



# Manual for Progress, Focused Midterm, and Special Visits

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## Table of Contents

Introduction	3
General Principles	3
Notification of the Institution	4
Conduct of the Visit	4
Preparation of the Team’s Report	5
The Team’s Recommendation to the Commission	6
The Team’s Final Report to the Commission	7
Reporting Expenses	7
Appendices	
Appendix A: Sample Title Page	8
Appendix B: Sample Confidential Letter to the Commission	9
Appendix C: Sample Midterm Visit Report	10
Appendix D: Sample Letter to the CEO for Correction of Fact	15

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## Introduction

This manual provides direction and procedures for the guidance of chairs and team members when visits are required as a means for monitoring specific developments within an institution between comprehensive evaluations. These visits include:

- The Progress visit to member institutions directed by the Commission to provide information and analysis related to issues of some urgency.
- The Focused Midterm visit to member institutions directed by the Commission to provide information and analysis focused on a number of key recommendations from the comprehensive evaluation team.
- The Special visit to member institutions requested by the institution, directed by the Commission, or initiated at the discretion of the Commission staff to provide information and analysis whenever serious issues arise which may require immediate investigation and follow-up before the institution's next regularly scheduled visit.

These visits are typically one-day visits by a team made up of two members, typically the chair of the comprehensive team and a member of the Commission or Commission staff.

The purposes of teams conducting these visits are to:

- Find evidence for the assertions in the report submitted by the college in response to the specific action of the Commission.
- Assess institutional developments that may have placed the institution out of alignment with Commission Standards.
- Provide information to the Commission on the quality of the institution.
- Report findings and recommendations to the Commission.

## General Principles

The evaluation visit is conducted in accordance with the principles and procedures for conducting a comprehensive visit. The specific principles cited below are worthy of review as the visit is conducted:

- Team members must review reports submitted by the institution and the Commission.
- Confidentiality regarding information about the institution must be maintained.

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- Objectivity and flexibility must be maintained.
  - Any conflict of interest must be disclosed.
  - Evidence and Commission standards and policies should be used in evaluating institutional responses;
  - The integrity of the accreditation process must be maintained.

### **Notification of the Institution**

Before the visit, Commission staff confer with the chief executive officer on the selection of dates for the visit. Membership of the prospective visiting team is also reviewed and agreed upon. The team chair is then expected to contact the institution to discuss a schedule for the visit as well as other arrangements. On a schedule determined by the Commission, the institution sends three copies of its report to the Commission and a copy directly to each team member. In the case of a Special visit where no report from the institution is required, the visit will occur soon after the institution is notified. In most instances, a preliminary visit by the chair is unnecessary.

### **Conduct of the Visit**

The visiting team is not expected to conduct a comprehensive review of the institution. Rather, the team is asked to seek evidence for the accuracy and relevance of the Report, or provide information on and analysis of issues which are of concern to the Commission. The resulting team report should address improvement in the areas identified by the Commission, evidence that the institution meets the standards of accreditation, and the quality of the institutional response. However, if issues have arisen since the time of the last review which indicate that the institution does not meet or exceed the standards of accreditation, and these issues are outside the original scope of the visit as outlined in the Commission action letter, the team has a responsibility to include these matters in its report and recommendation to the Commission.

The team will meet with appropriate personnel who have knowledge of the issues which gave rise to the visit, including, where appropriate, those personnel representing the major campus constituencies. Key groups may include committees that prepared the institutional report, members of the administration, academic senate or other representative faculty body, staff, students, and trustees. The team should devote most of its time and attention to the issues raised in the Commission action letter, and in the report of the previous evaluation team. In the case of a Special visit, the team will meet with those individuals and groups that the team determines can best provide needed information on the Commission concerns that were grounds for the special visit. In all cases, the team will conduct an exit interview with the chief executive officer.

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Although each team member may have responsibility for preparing a draft of appropriate sections for the team chair's use, the team chair for the visit is responsible for writing the team report. The team report should give most of its emphasis to the key issues raised in the Commission action letter, or to completion of the investigation of other serious issues, and provide as much evidence as possible for the conclusions reached by the team.

## **Preparation of the Team's Report**

The team's report should have the following format:

- 1. Cover Page (see Appendix A)**
- 2. List of Team Members, Including Titles and Institutional Affiliation**
- 3. Introduction and Overview**

This section of the report should be a brief overview of the nature of the institution and its significant changes since the comprehensive visit. The nature and purpose of the Progress, Focused Midterm Report, or Special visit, should be included. General observations about the visit should be stated as well as any commendations the team might wish to make.

- 4. Discussion of the Institution's Responses to the Commission Action Letter or Results of the Special Visit**

This is the major section of the report and should address the areas identified for the focused evaluation by noting the quality of the institution's response, the progress made, and any activities not yet completed by the institution. In the case of a Special visit, this section of the report should discuss team findings on areas of concern. This discussion should include observations made by the team, the analysis of the evidence, and conclusions reached by the team. The report should not contain the team's recommendations to the Commission since this will be contained in a separate confidential letter to the Commission.

- 5. Confidential Letter to the Commission**

The team's recommendations to the Commission are contained in a cover letter written by the team chair. The cover letter summarizes progress and/or expresses concerns or outlines specific issues which the team believes should be addressed in a subsequent report or comprehensive

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review. The letter should also contain a statement regarding the acceptance of the institutional report and any recommended change in the accredited status of the institution. For Special visits, the letter will contain only the confidential recommendation since no formal report was prepared by the institution.

### **The Team's Recommendation to the Commission**

Based on its findings, the team will make a recommendation to the Commission concerning the disposition of the institutional report in the cover letter from the team chair. The team may recommend one of the following to the Commission:

#### *Accept the Report*

The team believes that the institution has responded satisfactorily and that the standards of accreditation are now met.

The team may recommend acceptance of the report relating to certain recommendations, but ask for some further report. If the college has not adequately responded to all of the recommendations, or if additional evidence of sustained effort is felt to be in order, the team may want to recommend further follow-up. This will vary according to the situation.

#### *Not Accept the Report*

The team believes that the institution has not responded satisfactorily. In these cases, the team should recommend appropriate follow-up and cite the reasons in the cover letter to the Commission.

Based on its findings, the team may wish to make a recommendation to the Commission regarding the accredited status of the institution. For example, the team may find at the time of the visit that it has found a basis for a Commission Action to place an institution on Warning, Probation, Show Cause, or Termination, or it may make a recommendation to lift such a sanction.

The teams conducting Special visits will not make recommendations to the Commission on acceptance or non-acceptance of institutional reports, since none were prepared. They may, however, make recommendations to require follow-up reports and visits, or on the accredited status of an institution.

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## **The Team's Final Report to the Commission**

Once the team chair has completed a preliminary draft of the team report, it is forwarded to Commission staff for review with the team chair. Submission is in electronic format. The final draft is then sent for review to the team member, and then to the chief executive officer of the institution to permit correction of errors of fact. Responses from the chief executive officer are sent to the team chair who then submits a final report to the Commission.

Review and action are taken at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Commission, and the final report and a Commission action letter are sent to the institution. When the final report has been submitted, the team's assignment has been completed. Any further communication from the institution should be directed to the Commission.

## **Reporting Expenses**

Expense forms are sent to each team member. As soon as the visit is complete, reimbursement for direct expenses is made. Special expenses such as car rentals or extra travel days must be approved by the Executive Director in advance.

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## Appendix A: Sample Title Page

*(This format for the title page is to be used for reports to the Commission.)*

### Type of Evaluation Report *(Progress, Focused Midterm or Special Visit Report)*

(Name of institution)  
(Address of Institution)

A Confidential Report Prepared for the Accrediting Commission  
for Community and Junior Colleges

This report represents the findings of the evaluation team that visited

(Name of institution)

on

(date)

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Name of Team Chair	Title	Institution
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Name of Team Member	Title	Institution
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## Appendix B: Sample Confidential Letter to the Commission

Date

Dr. Barbara A. Beno, Executive Director  
Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges  
10 Commercial Blvd., Suite 204  
Novato, CA 94949

Dear Dr. Beno:

Based on the findings of the team that visited ABC Community College on March 15, 2004, the team recommends that the Commission accept the report submitted by the college.

The college is to be commended for its efforts in addressing the recommendations of the Commission. Though considerable work remains to be completed, extensive progress has been made and the college community appears to be poised to continue its efforts.

Sincerely,

Team Chair  
XYZ Community College

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# Appendix C: Sample Midterm Visit Report

## Focused Midterm Visit Report

ABC Community College  
401 River Road  
Riverton, CA 95400

A Confidential Report Prepared for the Accrediting Commission  
for Community and Junior Colleges

This report represents the findings of the evaluation team that visited

(ABC College)

on

(March 15, 2004)

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Name of Team Chair	Title	Institution
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Name of Team Member	Title	Institution
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DATE:

TO: Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

FROM: Team Chair

SUBJECT: Report of Focused Midterm Visit Report,  
ABC College, March 15, 2003

### **Introduction:**

A comprehensive visit was conducted to ABC Community College in October, 2000. At its meeting of January 12, 2001, the Commission acted to require of ABC Community College a Focused Midterm Report and visit. The visiting team, Dr. Jane Doe and Dr. Roger Smith, conducted the site visit to ABC Community College on March 15, 2003. The purpose of the team visit was to validate the Focused Midterm Report prepared by the college and to determine if sustained, continuous, and positive movement toward institutional good practice had occurred.

In general, the team found that the college had prepared well for the visit by arranging for meetings with the individual and groups agreed upon earlier with the team chair and by assembling appropriate documents in the meeting room used by the team. Over the course of the day, the team met with the President of the college, four members of the Board of Trustees, the Accreditation Liaison Officer, the Academic Senate President, members of the faculty and staff, and students.

The Focused Midterm Report and visit were expected to document improvement in the following areas:

1. The college needs to complete and substantially implement its College Facilities Plan as discussed in the team report.
2. Program review needs to be conducted systematically in all areas of the college and the results used in planning and budgeting.
3. The Board of Trustees and the college community should develop and institutionalize a governance process that clarifies roles, responsibility, authority, and accountability for each constituency.

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## **College Responses to the Team Recommendations:**

### **1. The college needs to complete and substantially implement its College Facilities Plan as discussed in the team report.**

At the time of the current visit, the college had completed the Facilities Plan begun three years ago. Completion had been delayed due to administrative changes and perceived budget constraints. In the Focused Midterm Report, the college supplied information indicating use of college committees and the assistance of a consultant in developing plans. The team was able to confirm these activities by reviewing minutes of committee meetings as well as the report submitted to the college by the consultant. The plan itself was approved by the Board of Trustees in November 1996.

The Focused Midterm report indicates that the plan has not yet been implemented due to unresolved budget issues and some lack of agreement in the setting of priorities. The team found that such was indeed the case. Furthermore, the completed plan had not received broad distribution among all constituencies of the college community, further hampering implementation and resulting in a notable lack of activity in maintaining facilities at a reasonable level.

**Conclusion:** While creation of a plan and the process whereby it was created are laudable, the college had been required by the Commission to “substantially implement” the plan and it has not done so. The college has, therefore, not fully responded to this recommendation. Since this matter had been brought to the attention of the institution in previous evaluations, continued failure respond places the college at risk of sanction by the Commission.

### **2. Program review needs to be conducted systematically in all areas of the college and the results used in planning and budgeting.**

The college has revised its program review policy to include its student services and other institutional programs. The revision, completed by a college-wide committee, includes a calendar for conducting reviews on a rotating basis and detailed processes for carrying on the reviews. The team was able to verify that the college had completed its first cycle of

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reviews, providing data and conclusions to the departments and programs affected, as well as to the college-wide planning and budget committees. The plan calls for the data and conclusions to be part of the on-going budgeting and planning activities of the college. The team also verified wide acceptance and enthusiasm for the process. At the time of the visit, the college was in the process of beginning the second cycle of reviews.

**Conclusion:** The college's Program Review Plan is a model of good practice in evaluating institutional programs and linking the results to planning and budgetary processes. Continued adherence to the proposed calendar and processes should result in program reviews being conducted systematically in all areas of the college with results used for successful planning and budgeting. The team believes that the college has met the expectations of the Commission.

**3. The Board of Trustees and the college community should develop and institutionalize a governance process that clarifies roles, responsibility, authority, and accountability for each constituency.**

At the time of the comprehensive visit, there had been a period of difficult Board meetings as Board members clashed with one another and tension between the Board and the various campus constituencies had continued to escalate. In addition, the team documented problems between faculty groups created, in part, by the lack of clarification regarding the roles and responsibilities of the Academic Senate and the faculty bargaining unit.

The Focused Midterm Report supplied information indicating that working relationships among Board members have improved with the election of two new members, and that the relationships with faculty have become more stable. This progress was verified by the team through interviews, analysis of Board minutes, and an examination of Board activities regarding updating of the Board Policy Manual and its distribution to major campus offices. In addition, the team noted that several of the Trustees, including the newly elected ones, have attended the CCCT conference this year.

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The Board, campus administration, and faculty have created committees that are developing processes for addressing the problems in governance that were documented during the comprehensive visit. While all constituencies acknowledge that the work is proceeding well, it is the consensus among these groups that much remains to be done before the college can be said to have met the expectation of the Commission.

Team interviews with faculty from both constituencies verified that, over the past year, the issues that were dividing faculty have been addressed and agreement reached on the roles and responsibilities of the Academic Senate and the union. This has been formalized in a (delineated functions agreement.) Relationships appear to be cordial and characteristically cooperative.

**Conclusion:** While the team recognizes that a good faith effort is being made regarding this recommendation, a number of questions remain unanswered and the college should continue to focus attention on issues of governance.

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Appendix D: Sample Letter to the CEO  
for Correction of Fact  
*(May be Submitted Electronically)*

Dear President:

Enclosed is a draft copy of the report of the evaluation team that recently visited your institution. This report is confidential. The Commission's policy is to permit you to correct any errors of fact contained in this draft report. Please provide me with any corrections within five days so that I can submit the report to the Commission in a timely manner.

Thank you for your cooperation and for your assistance to the team during the visit.

Sincerely,

Team Chair