



*Commission on Colleges  
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools  
1866 Southern Lane  
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097*

## **QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PLAN: LEAD EVALUATOR NOMINATION PROCESS**

### **- Policy Statement -**

An institution conducting its review leading to reaffirmation of accreditation is expected to nominate a candidate to serve on the On-Site Review Committee as the lead evaluator for the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The Commission welcomes nominations from outside the Southern Association region. The evaluator does not have to be employed by a college or university.

In order to protect the integrity of the process and of the institution, an institution nominating the QEP lead evaluator should be particularly sensitive to even the potential appearance of impropriety that could result from personal or professional relationships between the nominee and institutional personnel, either past or present. A person nominated should have special expertise in relation to the QEP and have no conflict of interest in connection with the evaluation. The conflict of interest policy of the Commission on Colleges (excerpts at the end of this document) applies to nominating the lead evaluator for the QEP.

A sitting Commissioner may not serve on a reaffirmation committee scheduled to visit an institution that employs another sitting Commissioner.

On-Site Review Committee members for reaffirmation, including the lead evaluator for the QEP, must not be called upon by the visited institution for advice or consultation in relation to any follow-up responses or reports submitted by the institution until final positive action has been taken on reaffirmation of accreditation. A committee member who violates this policy will be dropped from the evaluator registry. An institution is expected to respect the process by not engaging any team member as a consultant for this period of time.

In submitting nominations for the evaluator, the following information must be provided to the staff of the Commission on Colleges for the nominee at least three months before the on-site reaffirmation visit:

- (1) Name and contact information
- (2) Title
- (3) Institution or organization
- (4) Experience and special expertise
- (5) Rationale for selection and explanation of how the nominee's expertise pertains to the QEP and its evaluation

After the institution has confirmed the willingness of the evaluator to serve on the committee, the Commission staff member will invite the individual and will include a copy of the Commission's conflict of interest statement. In a positive response to the staff member's invitation, the evaluator will be asked to

indicate that the statement was reviewed and that no conflict of interest exists for the institutional assignment.

The institution should develop a series of questions or issues concerning the QEP that should be forwarded to the staff of the Commission for review and then to the entire On-Site Review Committee. The questions and issues should focus on those particular areas for which the institution requests the advice of the On-Site Review Committee. All of the issues and questions and suggested interviews should be sent to the Commission staff and to the committee members at least six weeks in advance of the on-site visit

All evaluators serving on On-Site Review Committees for reaffirmation receive the same nominal expense reimbursements from the Commission on Colleges (\$100 plus expenses). Evaluators may not receive additional compensation from the institution or from other sources in connection with the evaluation.

**Excerpt from “Ethical Obligations of Commissioners and Peer Evaluators”**  
(For full text, see the Commission’s Web site at [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org))

### ***Conflict of Interest***

Commission policies provide appropriate safeguards against conflict of interest in arriving at accrediting decisions. Peer evaluators, including lead QEP evaluators, should not accept appointment to a review committee where conflict of interest, or the appearance of conflict of interest, exists. The Commission relies on the personal and professional integrity of individual committee members, expects them to be sensitive to potential conflicts of interest in the peer review process, and assumes they will act accordingly. If it is discovered that a conflict of interest situation may have significantly affected the evaluation of an institution by a visiting committee, the Chair of the Commission may ask that a further evaluation of the institution be initiated to determine the validity of the original findings of the visiting committee.

As examples, an evaluator would have a conflict of interest if he or she

1. is employed within a state where the parent campus of the institution is located;
2. has been a consultant at the institution within the last ten years;
3. has been an appointee of the institution within the last ten years (e.g., board member);
4. has been an employee of the institution;
5. has been a candidate for employment at the institution within the last ten years;
6. is a graduate of the institution;
7. has a close personal or familial relationship with persons at the institution or a strong bias regarding the institution;
8. is a stockholder or board member of the institution;
9. has any other relationship that could serve as an impediment to rendering an impartial, objective professional judgment regarding the accreditation of an institution; or
10. is a Commissioner and has been invited to serve as chair or member of an evaluation committee scheduled to review the institution of another Commissioner.

Members of review committees must not give advice to or consult with the visited institution, in relation to any issues contained in the follow-up responses or monitoring reports submitted by the institution, until initial action has been taken by the Commission in connection with these issues. A committee member who violates this policy will not be used as an evaluator in the future. An institution is expected to respect the integrity of the accreditation process by not engaging any team member as a consultant, paid or unpaid, or as an employee for this period of time.

***Conflict of Interest and Undue Influence.*** An evaluator is expected to contact Commission staff when an attempt is made to influence the evaluator’s judgment or to influence an impending review. Examples of undue influence might include:

1. In advance of an off-site review, an evaluator is contacted by representatives of the institution to discuss the upcoming off-site evaluation;

2. A supervisor attempts to influence an evaluator reporting to the supervisor regarding an upcoming institutional review; and
3. In advance of an on-site review, an evaluator is contacted by representatives of the institution to discuss the upcoming on-site evaluation for reasons other than providing requested additional information or clarification.

*Adopted: Executive Council, February 2006*  
*Revised: Commission on Colleges, June 2006*  
*Edited: June 2007*