

**American Bar Association
Standing Committee on Paralegals
Approval Commission
321 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL 60654-7598
Site Visit Coordinator: (312) 988-5616**

Instructions for Hosting a Site Visit

Introduction

These instructions are provided to you as the program director of a paralegal education program that will soon be evaluated by a site team representing the ABA Standing Committee on Paralegals. This document describes how to manage and prepare for the visit and what is expected of you during and after the visit. Please contact the ABA staff if you have any questions about the visit that are not covered by these instructions.

Purpose of the Site Visit

The purpose of the site visit is to determine if your program is in compliance with the ABA *Guidelines for the Approval of Paralegal Education Programs*. The responsibility of the site team is to evaluate compliance objectively and fairly, using the *Guidelines* as the sole criteria and basing its assessment on the program's written report and exhibits and on additional information attained during the course of the site visit. The site visit provides the Approval Commission the opportunity to:

- verify the accuracy of information contained in the self-evaluation report;
- review additional written information not included with the self-evaluation report or available only on campus;
- clarify matters that may have been confusing or missing from the self-evaluation report; and
- make observations about the program that can only be made by visiting the campus.

Scheduling the Site Visit and Selecting the Site Team

Before a program is scheduled for a site visit, its self-evaluation report and exhibits are carefully reviewed by the staff and one of the Standing Committee's educational consultants. Reports and exhibits must be substantially complete and accurate in all respects before the staff schedules the program for a site visit.

The site visit usually lasts a day and a half but may need to be longer if you have off-campus sites or an off-campus library to be visited. At the time that you were informed that the program would be scheduled for a visit, you were asked to provide the staff with several possible dates for the visit. A member of the staff who is responsible for scheduling site visits checks these dates and identifies potential team chairs. Once tentative dates for the visit are determined and the

team chair is selected, the other potential member or members of the team are identified and contacted. A staff member will be in touch with you while these arrangements are being made.

Once the full team and the dates are finalized, you will receive a letter confirming the dates of the visit and the names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of the team members. You will also be asked to send a complete set of the final self-evaluation report and exhibits directly to each member of the team. To allow sufficient time for review, the team must receive the materials at least three weeks in advance of the visit or the visit is subject to cancellation.

A team composed of three persons visits programs seeking initial approval. Programs seeking reapproval are visited by two-person site teams. One person on each site team is designated as chair of the site team. This person is usually a member of the Approval Commission or a specially designated past member of the Approval Commission with extensive experience chairing teams. The Approval Commission has members who are lawyers, paralegals, paralegal managers, legal administrators, and paralegal educators (who may also be lawyers or paralegals). Regardless of background, all team chairs have special training and experience on several site teams before they are appointed to chair a team.

The staff tries to identify persons to serve on teams who have complementary backgrounds to that of the site team chair. Each team usually has one person who is primarily a paralegal educator and one who works in the legal profession as a lawyer, paralegal, paralegal manager or legal administrator. An effort is also made to appoint a local paralegal who is familiar with the legal community in the area served by the program.

The staff follows guidelines in selecting team members to guard against potential conflicts of interest of any type and the appearance of favoritism. A copy of the Statement of Conduct for Standing Committee, Approval Commission and Site Team Members is attached to these Instructions.

If you object to a particular person serving on the site team to your program, you must express your objection to the Chair of the ABA Standing Committee on Paralegals in writing as soon as possible after you learn of the names of the team members. You must, of course, have a sound rationale for objecting to someone's service, such as a conflict covered by the Statement of Conduct that had not been brought to the attention of the staff.

Preparing for the Site Visit

Once the site visit is scheduled, the program director must immediately:

- Send copies of the self-evaluation report (the final revised version if revisions have been requested) and exhibits to each member of the team. All information in the report sent to the team must be current and include all revisions requested, as well as any updated information that has occurred since submitting the report to the ABA. The team must have these materials at least three weeks in advance of the visit or the visit is subject to cancellation.

- A copy of the self-evaluation report and exhibits distributed to the site team must also be submitted to the ABA headquarters in Adobe PDF© format on a CD ROM. The ABA does not require a hard copy of these final revised materials. Each PDF file must include bookmarks for relevant sections and each file should be titled in a way that clearly describes the file contents. Any material not readily available in or convertible to electronic format should be sent in hard copy to the ABA.
- Prepare a tentative agenda for the site visit and have it approved by the chair of the site team.
- Arrange for accommodations, transportation, means and workspace for the team.
- Communicate with team regarding reimbursement of expenses not otherwise directly billed to the program.
- Review all correspondence that has been sent to you by the ABA staff. Most of the questions that arise when preparing for the site visit are contained in these materials.
- Review the *Guidelines*.

Travel and Accommodations

The institution is required to pay all the expenses of the site team members, including reasonable airfare, local transportation, hotel accommodations and meals. The program is responsible for making hotel reservations for the members of the team and for coordinating travel plans with the team members. All travel and other accommodations should be made according to the guidelines in the Statement of Conduct attached to these instructions.

The program director should contact the members of the team to offer assistance in making travel arrangements to the area and locally, and to inform the members about the hotel. If possible, hotel and other travel charges should be billed directly to the program in order to minimize the amount of funds that the site team members have to expend on their own. Arrangements should be made to reimburse the members of the team for all expenses not already covered directly by the program. Please see the Statement of Conduct concerning reimbursement of expenses.

Site Visit Agenda

You should contact the team chair as soon as possible after you know who has been selected to chair the team and the dates have been finalized in order to discuss the needs of the team and the agenda of activities for the visit. You will have to set up a number of meetings and ensure that there is good attendance at those meetings, so the sooner you finalize an agenda the better. Remember that you are obligated to arrange for members of the team to visit any off-campus sites and libraries and should discuss these arrangements with the team chair as soon as possible in the process.

You should prepare a tentative agenda and contact the team chair for his/her approval before you invite anyone to meetings. The meetings should each be 45 minutes to an hour and a half,

depending on the time available and the nature of the meeting, and whether or not it is held in conjunction with a meal. Sample agendas are attached to these Instructions.

The agenda should include the following activities, as well as any additional activities specifically requested by the site team chair:

1. An initial meeting at the beginning of the site visit with the program director.
2. A meeting with the president of the institution (or his/her designated representative if necessary).
3. A meeting with the advisory committee.
4. A meeting with the faculty. (This should include all faculty members whether or not they are teaching that term.)
5. A meeting with a group of graduates. (The program director will have to select graduates to be invited and should choose a cross-section of graduates of various backgrounds.)
6. A meeting with a group of students. (If possible, you should invite a number of paralegal students to attend an open session and conduct sufficient follow-up to ensure that a good turnout is present. Alternatively, you can have the team interview groups of students in their classes.)
7. Individual meetings with members of the staff who are involved in admissions, internships, counseling and placement.
8. A tour of the facilities.
9. A tour of the library, check of the library collection, and meeting with appropriate members of the library staff.
10. Examination of records, including student files, faculty files, faculty evaluations, student transcripts and grade reports, textbooks, course syllabi, supplementary materials, tests and assignments, samples of student work, such as examinations and assignments submitted by students; placement and internship records and forms, actual graduate and employer surveys, and other documentation that the team chair may request.
11. Scheduled time for the team to meet in executive session every few hours.
12. Observations of classes in session, preferably several legal specialty classes held during the site visit.
13. Visits to off-campus sites and off-campus libraries, and meetings as appropriate with teachers, staff and students at those locations.

14. An exit meeting with the program director and such others as the program director and institution deem appropriate.

When you are planning the agenda, start by setting the meetings with the program director and the president on the morning of the first day and the exit meeting at the end of the last day, usually just after lunch, and then fill in fixed agenda items, such as scheduled classes. After that, fill in the agenda with the other meetings, carefully considering the time of the day when the various groups of persons are most likely to be available to meet with the team. You may have to set meetings early in the morning, at lunch and in the early evening in order to accommodate all the groups and individuals that the team needs to see.

Once the team chair has reviewed and approved the agenda, you should send it to all the team members and confirm the meeting dates and times with the persons with whom the team will meet. Some follow-up is usually needed to ensure good attendance at all meetings.

Team Room and Support

A conveniently located private room should be set aside for the site team's use during the visit. This room should contain the documents noted above (except those that cannot be removed from their location on campus, of course) as well as other documents that the team wants to review. The team should be able to leave their own materials safely in this room for the duration of the visit and should be able to meet and converse privately in this room.

Many teams like to start preparing the site team report while they are conducting the visit. Please ask the team members if they require a computer either to use in the room or to take back to the hotel at night, if this equipment is available at your school. Writing pads, pens and other supplies should also be available in this room.

The Site Visit

The site team utilizes several methods to conduct the site visit including interviews (individually and in groups with various people involved in the program), examination of written material, observation of classes and other activities in session, and a tour of the facilities and library, which include a check of the library collection. Be sure to meet the team members as they arrive on campus and accompany them to all their meetings. Help to keep the team on schedule.

The program director and other members of the program staff and administration are asked not be present for meetings with students, faculty, graduates and advisors. The team members will introduce themselves, explain the approval process, and begin and end the meetings and interviews.

As the program director, you should be available during the entire visit to answer questions and to assist with any problems that might arise. Team chairs make every effort to discuss and resolve potential compliance issues during the course of the visit.

The Exit Meeting

By the end of the visit when the exit meeting is held, the team will have met in executive session to discuss its observations and will have decided on the action it will recommend to the Approval Commission and on the basic content of the site team report. At the exit meeting, the team chair will tell you what the team's recommendation to the Approval Commission will be and will inform you of the findings and conclusions that will be included in its report. Any matters that may have needed clarification should have been addressed by the time of the exit meeting; therefore this meeting should not be a discussion of the merits of the team's findings.

The program director can invite anyone to the exit meeting that he or she wishes. Most program directors invite their immediate supervisor and key members of the faculty. Many also invite higher ranking college officials or other persons who played important roles in preparing for the visit.

The Site Team Report

The site visit team prepares a draft of its report shortly after the visit. A draft is submitted to the ABA staff. Once the report has been reviewed in accordance with procedures established by the Standing Committee, a draft is submitted to the program director. You are given a date by which you can request factual corrections to be made to the report. If the team misunderstood some aspect of the program or cited inaccurate information or data, this is the time for it to be corrected. However, a team will not change its findings at this point or make any changes other than purely factual ones. Information for requesting these corrections will be provided to you at the time the draft of the report is sent.

If factual corrections are necessary, a final version of the site team report will be sent to the program. If you have objections to the Recommendation of the team as to the approval status of the program, you may make them at this point in writing by way of a letter to the Chair of the Approval Commission.

The full report and any correspondence from the program concerning the team's recommendation will be included in the agenda for the Approval Commission meeting.

Evaluation of the Site Visit and Approval Process

Evaluation forms are included in the letter to you confirming the site visit. These forms should be completed and returned to the ABA staff. This evaluation asks for candid comments on various aspects of the approval process and the site visit. Please complete and return this form as it helps the staff and Commissioners to evaluate and improve all aspects of the approval process. The results are not reviewed directly by the persons who served on the teams. They are analyzed by the staff and the Approval Commission chair and discussed generally with the Approval Commission. Specific problems identified through the evaluation process are dealt with individually on a case-by-case basis.

**American Bar Association
Standing Committee on Paralegals
321 N. Clark Street
Chicago, Illinois 60654-7598
(312) 988-5618
www.abaparalegals.org**

STATEMENT OF CONDUCT
for Standing Committee, Approval Commission and Site Team Members
in the Approval
of Paralegal Education Programs

**I.
PREAMBLE**

The integrity of the ABA approval process depends upon the fair and impartial judgment of members of the Standing Committee, Approval Commission and site teams. This statement of conduct provides guidance for those who participate in the process with the aim of ensuring high standards of professional conduct. The references in this statement to the approval process include all phases of approval, including reapproval and special reports and visits.

**II.
IMPARTIALITY AND FAIRNESS**

Members of the Standing Committee, Approval Commission and site teams shall carry out their responsibilities fairly and impartially.

In order to safeguard impartiality and fairness in the ABA approval process, persons will not be asked to serve on site teams if their impartiality or fairness might be reasonably be questioned. Further, persons invited to serve on a site team who believe that they cannot be fair or impartial must refuse to serve if asked.

Further, members of the Standing Committee and Approval Commission whose impartiality or fairness might reasonably be questioned must excuse themselves from participation in formal or informal discussions of the Standing Committee and Approval Commission and from voting on the status of such a program.

Among the situations that fall into this category are:

- 1) when a person affiliated with a paralegal education program is asked to serve on a site team or to deliberate about or vote on the status of a program that recruits its students from the same pool of prospective students or places its students and graduates with the same law firms; or

- 2) when a proposed member of a site team, the Approval Commission, or the Standing Committee has a close personal relationship with or is related to someone affiliated with the paralegal education program in question.

Additional prohibitions on participation in the ABA approval process are contained in the section on Conflicts of Interest below.

III. PROFESSIONALISM

Members of the Standing Committee, Approval Commission and site teams shall conduct themselves professionally in carrying out their responsibilities in the approval process, including acting in a respectful, courteous and civil manner, being prepared for site visits and meetings, and adhering to deadlines, policies and procedures established to implement the approval process.

IV. CONFIDENTIALITY

Members of the Standing Committee, Approval Commission and site teams shall preserve confidentiality of information about programs that is learned during the course of the approval process. Members of the Standing Committee, Approval Commission and site teams must refrain from discussing information learned about programs through the approval process except as needed to carry out their responsibilities in the approval process by means of reports and discussions with members of the Standing Committee, Approval Commission, representatives of the program in question and members of the site team visiting the program in question.

V. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

1. Definitions

A. Definition of Consultant: A consultant is a person who provides advice, guidance or assistance for compensation. The following activities do not constitute consulting for the purposes of this statement: informal advice or routine assistance rendered by a site team member visiting a program; advice and assistance rendered by a person acting in the normal course of employment or service for the ABA; presentations and related discussions by a person who participates in workshops, seminars or other activities that provide information about ABA approval; advice, guidance and assistance provided by persons in the regular course of their employment by institutions that offer paralegal educational programs; advice, guidance and assistance rendered as a member of an advisory committee.

B. Definition of Affiliation with a Paralegal Education Program: Affiliation with a paralegal education program means having a relationship with the program in any capacity, including as an employee, a program director, an administrator, a staff member, a faculty

member, an alumnus/alumna, a consultant as herein defined, or a member of an advisory committee.

2. Consulting during and after ABA Service

A. Prohibition on Consulting: Current members of the Approval Commission or Standing Committee may not serve as a consultant to a paralegal education program in any matter relating to ABA approval. For a period of one year after the end of service on the Standing Committee or Approval Commission, past members of the Approval Commission or Standing Committee may not serve as a consultant to a paralegal education program in any matter relating to approval by the ABA.

B. Exception to Prohibition on Consulting: If a member of the Approval Commission or Standing Committee has an affiliation with a program that prohibits that person from serving on a site team to that program or participating in discussions or voting on the status of that program, as provided below, such person is not prohibited from having a continued affiliation with that program during or after service on the Standing Committee or Approval Commission.

3. Previous or Current Affiliations

A. Service as a Site Team Member: A person may not serve on a site team visiting any institution or branch of any institution with which he or she has been or is currently affiliated, either directly or indirectly, or with which that person has present plans to be so affiliated.

B. Standing Committee and Approval Commission Deliberations: Members of the Standing Committee and Approval Commission must excuse themselves from participation in formal and informal discussions of the Standing Committee and Approval Commission and from voting on the status of a program with which they have been affiliated or with which they have present plans to be so affiliated.

4. Programs with which Standing Committee or Approval Commission Members are Affiliated:

A program whose director, faculty member, advisory committee member, or consultant is a member of the Standing Committee or Approval Commission shall not be placed on the consent calendar of the Approval Commission.

VI. FINANCIAL MATTERS

1. Expenses of Site Teams: Transportation and hotel accommodations for site team members should be reasonable and moderately priced. In general, transportation by air should be coach class, and hotel accommodations should be business class. Under no circumstances shall the nature of transportation and accommodations influence the site team's evaluation of a program's compliance with the Guidelines for the Approval of Paralegal Education Programs.
2. Gifts: Members of the Standing Committee, Approval Commission and site teams are prohibited from accepting gifts, other than token gifts, from anyone affiliated with a program that is approved, seeking approval or reapproval or otherwise involved in the approval process. Gifts valued at under \$25 are presumed to be token gifts.

VII. COMMUNICATION OF THIS STATEMENT

A copy of this statement is provided to each person serving on the Approval Commission, on the Standing Committee, as a member of a site team and to each program applying for approval or reapproval. Members of the Approval Commission, Standing Committee are required to sign a statement agreeing to abide by this Statement of Conduct when they accept appointment. Persons not members of the Approval Commission or Standing Committee who are asked to serve as site team members are required to sign a statement agreeing to abide by the terms of this Statement when they accept appointment to a site team.

Approved by the Approval Commission, April 22, 1995
Approved, with amendments, by the Standing Committee on
Legal Assistants, May 6, 1995

Amended by Approval Commission, May 15, 1999
Approved as amended by the Standing Committee on
Legal Assistants, June 4, 1999

Amended by the Standing Committee on Paralegals,
April 28, 2005

Sample Agenda for Site Visit
(for program with day and evening classes)

DAY BEFORE THE VISIT

6 p.m. Team members arrive at hotel and meet to plan visit

FIRST DAY

8:00 a.m. Team meets at hotel and travels to institution
8:30 a.m. Team meets with program director
9:30 a.m. Team meets with college president or his/her representative
10:00 a.m. Team visits classes in session
11:00 a.m. Team tours campus
11:30 a.m. Team examines library collection
12:30 p.m. Team meets with advisory committee/luncheon meeting
2:00 p.m. Team reviews records/executive session
2:30 p.m. Team meets with placement staff
3:00 p.m. Team meets with counseling staff
3:30 p.m. Team meets with admissions and records staff
4:00 p.m. Team meets with alumni
5:00 p.m. Team meets with students
6:00 p.m. Team meets with faculty
7:00 p.m. Team visits classes in session
8:00 p.m. Team returns to hotel and meets in executive session/dinner

SECOND DAY

8:00 a.m. Team meets at hotel and travels to institution
8:30 a.m. Team completes review of records/executive session
9:30 a.m. Team meets with program director to discuss any unfinished matters
10:30 a.m. Team meets to decide on findings and recommendations/executive session
12 noon Team meets with program official(s) for final exit meeting
1:00 p.m. Team departs campus to return home

REMEMBER THAT THE FINAL AGENDA SENT TO THE TEAM SHOULD HAVE THE NAMES AND TITLES OF INDIVIDUALS WITH WHOM THE TEAM WILL MEET AND LOCATIONS OF MEETINGS.

Sample Agenda for Site Visit
(for program with evening classes only)

DAY BEFORE THE VISIT

6:00 p.m. Team members arrive at hotel to plan visit

FIRST DAY

8:00 a.m. Team meets at hotel and travels to institution
8:30 a.m. Team meets with program director
9:30 a.m. Team meets with college president or his/her representative
10:00 a.m. Team tours the campus
10:30 a.m. Team examines library collection
11:00 a.m. Team reviews student and other records/executive session
12 noon Team meets with advisory committee/luncheon
1:30 p.m. Team continues review of records/executive session
2:30 p.m. Team meets with placement staff
3:00 p.m. Team meets with counseling staff
3:30 p.m. Team meets with admissions and records staff
4:00 p.m. Team meets with alumni
5:00 p.m. Team meets with students
6:00 p.m. Team meets with faculty
7:00 p.m. Team visits classes in session
8:00 p.m. Team returns to hotel and meets in executive session

SECOND DAY

8:00 a.m. Team meets at hotel and travels to institution
8:30 a.m. Team completes review of records/executive session
9:30 a.m. Team meets with program director to discuss any unfinished matters
10:30 a.m. Team meets to decide on findings and recommendations/executive session
12 noon Team meets with program official(s) for final exit meeting
1:00 p.m. Team departs campus to return home

REMEMBER THAT THE FINAL AGENDA SENT TO THE TEAM SHOULD HAVE THE NAMES AND TITLES OF INDIVIDUALS WITH WHOM THE TEAM WILL MEET AND LOCATIONS OF MEETINGS.

Sample Agenda for Site Visit
(for program with evening classes and off-campus library)

DAY BEFORE THE VISIT

6:00 p.m. Team members arrive at hotel and meet to discuss program and plan visit

FIRST DAY

8:00 a.m. Team meets at hotel to travel to institution
8:30 a.m. Team meets with program director
9:30 a.m. Team meets with college president or his/her representative
10:00 a.m. Team tours the campus
10:30 a.m. Team travels to external library
10:45 a.m. Team meets with library staff and examines collection
11:45 a.m. Team returns to campus
12 noon Team meets with advisory committee/luncheon
1:30 p.m. Team reviews records and other documents in team room/executive session
2:30 p.m. Team meets with placement staff
3:00 p.m. Team meets with counseling staff
3:30 p.m. Team meets with admissions and records staff
4:00 p.m. Team meets with alumni
5:00 p.m. Team meets with students
6:00 p.m. Team meets with faculty
7:00 p.m. Team visits classes in session
8:00 p.m. Team returns to hotel and meets in executive session

SECOND DAY

8:00 a.m. Team meets at hotel and travels to institution
8:30 a.m. Team completes review of records/executive session
10:30 a.m. Team meets with program director to discuss any unfinished matters
11:30 a.m. Team meets to decide on findings and recommendations/executive session
12:30 p.m. Team meets with program official(s) for final exit meeting
1:30 p.m. Team departs campus to return home

REMEMBER THAT THE FINAL AGENDA SENT TO THE TEAM SHOULD HAVE THE NAMES AND TITLES OF INDIVIDUALS WITH WHOM THE TEAM WILL MEET AND LOCATIONS OF MEETINGS.

Sample Agenda for Site Visit
(for program offering courses by distance delivery)

DAY BEFORE THE VISIT

6:00 p.m. Team members arrive at hotel and plan visit

FIRST DAY

8:00 a.m. Team meets at hotel to travel to institution
8:30 a.m. Team meets with program director
9:30 a.m. Team meets with college president or his/her representative
10:00 a.m. Team visits classes in session
11:00 a.m. Team tours campus
11:30 a.m. Team examines library collection
12:30 p.m. Team meets with advisory committee/luncheon meeting
2:00 p.m. Team reviews records/executive session
2:30 p.m. Team meets with placement staff
3:00 p.m. Team meets with counseling staff
3:30 p.m. Team meets with admissions and records staff
4:00 p.m. Team meets with alumni
5:00 p.m. Team meets with students
6:00 p.m. Team meets with faculty
7:00 p.m. Team visits classes in session
Team observes class offered online or by television/video
7:45 p.m. Team interviews students at distant site using interactive television system or interviews
online students by telephone
8:30 p.m. Team returns to hotel and meets in executive session/dinner

SECOND DAY

8:00 a.m. Team meets at hotel and travels to institution
8:30 a.m. Team sees demonstrations of three on-line courses by faculty members teaching those
courses
9:30 a.m. Team logs on to classes to “observe”
10:30 a.m. Team completes review of records/executive session
11:30 a.m. Team meets with program director to discuss any unfinished matters
12 noon Team meets to decide on findings and recommendations/executive session/lunch
2:00 p.m. Team meets with program official(s) for final exit meeting
3:00 p.m. Team departs campus to return home

REMEMBER THAT THE FINAL AGENDA SENT TO THE TEAM SHOULD HAVE THE NAMES AND TITLES OF INDIVIDUALS WITH WHOM THE TEAM WILL MEET AND LOCATIONS OF MEETINGS.