Orientation for Evaluation Committee Chairs

ATS Commission on Accrediting
(revised December 2015)
Purpose of this training session:

Help you chair the visit so that...

- The *visiting committee* does its work well
- The *visited school* understands what is needed
- The *visiting process* is candid but collegial
- The *Board of Commissioners* can decide well

**RESULT:**

Our “publics” have some *quality assurance*

Our schools experience *quality advancement*
Aggregate for this training session:

1) Introduction of Commission staff
2) Introduction of Commission & visit documents
3) Overview of the role of the committee chair
4) Primary/typical responsibilities of the chair
   (before, during, and after the visit)
5) Concluding thoughts
Note: this orientation session assumes that you are already familiar with ATS/COA accreditation visits, Commission Standards, and so on, but recognizes that the role and work of a chair is somewhat different than that of other visitors.

As a refresher, you might find it helpful to review other orientation materials on the ATS Commission website under “Accrediting: Evaluation Visits”: http://www.ats.edu/accrediting/evaluation-visits

Contact Joshua Reinders (reinders@ats.edu) if you have any questions about these materials.
Commission Staff

Commission staff liaisons:

Lester Ruiz
Tom Tanner
Barbara Mutch
Debbie Creamer

In-house staff:

Lori Neff LaRue
Joshua Reinders
Documents (part one)

Most key documents are found on the ATS Commission Website (www.ats.edu), including:

- General Institutional Standards
- Educational and Degree Program Standards
- Notations (revised February 2014)
- Commission Policies and Procedures
- Self-Study Handbook
  
  (See especially Chapter Four, “Guidelines for Members of Accreditation Evaluation Committees,” and Chapter Five, “Guidelines for Using the Standards in Institutional Evaluation ”)
Welcome!

This site is designed to provide resources for all those interested in theological education—faculty, administrators, students, and the public.

The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) is a membership organization of more than 270 graduate schools that conduct postbaccalaureate professional and academic degree programs to educate persons for the practice of ministry and for teaching and research in the theological disciplines. The Commission on Accrediting of ATS accredits the schools and approves the degree programs they offer.
Standard 1  Purpose, Planning, and Evaluation

Theological schools are communities of faith and learning guided by a theological vision. Schools related to the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools conduct postbaccalaureate programs for ministerial leadership and in theological disciplines. Their educational programs should continue the heritage of theological scholarship, attend to the religious constituencies served, and respond to the global context of religious service and theological education.

1.1  Purpose

1.1.1  Each Member school shall have a formally adopted statement of institutional purpose. The statement of institutional purpose should articulate the mission to which the school believes it is called and define its particular identity and values. When confessional commitments are central to the identity of a school, they shall be clearly articulated in the statement of purpose. The initiation, development, authorization, and regular review of this statement is the responsibility of the appropriate governing body, and the development should involve all appropriate constituencies (e.g., trustees, faculty, administration, staff, students, and ecclesiastical bodies).

1.1.2  Theological schools that are related to colleges or universities should support the purpose of the overall institution and develop their purpose statements in relationship to the institutions of which they are a part.
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Documents (part two)

Other documents will come to you from the school, including:
• School’s self-study and appendices
• Targeted Issues Checklist (with their section completed)

And some come from the ATS office, including:
• Evaluation Committee Roster
• Report Framework
• Checklist for Effective Assessment
• Schedule Template
• (also numerous other documents providing information about the school, its accreditation history, fact sheet, and so on)
Some of the documents you will receive from ATS/COA:

ATS Institutional Fact Sheet For
Sample Theological Seminary
1/8/2013 13:15

4. Library and Information Resources
   - Annual Circulations
     - 2007-08: n/a
     - 2008-09: n/a
     - 2009-10: 5,293
     - 2010-11: 5,393
     - 2011-12: 4,025
   - Annual Reference Transactions
     - 2007-08: n/a
     - 2008-09: n/a
     - 2009-10: 550
     - 2010-11: 550
     - 2011-12: 2,652

The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

Dear Evaluation Committee Members,
Attached are electronic versions of the materials you will receive on Wednesday, October 15, 2014:
- Committee Roster
- Authorizing Action
- Report of the prior comprehensive evaluation commission
- Accrediting History
- Institutional Fact Sheet
- Targeted Issues Checklist (see explanation below)
- Report Framework
- Guidelines for Evaluation Chairs and Visitors
- Checklist for Effective Assessment

Evaluation Committee Roster

ATS Site Visit
Winsome Theological Seminary
10/12/2014 to 10/15/2014

XX Hotel
Arrival Day
Arrival schedule:
  - First Name- Information
  - 4:30: Evaluation
  - 5:45: Meet in XX
  - 6:30: Dinner
  - 8:00: Return to

Checklist for Effective Assessment

This checklist is taken from chapter six of A Reflective Guide to the Effective Assessment of Student Learning (Handbook of Accreditation, Section Eight). That guide, including this checklist, was approved by the ATS Board of Commissioners in June 2014. Effective fall 2014, evaluation committees will use this guide in reviewing school's assessment efforts during any visit for initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. The Board of Commissioners and Commission staff will also use this checklist to evaluate assessment reports.
Checklist for Effective Assessment

This checklist comes from Chapter Seven of the Self-Study Handbook, “A Reflective Guide to Effective Assessment of Student Learning”.

This checklist can also be found on the ATS website, under “Self-Study and Assessment”.

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**Checklist for Effective Assessment**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Effective assessment plan and process</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>IN PROCESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Is appropriate mandate/oversight provided by the governing board?</td>
<td>E5.6.4.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Is there a designated person or office to coordinate assessment?</td>
<td>E5.6.2.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Does plan/process reflect school's mission, ethos, resources, and size?</td>
<td>E5.6.2.1.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Do faculty play a central role in the assessment process?</td>
<td>E5.6.4.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Is the plan/process simple, sustainable, sufficient/adequate?</td>
<td>E5.6.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Is the plan/process itself assessed and changed as needed?</td>
<td>E5.6.2.4</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Committee Comments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Identification of desired goals/outcomes—for each degree</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>IN PROCESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Are goals/outcomes clearly stated for each degree program?</td>
<td>E5.6.1, 6.4.2</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Do goals/outcomes reflect appropriate degree program standards?</td>
<td>A-1.1.2</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Are goals/outcomes expressed in discernible terms?</td>
<td>E5.6.3.1.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Are goals/outcomes measurable in number?</td>
<td>E5.6.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Are goals/outcomes decided by faculty in those programs?</td>
<td>GIS 5.3.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Committee Comments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Information on the achievement of those goals/outcomes</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>IN PROCESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Does information come from both direct and indirect measures?</td>
<td>E5.6.3.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Does information include both qualitative and quantitative data?</td>
<td>E5.6.3.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Does information use some form of benchmarks?</td>
<td>E5.6.1.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Does information include data about completion/placement?</td>
<td>E5.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Does information not rely mainly on course grading or rubrics?</td>
<td>E5.6.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Is information about individual students kept confidential?</td>
<td>E5.6.3.3</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Committee Comments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. Interpretation of that information by key players, especially faculty</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>IN PROCESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Are the key players, especially faculty, engaged in assessment?</td>
<td>E5.6.4.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Do faculty have substantive conversations about assessment data?</td>
<td>E5.6.1.3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Do faculty review regularly the implications of this information?</td>
<td>E5.6.1.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Do faculty interpret data in appropriate ways in light of mission?</td>
<td>E5.6.2.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Committee Comments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. Implementation of those interpretations for meaningful improvement</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>IN PROCESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Do faculty interpretations lead to improvements in student learning?</td>
<td>E5.6.4.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Does school provide clear examples of such improvements?</td>
<td>E5.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Does board ensure results shape educational/institutional decisions?</td>
<td>E5.6.4.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Are assessment plans/process and results clearly documented?</td>
<td>E5.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Does school summarize key assessment results publicly and regularly?</td>
<td>E5.6.4.4</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Committee Comments:

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*Refers to the ATS Commission’s Educational Standard (E), unless otherwise noted below.
 Refers to section 1.2 of each degree program standard (A-1).
 Refers to the ATS Commission’s General Institutional Standard (GIS) on faculty.
Overview of the Role of Chair

Technical/procedural leadership
- Before the visit: organizing and setting the stage
- During the visit: gathering data and formulating impressions
- After the visit: ensuring a timely and helpful report

Interpersonal leadership
- Setting an appropriate tone (thoughtful, fair, objective, collegial)
- Dealing with dominant voices or antagonistic characters
- Minimizing “my school” perspectives
- Highlighting role as peer accreditors rather than as consultants or as compliance auditors
- Maintaining a spirit of confidentiality
Overview of the Role of Chair

A few other thoughts:

- Each comprehensive or initial visit is a bit different, as each school is different
- Some have specific issues or contexts that you’ll want to discuss with Commission staff (e.g., embedded schools, schools with extension sites, concurrent visits)
- Note that there are different styles of leadership and relationships possible between chair and staff liaison, chair and committee, and chair and school
- Also note that Commission staff are not “peers” but are available for consultation and guidance throughout the process
Responsibilities : Before the Visit

1. Review all materials from school and from ATS; request any additional information that might assist your work

2. Check in with Commission liaison about any unique issues for this visit (a call with the liaison prior to the committee conference call may be helpful)

3. Get to know your committee (e.g., practitioner, distance education specialist)

4. Plan writing assignments, typically based on discussion with liaison and/or committee (introduction plus institutional, educational, and degree program standards)

5. Lead conference call with liaison and committee

6. Work out interview schedule with school and liaison
A note about writing assignments:

One Possible “Division of Labor”:

1. Purpose, Planning, Evaluation
2. Institutional Integrity
3. Theological Curriculum
4. Library and Information Resources
5. Faculty
6. Student Recruitment, Admissions, Services, and Placement
7. Authority and Governance
8. Institutional Resources

NOTE: Plus Educational Standard and Degree Program Standards
(Academics usually review ES; Academics and practitioners often review Degree Program Standards)

1, 7, 8 to “Administrator(s)”
2, 6 to “Practitioner”
3, 4, 5 to “Academic(s)”
A reminder about conflicts of interest:

- Each committee member will receive a Conflict of Interest Form from the ATS office. This form must be filled out and submitted prior to participation on an evaluation visit.

- “A potential conflict of interest includes the following relationships with a school undergoing evaluation, whether the relationship involves that person or an immediate family member: employment (including past employment or prior/current application for employment); current employment at a school in a consortial relationship; enrollment as a student (past or present, including denial of admission); recipient of an award or honor; provision of goods or services; service as a trustee (past or present); regular recruitment of prospective students or staff; or any other relationship that could threaten a fair and objective evaluation.” (Board of Commissioners Policy Manual, I.C.2.d)

- No evaluation committee member who has a potential conflict of interest shall be involved in an evaluation or accrediting decision.

- If you suspect a potential conflict of interest, or have questions about the policy, please contact your Commission staff liaison immediately.
A note about the conference call:

- Held anywhere between a week and a month before the visit, depending on schedules (ATS office helps arrange this)
- Goals for the conference call typically include:
  - To get acquainted
  - To share concerns or questions that committee members have identified from an initial reading of the self-study report and other documents
  - To review the draft schedule and identify particular members of the school community with whom the team will want to meet
  - To identify any additional documents needed at this point
  - To discuss travel or other logistical issues
Responsibilities: During the Visit

1. Provide leadership throughout the interviews and meetings, as appropriate
2. Model critical, careful, and collegial engagement
3. Deal with interpersonal issues that may arise
4. Ensure Targeted Issues Checklist is addressed
5. Help team formulate its recommendations
   - Note that these are only *recommendations* to the Board of Commissioners, who may make adjustments to them
6. Lead exit meeting
A note about team recommendations:

- Revised report framework, with the “recommendations” section (last pages) usually completed on the last afternoon/evening:
  - Suggest recommended period of accreditation (provide a rationale if less than the maximum period)
  - Accurately list all degrees, extension sites, distance ed
  - Identify distinctive strengths and areas of needed growth
  - Consider which “concerns” may require specific follow-up actions to the Board or to Staff (reports and/or focused visit)
  - Notations: when a school insufficiently meets the standards

- Recommendations should be based on the Standards and Procedures and on what the team has observed in documents and on the visit; liaison does not make recommendations but may assist the team in formulating the recommendations based on what she or he has heard from the committee during the visit. Please consult with your liaison about this process.
Committee Recommendations:

IV. COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

{Note: Items in [ ] in italics need editing; items highlighted in yellow are to be deleted from final report}

The Evaluation Committee recommends to the Board of Commissioners the following actions:

1. To [reform or grant accreditation [after name of school] for a period of [number of years, not in digits] years (fall or spring 20xx)]. [NOTE: The term listed in parentheses is the date of the next anticipated comprehensive visit, one year before the period of accreditation expires.]

Rationale if less than maximum period: (describe in one or two sentences, using criteria below)

NOTE: For schools hosting a comprehensive visit for reaffirmation of accreditation, the typical period of reaffirmation is 10 years. That period may be reduced to 7 years or 5 years or even fewer, if the school has one of more notations or if there are any significant concerns about the school’s institutional stability or educational quality that could impact its long-term ability to meet any of the Commission standards (e.g., major financial issues, significant turnover in personnel, lack of future planning, anticipated changes with major institutional ramifications). If a school does not meet one or more of the Commission standards, it shall be placed on probation.

NOTE: For schools hosting an initial visit for accreditation, the typical period of reaffirmation is 7 years. That period may be reduced to 5 years or 3 years, if the school has one or more notations or if there are any significant concerns about the school’s institutional stability or educational quality that could impact its long-term ability to meet any of the Commission standards (e.g., major financial issues, significant turnover in personnel, lack of future planning, anticipated changes with major institutional ramifications). If a school does not meet one or more of the Commission standards, it shall not be granted initial accreditation.

2. To approve the following degree program(s): [list only approved degree programs, as follows]
   - Master of Divinity
   - Master of Arts in Christian Ministry (Professional MA)
   - Master of Arts (Academic MA)
   - Master of Arts (Theological Studies)
   - Doctor of Ministry

3. To approve the following extension site(s):

{NOTE: List here each approved extension site (if none, list none), including the exact mailing address for each site and an indication of what degree(s) and portion of degree(s) may be offered there. For example, the extension site at First Church (12 Main Street, Somewhere, PA, 15275) is a complete degree-granting site for the Master of Divinity degree only (or as an ongoing course site approved to offer half or more of any basic degree programs oriented toward ministerial leadership that the school is approved to offer).}

4. To grant approval to offer comprehensive distance education: [yes, no, or none]

5. To encourage that attention be given to maintaining and enhancing those distinctive strengths:
   - List two or three ongoing, distinctive, nearly unique, strengths
     a. [First strength]
     b. [Second strength]

Revised March 2014
Responsibilities: After the Visit

1. Write report sections for which you are responsible

2. Edit final committee report
   - May need to prompt committee members to get their sections to you in a timely fashion (typically within a week of the visit)
   - May need to edit sections to deal with consistent voice, uneven quality, duplications, and so on
   - Share draft with liaison (and possibly full team) before sending to school

3. Send report to school for correction of factual errors
   - Send to school within two weeks of visit
   - May need to prompt the school to return the corrected report to you in a timely fashion (within two weeks of their receipt of report)

4. Make any appropriate corrections and finalize report
   - Submit to liaison no later than a week after receiving it from school
A note about committee reports:

The committee report is generally 20-25 pages. Some tips:

- Write descriptively, not prescriptively ("the school has five faculty," not "the school has far too few faculty")
- Identify problems, not people ("current business practices do not align with..." not "the CFO should be fired")
- Be specific, not general ("the MDiv addresses well all four content areas," not "the MDiv is okay")
- Say just enough, but not too much or too little (write 1-2 pages or so per standard, not 10 words or 10 pages)
- Use inclusive language
- Make sure formal recommendations are supported (and bolded) in report, and linked to standards and procedures
- Any other suggestions should also be linked to standards and procedures
Concluding Thoughts

• See the sample committee reports (provided along with this training)

• Remember to review Chapter Four of the Self-Study Handbook (previously “Handbook of Accreditation”)

• Staff liaison is here to support you – please follow up with us if you have any questions!

• Thank you for your service to theological education!
Thank you!