

ACADEMY EVALUATION PRE-PLANNING

An academy that is well-prepared for a full on-campus evaluation visit provides the visiting committee efficiency in its work, reducing disruptions to its evaluative focus, and gives the academy staff confidence that they are ready for the peer review by fellow educators. The following checklist can be used to help the “host” academy review with the coordinating union educational leader (and conference) the plans for the travel and work details of the visiting committee members during the evaluation visit.

CHECKLIST

ON-SITE VISIT PREPARATION:

Transportation

- Members from/to Home (airfare, mileage)
- Ground Transportation – from/to airport
 - around town as necessary during site-visit

Lodging

- Motel – Individual Rooms with Internet and Breakfast
 - Master Billing to School (except for the chair)
 - Name, Address and Map (with directions to/from school)

Meals

- Sunday – Get Acquainted Event (VC and available staff/board/etc.)
- Monday
 - Breakfast
 - Lunch
 - Supper (Union or conference hosted dinner on the town)
- Tuesday
 - Breakfast
 - Lunch
 - Supper (Small supper to allow more VC work time if needed)
- Wednesday
 - Breakfast
 - Lunch

Snacks/Gifts

- Gifts (*If done, only “small” welcome gift/basket*)
- Work room refreshments – Drinks and healthful snacks, plus chocolate!

Work Room & Equipment

- Room Location/Size – access, privacy
- Furniture – sufficient “elbow room” and comfortable chairs
- Equipment/Supplies Needed: Printer (including driver software)
 - Extension Cords, power bars
 - Paper (tablet & printer)

SELECTING A VISITING COMMITTEE

A competent and professional visiting committee is the goal for every academy evaluation visit. With a shared commitment to Adventist education, a passion for excellence, and a love for students, this group often moves beyond valued colleagues to fast friends. The visiting committee should have a diversity of experience and expertise, recognized by their peers and supervisors as capable educators. Prospective members current job assignment, past experience, certification and interest will guide in the selection and assignment of evaluative tasks.

Union educational leaders are to recruit visiting committee members in the Fall (Sep–Nov) and have them identify preferred areas of focus during the evaluation (*See: NADOE/110 Form*). These forms along with the contact information and a summary of qualifications for each member in a table like the sample below is to be sent to the visiting committee chair at least sixty days prior to the on-site visit. The addition of certification information and or past subjects taught is very helpful, especially in assigning administrators.

SAMPLE ROSTER (Auburn Adventist Academy, 9–12 Boarding)

NAME with Contact Info	INSTITUTION with Address	CURRENT ASSIGNMENT with Other Qualifications
Jim Ingersoll – Chair jingersoll@southernunion.com	Southern Union Conference 3025 E Spangle-Waverly Road Spangle, WA 99031-9703	Associate Director for Secondary Ed
Jeff Fovee jbovee@ucaa.org	Upper Columbia Academy 3025 E Spangle-Waverly Road Spangle, WA 99031-9703	Principal <i>English, Social Studies</i>
Rosa Gillham gillro@wwva.org	Walla Walla Valley Academy 300 SW Academy Way College Place, WA 99324	Business/Computer Education <i>Health, Home Ec</i>
Peter McPherson pjm49@hotmail.com	Livingstone Adventist Academy 5771 Fruitland Road NE Salem, OR 97301-3369	Physical Education, Social Studies <i>Religion</i>
Monte Saxby msaxby@gmail.com	Mount Ellis Academy 3641 Bozeman Trail Road Bozeman, MT 59715-6683	Mathematics <i>Computer Ed, Physics</i>

. . . and so on . . . and so on!!

VISITING COMMITTEE MEMBER ASSIGNMENTS

Seating a competent and professional visiting committee is the first step towards a successful academy evaluation visit. Upon receipt of a complete roster of evaluation visiting committee members the outside-of-union chair will need to thoughtfully assign members specific areas of the evaluation for which they are to become the “expert.” Members should be assigned to areas of expertise as evidenced by, (1) past employment experience and/or certification, and by (2) expressed interest. The roster of members from the union secondary leader and the member’s input form (NADOE/110 Form) will provide this information.

An assignment list is easily presented and understood in a table format. On the following pages are samples for both 9-12 and K-12 academies. You’ll note that the assignment areas are usually the ten standards for accreditation and the subject areas. The School Profile section with its data tables, the Surveys, and the Action Plans are applicable to some or all of these areas. In other words, someone assigned as the Library/Media Center “expert” will review not only that standard section, but also the profile data, student/parent surveys, and any applicable action plans to gain a complete picture of the school program in this area.

You can assign one or two members to each area. If you assign two members make sure that one is designated as the chair or lead individual responsible for submitting the writing. Assigning two highlights the need for collaboration to ensure a balanced report and the expectation that a first read and edit of each member’s writing by a fellow committee member is to occur before submission. When one member is assigned, ask members to have one of their colleagues to provide that peer review.

In one of the following samples only core subject areas and lengthy standards received an identified assistant. While providing balance in assignments for all committee members is important, it is not easily achieved. Consideration of the scope of course offerings in different subject areas, as well as the varying impact of different standards must be reviewed for each school. The size of the committee will also determine how many assignments should be given to each individual and whether the chair needs to also take some specific areas.

As the visit proceeds you may need to ask visiting committee members with previous experience to assist others who appear to be struggling with their assignment. Of course, this is also one of the reasons that it is helpful to have the local union secondary educational leader (or designee) present during the visit to facilitate the writing task.

The final visiting committee report is a product of the whole committee, individuals should not be credited (or blamed) for various sections. It must say what the consensus of the whole committee desires. Remind the members that (1) they are to be “idea contributors” more than “word smiths,” and (2) they can not own their writing so proudly that they are resistant to edits.

See the following pages for samples of Visiting Committee Assignments.

The full on-campus evaluation visit to a senior academy is to be consistent across the NAD providing a framework for similar assessments of each school. The following “typical” schedule includes meetings that are to occur in each school. Adjustments in the actual times will depend on the school schedule, size and type of school (boarding vs day, or 9-12 vs K-12) and should be somewhat aligned with the class schedule.

Evaluation Visiting Committee **SCHEDULE**

Sunday, April 2

- 4:30 p.m. Visiting Committee Introductions, Campus Tour & Orientation
- 6:00 p.m. Supper: Faculty/Staff, Board and Visiting Committee

Monday, April 3

- 8:00 a.m. Visiting Committee Meeting: Devotional & Announcements
- 8:15 a.m. Meeting with Administration & Coordinating Committee
- 9:15 a.m. Meeting with School Stakeholders (conference leaders and/or board members)
- 10:00 a.m. Class Visitation and Interviews
- 12:00 noon. Lunch
- 12:45 p.m. Class Visitation, Interviews, and Writing Report
- 5:00 p.m. Visiting Committee Meeting: The Day in Review
- 5:15 p.m. Depart for Supper ‘on the Town’

Tuesday, April 4

- 7:15 a.m. Observe School Opening - Faculty Worship, Visitation and Interviews
- 8:00 a.m. Visiting Committee Meeting: Devotional & Announcements
- 8:15 a.m. Class Visitation, Interviews, and Writing Report
- 10:00 a.m. Meeting with Student Group(s)
- 11:45 a.m. First Draft Deadline
- 12:00 noon Lunch
- 12:45 p.m. Interviews and Writing Report
- 2:30 p.m. Second Draft Deadline - Visiting Committee Meeting: Reading and Editing
- 5:15 p.m. Supper
- 6:30 p.m. Visiting Committee Meeting: Reading and Editing (*as needed*)

Wednesday, April 5

- 8:00 a.m. Visiting Committee Meeting: Devotional, Reading and Editing
- 10:30 a.m. Final Visitation and Interview Follow-ups
- 11:00 a.m. Preliminary Report to Administration & Coordinating Committee
- 12:00 noon Lunch
- 1:00 p.m. Visiting Committee Meeting: Closing Business (Editing, Majors, Term, etc.)
- 3:30 p.m. Exit Report to School Personnel, Board, and other Stakeholders

GROUP MEETINGS DURING THE VISIT

One of the factors that makes the evaluative process an effective and viable school accountability event is a consistent process using a similar schedule at all academy on-site visits. This schedule includes group meetings and group interviews with various school stakeholders which helps keep the evaluation visit on target and in focus. The purpose of the meetings is to allow the group to share its unique perspective of the school and to respond to visiting committee questions that seek deeper understanding or clarity. These questions should be primarily to validate what the school has written in the self-study report. It may also provide some insight into strengths and areas needing improvement that were not in the report but gathered by observation or interviews. It is important that the chair schedule the following group meetings.

1. **Visiting Committee Orientation** – It is vital at the beginning that the visiting committee have an opportunity to get acquainted, hear the chair's expectations, review their tasks and tour campus.
2. **Get Acquainted Supper** (or Reception) – This provides an opportunity to put faces with names. All school personnel, board members and constituency/conference leaders should be invited.
3. **Morning Worship** – We must always remember that our task is not just academic, it's about helping an Adventist school bring Jesus to the students. We will need His Spirit's guidance and wisdom.
4. **Morning Coordinating Meeting** – A short meeting to review the daily schedule and organize for upcoming group interviews, and share observations/questions for clarification. Having the principal involved will assist with integrating the visit into the daily schedule.
5. **Coordinating Committee Interview** – An important first group interview is with the small group that was responsible for producing the self-study report. The principal should be in this group.
6. **Constituency Leadership Interview** – An optional group interview would be with leaders of the board, constituent churches and local conference. This may be done individually.
7. **Student Interview** – A fun activity that includes both student leaders and randomly selected students (in one group or in two distinct groups) provides insights from direct "customers."
8. **Staff Interview** – Another group interview, which could also be done individually, is the support staff. They have a unique perspective on school programs and procedures.
9. **Preliminary Exit Report Reading** – A reading of the draft visiting committee report with the administration and coordinating committee provides the opportunity for correction of fact and a response from leadership, but promise no corrections only a thoughtful consideration of their points.
10. **Exit Report** – The culmination of the visit is to share with stakeholders a fair and balanced picture of their school as seen through the visiting committee report which is shared orally.

ORIENTING THE VISITING COMMITTEE

The success of a school evaluation visit begins with committee members that are competent, professional, compatible and objective. The selection of members is the first step in seating a committee with these characteristics. The next step is to ensure that they have a good orientation to the school evaluation task. This is usually accomplished in two parts. First, by providing written materials prior to the on-site evaluation visit and secondly, beginning the on-site visit with an in-person orientation.

The printed material that is provided before the on-site visit includes the Visiting Committee Handbook which is available on-line at www.nadeducation.org. You may send members a printed copy of the document or direct them to the digital document online. In addition, the chair should also send the following items, or verify that they are provided by local union, conference or school leaders.

1. Letter of welcome with a time and place of the first meeting (orientation)
2. Roster of visiting committee members and contact information
3. Tentative schedule for the evaluation visiting committee
4. List of assignments for each visiting committee member
5. Map with directions to the schools and hotel
6. Travel arrangements and expenses as per local union protocol
7. On-campus school map and floor plan*
8. Current class schedule*

**These may be provided at the on-site orientation beginning the visit.*

At the beginning of the on-site evaluation visit an orientation must be provided. It is best to begin this with interesting personal introductions. Committee members will be working closely together for three intensive days and need to be formed into a team quickly. Knowing about a persons professional experience and a “tidbit” of personal information facilitates this process. It is also helpful to know who has previous experience on evaluation visiting committees.

Using a Powerpoint presentation for the on-site orientation has been effective as it provides for auditory and visual learning while ensuring that no important points are missed. It covers the purpose and process for school evaluations, gives helpful hints for writing and dealing with action plans, should provide time for sharing ideas and how to handle difficult situations, and point out the supplementary material available. The orientation is not complete without a tour of the primary campus facilities with a campus map or building floor plan in hand.

GUIDELINES FOR VISITATION

Much of the information we have shared for chairs also applies to visiting committee members. In this “tip sheet,” however, I want to focus on the visiting committee member’s role on campus during the evaluation visit. As a peer review and assessment event, school evaluations require objectivity. Members must make careful observations, pose insightful questions, and communicate clearly to develop an accurate picture of the school. Difficult situations must not be avoided if the school is to have full benefit of the evaluation process. This means that members must always conduct themselves with high professional integrity and tact.

The following will provide an effective guide to a member’s role and conduct.

1. **We are guests**, not instructional supervisors or school inspectors. As a team of professionals assessing the impact of the school program on student learning, we must be polite and respectful.
2. **Avoid direct comparisons** with your school or your classroom. While we are conducting a peer review, we must compare what we observe and hear with best practice, not what we do.
3. **Seek validation** of the self-study report. To be unbiased, brief, and non-prescriptive means that our commendations or recommendations should reflect words from the report or from interviews.
4. **Be prepared** by thoroughly reading the self-study report, preparing follow-up questions and even a draft of some possible commendations and recommendations before the on-site visit.
5. **Be prompt** at all times to group meetings and individual interviews that you schedule with school staff. Plan your arrival and departure to campus so as not to miss any part of the visit.
6. **Observe classes** without taking copious notes to avoid the “feel” of a teacher evaluation. You need to grasp student interest, interaction, available resources/equipment as well as pedagogy.
7. **Know your writing assignment.** The final report of the visiting committee is a whole committee report and you have a part to add. Your assignment is only the first draft that will be edited.
8. **Team membership means** that we will share our perspective passionately, listen to others carefully, lose gracefully when they choose differently, and support fully the committee consensus.
9. **Confidentiality** is very important in an assessment environment where strengths and weaknesses of the school must be discussed openly and honestly by the committee in its deliberations.
10. **Enjoy the experience.** You’ll make friends with colleagues in Adventist education and almost always take something back with you to improve your own school or personal service.

GETTING THE “WHOLE SCHOOL” PERSPECTIVE

To achieve a balanced comprehensive view of the entire school program, from administration and instruction to facilities and finances, the committee must create a schedule that will provide time for individual and group interviews. It must also keep a record of who has been interviewed and/or observed to ensure that no school personnel or stakeholder group is unintentionally left out. A chart listing teachers and administrators has proven helpful. The chair should create and post such a list in the committee work room and have the visiting committee members sign off (initial) for every interview and observation.

It is also important to remind the visiting committee members that the perspectives of all members taken together will provide a more accurate picture of the “whole school” program. It is human nature for committee members to identify with their fellow educators, the peers who are their assigned interviewee. Likewise, it is also an inherent trait for school personnel to tell “the story” as they see it, to give their personal perspective. This is not usually the “whole story” and thus, an incomplete picture of the school. To avoid such distortion it is safer to take the input from many “eyes and ears.” Further, remind committee members that the context for evaluating the school is not with members personal experience or even their current school back home, but with what is generally accepted as best practice in education.

Observations in a class should begin when the class begins, if possible. This will reduce disruption. However, with a tight schedule you may need to see two classes in the same class period. If the teacher stops to introduce you or have you introduce yourself, be friendly and relaxed. Quickly give your name, where you are from, why you are there and ask them to carry on while you just observe. Remind the members that they are trying to get a “whole picture” for what is happening in the classroom. They should not dwell on instructional techniques for the topic of the day, but attempt to get a general feel for instructional strategies, student interest, student-teacher interaction, available resources, equipment and comfort.

For interviews with individuals and with groups it is more productive to have several pre-scripted questions, those that will help you validate what you’ve read in the self-study or observed already. It is also important that while you wish to (and should) put your interviewee at ease and show collegial understanding and empathy, you must ask about the challenging questions as well. Our goal is to support their plans for improving student learning. It should always be about improving our service to God’s kids.

WRITING THE VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT

The product of the visiting committee's evaluative work is the visiting committee report. Like any document created by a committee the goal of producing a single report from many contributing writers is challenging. To achieve consistency a standardized writing convention has been adopted to assist members in producing the visiting committee report.

On the NAD web-site (*see*: Administrative Resources in the Educator's Toolbox) there is a template for chairs to use in developing the report. The components should all be included in the order prescribed. Unless otherwise delegated, the chair is responsible for authoring the school description and history. The justification statement to support the recommendation for a term of accreditation is a crucial narrative that should be written by the chair. Committee members contribute commendations and recommendations in the areas to which they have been assigned. These are to be written according to the adopted convention that is outlined in another on-line resource entitled "Writing Tips."

As the writing begins it is helpful for the chair to assess individual members comfort and facility with writing. Having all members partner with another for feedback and editing their early drafts prior to submission will help reduce later "word smithing". Where possible, the chair should assign the union coordinator or other experienced member to mentor those that need more help. Another writing help that chairs have found useful is a word list that helps spur the writing within the style convention. Finally, remind members that the number of commendations and recommendations is not prescribed. In all areas they should strive to include only those that will be most helpful in fostering genuine school improvement.

The writing convention for commendations and recommendations has three components. Please review the following with visiting committee members during the orientation: (1) who is addressed, (2) for what reason—why, and (3) how do you know this. The first, is people by group identification, not personal names (board, administration, faculty, etc.). The second gives the specific action being done that is commendable, or that needs to be done (recommended). This is where members will have to be careful not to prescribe a certain product or program, but to describe the goal and nature of the action that has (or will) improve the school. Finally, the evidence or documentation source for the item (i.e. Self-Study Report page, interview, observation, supplementary material) is to be included.

Bringing the various writing assignments together into a completed "whole" report involves the physical collation of material as well as editorial review to provide a cohesive message. Many have found that USB drives or e-mail attachments help with transmitting the writing. But, making the report error free with a singular voice that represents the whole committee still takes significant time and energy.

CHOOSING “MAJORS” and a TERM OF ACCREDITATION

Perhaps the most challenging activity for any chair during the evaluation is leading the visiting committee to a consensus on a recommended term of accreditation. Sometimes this feels more like art, than science, and is one area where experience is a good teacher. This process is aided considerably, however, if the visiting committee spends time identifying the most important successes the school has experienced, as well as the most significant needs to make a school-wide impact on student learning. We call this review process choosing “majors.”

As the committee reads and edits the entire visiting committee draft report to give it coherence and consistency, they should note actions that have most shaped the school as captured in commendations. Simultaneously, they should also note the strategic steps that would best meet the school’s most significant areas of needed improvement as written in recommendations. While the selection of major commendations and recommendations should come from those already crafted by visiting committee members, it does happen sometimes that this review does not yield a well-written or well-focused statement. It is acceptable to get it right—to add, in limited circumstances, a “major” commendation or recommendation. Be sure to also include it under the acceptable standard or subject area.

The exercise of identifying “majors” will help visiting committee members reach a consensus on a term of accreditation. School’s with significant needs will benefit from more accountability—opportunities for guidance and support and equates to a shorter term of accreditation with more interaction with evaluators. Similarly, when the needed school improvements seem to be “fine tuning” of the program or limited to ancillary programs or practices a full term is appropriate. The members are to attest to their support for the recommended term of accreditation by affixing their signature to the form provided.

One of the following terms is to be selected for recommendation to the NAD Commission on Accreditation. Any variation may only be submitted if there has been prior consultation with a Commission officer during the on-campus visit. On the NAD web-site there is a description of each term and the possible follow-up activities. It is generally, understood that the longest term with the least follow-up activity, SIX YEARS CLEAR, is for “blue ribbon” schools. The most common term recommended, and therefore considered the standard term for the typical school is SIX YEARS With an INTERIM REVIEW.

- The terms are:
1. Six years clear
 2. Six years with an Interim Review
 3. Partial six year term (two or three years) with a Revisit
 4. Probation
 5. Accreditation denied

THE EXIT REPORT

School administrators and staff have invested a large amount of time and energy in developing their self-study report, preparing for the on-site evaluation visit, and accommodating interviews and drop-in observation visits during the school evaluation. Naturally, the school staff is eager to hear what the visiting committee thinks! At the conclusion of the formal evaluation visit an oral exit report is to be provided for school personnel and other stakeholders.

Since the visiting committee report has been carefully crafted to reflect the best judgement of the committee members it is customary to focus on a reading of the written report. However, the reading of the report in its entirety has not always proved to be a productive exercise. It has been found that reading the major commendations and recommendations will suffice if combined with the reporting of other significant and interesting information that profiles the school.

An exit report presentation of this type benefits from a Powerpoint presentation with engaging student pictures included. This exit report should consist of at least, (1) school facts and survey findings that profile the school, (2) a reading of major commendations and recommendations, and (3) an oral review of the school's action plans. In fact, when carefully chosen the data highlighted in the profile will support the major commendations—school successes, and recommendations—areas of needed improvement, that are read.

Finally, you may report the visiting committee's recommended term of accreditation as it will be submitted to the NAD Commission on Accreditation. This should be accompanied by an oral summary of the points included in the justification statement. Remind the assembled group that no term is officially granted until the Commission takes final action during its annual meeting each summer. The final term of accreditation granted may be different.

In summary, the exit report should include at least these components:

1. Express appreciation for the hospitality and cooperation provided the visiting committee
2. Acknowledge school leaders, administration and others, who helped with the evaluation
3. Re-introduce the visiting committee members and thank them for their service
4. Give a brief "profile" of the school from data in the report, surveys, and interviews
5. Read the major commendations and recommendations from the visiting committee report
5. Orally summarize the school developed action plans that will guide school improvement
6. Share the proposed recommendation for a term of accreditation
7. Pray for the school, its students, personnel and stakeholders

*Do **NOT** field content specific questions about the report in the public forum.*

POST-VISIT TASKS

Concluding the on-site evaluation visit with an exit report is not the final end of the evaluation assignment. These follow-up tasks need to be accomplished in a timely manner.

1. **Final Visiting Committee Report Submission** – Submit the final visiting committee report to:
 - a) NAD Commission on Accreditation (via the NAD Office of Education) – submit both a clean hard-copy and digital file by USB drive or separately by e-mail attachment
 - b) School evaluated – provide either a hard-copy or digital file. However, neither should contain the justification statement and recommendation of term page with signatures. This will be forwarded to the school by the Commission officer only after official action has been voted by the Commission.
 - c) Visiting committee members – share a digital copy in PDF format with each member, including the local union coordinator.
2. **Letters of Appreciation** – It is affirming for visiting committee members to hear from various leaders that their service was appreciated. Please send a letter of appreciation noting their contribution to the success of the visit.
3. **Local Union Contact** – Make contact with the local union education leader that was your liaison for the on-site visit to ensure that any/all necessary follow-up details have been addressed.

IN CONCLUSION:

In twelve separate “Chair’s Tips” sheets we have covered a wide-range of tasks for an Academy Evaluation Visiting Committee chairperson. There are many more strategies that could be shared, many more helpful tips could be added by experienced colleagues. For instance, some chairs have a good “question bank” for different group interviews, others have unique ways of selecting random students for the student group interview; some chairs distribute helpful word lists to ease writer’s block, others have unique metaphors for helping the committee build consensus on a recommended term of accreditation. The point is, we learn best when we share. We look forward to hearing what works for you.

The purpose of these tip sheets has been to make your leadership effective and efficient so that all involved in this accountability exercise will have a pleasant and productive experience for the benefit of God’s kids in Adventist schools.

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