the ERP Chair.

III.5.1 Responsibilities of the ERP Chair

COA appoints the Chair of the ERP approximately 18 months before the scheduled visit. The Chair's responsibilities include the following:

- Consulting with the Program Head to facilitate the development of an effective Self-Study (See section II: Guidelines for the Self-Study and Comprehensive Review) ;
- Consulting with the Program Head and the OA Director regarding the size of panel needed for the review; program size, number of faculty, number of students, and campus locations are all part of what is considered;
- Assigning specific tasks and responsibilities to all ERP members, including any off-site members of the panel;
- Consulting with the Program Head to ensure advance notice to students, faculty, and other interested parties of the panel's visit and to arrange information sessions on the accreditation and review process;
- Scheduling and conducting one or more planning conference calls with the entire panel after receipt of the Self-Study;
- Working with the program representative to make lodging, meeting facility, meal, and local transportation arrangements that meet the needs of the ERP;
- Planning the site visit schedule. Particular attention should be paid to ensure that each full-time faculty member is interviewed by at least one panel member and that students have ample opportunity to express their views, in confidence, to the panel members;
- Arranging access to appropriate on-site documents, facilities, classes, and institutional personnel;
- Arranging access to appropriate electronic documents, campus networks, and online courses;
- Coordinating communication among ERP members before, during, and after the site visit;
- Scheduling and conducting conference calls with the entire panel during the site visit, if there are any off-site panelists, to discuss issues related to the visit;

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- Avoiding purely social activities with the Program Head, students, faculty, and other interested parties during the site visit;
- Planning and conducting the exit briefing with representatives of the program and the institution;
- Consulting with the OA Director should any serious problem arise;
- Ensuring that process is followed and professional decorum is maintained throughout the visit;
- Coordinating the development of the ERP Report;
- Submitting the draft and final ERP Reports to the school and the Office for Accreditation by the stated deadlines;
- Attending the COA meeting wherein the Committee makes the accreditation decision in order to represent the panel and respond to COA questions.

III.5.2 Responsibilities of ERP members

Panel members are appointed approximately one year before the visit. The work of the ERP members begins when they receive assignments from the Chair, review their assigned chapter(s) of the draft Self-Study, and provide feedback to the Chair, approximately four months before the visit. Intense work starts when panelists receive and begin analysis of the Self-Study that is sent to them six weeks before the site visit. Work continues through the visit and the development and submission of the ERP Report to the COA.

Responsibilities of ERP members include the following:

- Participating in one or more training sessions before the site visit;
- Reviewing the *Standards* carefully before reading the Self-Study;
- Maintaining confidentiality throughout the process in accordance with section III.5.4 and the signed confidentiality agreement;
- Preparing for and participating in panel conference calls or electronic discussions to plan the work of the panel;
- Reviewing assigned chapter(s) of the draft of the Self-Study and providing feedback to the Chair;
- Reading and analyzing the entire Self-Study carefully and thoroughly;
- Completing draft of assigned report sections before the site visit;
- Completing assignments scheduled before and after the site visit in a timely manner;
- Preparing questions and areas for further observation and evidence gathering during the site visit;
- Notifying the ERP Chair of additional evidence or documents that should be reviewed on site;
- Working cooperatively with the ERP Chair and other members of the panel throughout the process;
- Keeping a log of the people interviewed to ensure that all parties are interviewed and to use as a reference when writing the report;
- Interacting diplomatically with all program and institutional personnel, students, and other constituents;
- Avoiding making comparisons of the program being reviewed to other programs;

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- Avoiding making pronouncements regarding the program's compliance with the standards or possible accreditation decision;
- Avoiding other commitments during the site visit;
- Completing assigned sections of the ERP Report as scheduled by the ERP Chair.

III.5.3 General recommendations

Maintaining collegial relationships and a professional demeanor throughout the review process is important. Accreditation is a voluntary process. It is founded on the premise of continuous self-evaluation and improvement as well as on respect for the individuality and uniqueness of each program and institution.

Panelists are cautioned against providing friendly advice or making comparisons to their own or other institutions. Even though such information may be well intended, the role of the ERP member is as an observer and evaluator; the time taken to describe other institutions diminishes the time available to evaluate the program being reviewed. The possibility of such advice and recommendations being interpreted as requirements for accreditation is of significant concern.

III.5.4 Confidentiality

All information related to the accreditation of programs is strictly confidential. This includes, but is not limited to, all reports; Self-Studies; files; correspondence, including the Decision Document; and discussions. Each ERP member must sign a confidentiality agreement at the beginning of each review to which he or she is assigned.

The following guidelines apply to people serving on an External Review Panel:

- Confidential information must be used solely in conjunction with duties performed as a member of the External Review Panel;
- Any material or other information related to the accreditation process must be disposed of in a manner that protects confidentiality;
- Any request received by a panelist for information regarding the accreditation process or the program must be forwarded to the Office for Accreditation or to the respective program.

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