

Guidelines in the Conduct of Virtual Program Accreditation (Approved by the Board of Trustees, 26 February 2021)

Basic Assumption:

The following guidelines are provided to help schools prepare for program accreditation considering the current situation where operations are primarily conducted online, particularly when there are no face-to-face classes. With this, PAASCU will have to undertake virtual accreditation until such time that the usual mode of face-to-face accreditation visit is possible.

The guidelines are grouped based on the seven (7) major steps in the accreditation process.

1. Application for Accreditation

A school that intends to be accredited will have to write a letter of intent to apply, addressed to the Executive Director of PAASCU. Together with this letter are the completed documents that the school needs to submit to the PAASCU Secretariat (henceforth, the "Secretariat"). The documents are identified on the PAASCU website.

Usually, this is submitted either online or delivered physically to the Secretariat. A virtual accreditation suggests that submission be made through a digital storage file, preferably Google Drive. The school will be responsible for ensuring that its digital capacity is sufficient to store all files it will submit. It is advised that the actual evidence is linked to the references about them for easy access. The submission, including the instructions on how to access the file, should be communicated to the Secretariat.

The Secretariat will then review the submitted files, and if found in order, will write the school to proceed with completing the survey instrument, the soft copy of which will be emailed to the school. During this time of online delivery of services, a list of additional requirements will be requested from the school to supplement the survey instrument (see Appendix A). This review and confirmation of the school's eligibility to apply are usually completed within a month after submitting the letter of intent and the required documents.

If the school needs assistance on the application process and the entire accreditation process, it may request an orientation from PAASCU, which will schedule the same. Before, the orientation is given in a face-to-face meeting agreed upon by the school and the Secretariat. With virtual program accreditation, this will be done using the Zoom virtual meeting technology provided by PAASCU.

2. The Self-Survey

The second step is a thorough, rigorous, and comprehensive self-assessment done by the school about its educational resources and effectiveness. Such self-assessment is a major undertaking that takes at least six (6) months to complete. With the use of the self-survey

instrument and the supplement, members of area committees appointed by the administration conduct a fair and objective analysis and evaluation of how well the school has achieved its mission-vision and objectives and how it complies with PAASCU standards and requirements. For each area, a committee consisting of two (2) groups is created. One (1) group is tasked to do the analysis section, and the other group the evaluation section of the survey instrument. Stakeholder inclusion is a must in all committee groupings to ensure wider representation in the process.

The school's self-assessment is documented and presented to PAASCU in the Self-Survey Report, which records and describes the salient features that surfaced from the said evaluation. The Self-Survey Report is supported by institutional materials used as evidence to substantiate the institution's claims and serve as the basis for evaluation during the Consultancy Visit. **Appendix B** provides the list of exhibits usually requested from the school.

In an on-site visit, materials are either made part of the Self-Survey Report or presented as exhibits made accessible to the consultant during the visit. However, with a virtual accreditation visit, it is requested that these materials be converted to soft files and be made accessible online. Again, it is advised that all evidence is linked to the references about them.

All submissions will be made through a digital storage file, preferably Google Drive, and instructions on how to access the files should be communicated to the Secretariat. These should be submitted two (2) months before the consultancy visit.

3. The Consultancy Visit (only for those who will undertake a Preliminary Visit)

A school applying for a Preliminary Survey is not placed on the visit-ready list until PAASCU, through the relevant Commission, has assigned a consultant. The consultant will guide the Preliminary Visit preparations, including any improvement in the Self-Survey report and supporting materials. The consultant will also determine the school's readiness and inform PAASCU of the school's earliest time to undertake the visit.

Usually, the consultant is sent to the school to conduct the process in a day. However, the same will be done virtually using various communication channels, including virtual meeting technologies. Flexibility is encouraged in the consultancy visit's conduct, including scheduling meetings and the communication channels to be used. The school and the consultant will agree on the visit's agenda and this should be communicated by the consultant to PAASCU.

4. The Preliminary Visit

In this step, a group of five (5) to eight (8) accreditors with expertise in the program or programs to be evaluated conduct the visit. Typically lasting two (2) days and following PAASCU procedures, the Survey Team's evaluation (henceforth, Team) seeks to assess the school in light of the self-survey based on accreditation standards. The Team takes a general look at the school situation, validates the Self-Survey Report through interviews with school

stakeholders, examines supporting materials, studies the recommendations presented in the Self-Survey Report, cites what it finds to be the best features of the different areas, and makes recommendations of its own where necessary. Once the program is judged ready for a Formal Survey Visit, it is granted "Candidate" status for a two (2)-year period.

This visit is usually done on-site, and meetings are scheduled during the site visit. The meetings are conducted in plenary with all accreditors present, particularly with faculty and students, or by a group of accreditors or an individual accreditor. However, in conducting a virtual accreditation visit, the process will be done remotely.

It is suggested that all meetings during the two (2) day visit will be conducted in plenary where all the accreditors and the persons to be interviewed are present. The Team Chair will mainly facilitate the meetings, although this task can be delegated to the other team members. There may be instances; however, that the Team will decide to schedule concurrent sessions. For those meetings, the Team Chair will assign the facilitators. A 10 or 15-minute private discussion of the team will follow each meeting to highlight key points discussed and plan for the succeeding meeting. The team's private discussion will also be the time to allow the new set of interviewees to enter the virtual meeting room.

Moreover, classes will be observed virtually, and a virtual tour of key facilities may also be scheduled during the visit.

The agenda for the 2-day visit, which includes persons to be interviewed and facilities to be visited during the virtual tour, will be finalized by the Team and submitted to the Secretariat. Secretariat will then forward these to the school one (1) month before the accreditation visit. **Appendices C and D** show the proposed schedule of the 2-day visit for Basic Education and Higher Education programs, respectively.

The school will submit to the Secretariat two (2) weeks before the visit the completed template for the list of interviewees and the plan for the virtual tour, if any. **Appendix E** shows the template for the list of interviewees.

The following suggestions have to be undertaken to facilitate the conduct of the visit:

- Ensure that there is stable internet connectivity during the visit.
- The virtual meeting technology to be used is the Zoom meeting platform which PAASCU will provide. Access information will be given to the school two (2) weeks before the visit.
- The technology should be tested in advance, at least one (1) week before the school's visit with all the Team members and the PAASCU Representative present. An agreed-upon contingency plan should be crafted in the event of technology failure.

- A virtual tour of the facilities is to be included as part of the accreditation visit. The school prepares pre-recorded tour in video format which will be submitted as part of the materials to support the Self-Survey Report.

A live walk-through tour may also be scheduled during the remote visit to supplement the pre-recorded tour. This tour will include certain spaces not included in the pre-recorded tour and requested by the Team. The request should be forwarded together with the request for additional materials. A DSLR camera, a digital camera, or a top-tier phone that can shoot 4k video with good quality audio is suggested for the live walk-through tour.

- For classroom observation, the school will provide the Team two (2) weeks before the remote visit access to both the Learning Management System (LMS) containing the courses under the program being accredited and the meeting platform for synchronous classes.
- The school's IT personnel should be available for the visit's duration to facilitate the visit's conduct and address any technical challenges.
- The key personnel assigned to coordinate the accreditation visit should be accessible during the two (2) day visit.

Appendix F provides the technical specification and guidelines for the use of Zoom meeting technology.

5. The Formal Survey Visit

Before a formal survey visit is undertaken, the school must undertake another self-assessment activity using the self-survey instrument, the supplement, and the Team's Survey Report that did the Preliminary Visit. The school will undertake the same process with the additional task of stating the status of actions taken on the recommendations written on the Survey Report. All of these will be documented in the Self-Survey Report and the supporting materials.

It is suggested that the school stores the documents in a digital file, preferably Google Drive, with all evidence linked to the references about them. The access information will be provided to the PAASCU Secretariat. These should be done two (2) months before the scheduled visit, as agreed upon by the school and the Secretariat.

A two (2) month period is prescribed to give the Team sufficient time to review the report and ask for additional materials from the school. Each team member is given two (2) weeks to identify such materials, forward the same to the Chairperson of the Team, who will submit a consolidated list to the Secretariat.

The Secretariat will then forward the request for additional materials to the school, which will be given two (2) weeks to provide and download the same in the digital storage file and inform the same PAASCU Secretariat. It is to be noted that a month before the survey visit, the Self-Survey Report and the supporting materials are deemed sufficient to undertake the accreditation visit. **Appendix G** shows the timeline of the preparations before the accreditation visit.

The Formal Survey Visit is conducted by a Team of from six (6) to eight (8) accreditors one (1) year after the Preliminary Visit. The visit usually lasts for two (2) days and follows the same process of interviewing school members and examining submitted documents. The Team, however, now cites the action taken by the school on the recommendations given by the Preliminary Survey Team. As in the Preliminary Visit, the Team also identifies the areas' best features and makes its necessary recommendations. Additionally, numerical ratings are provided for each area under the survey. A program granted formal accreditation is given Level I accredited status for three (3) years.

The process and guidelines for conducting the accreditation visit will be the same as in the Preliminary Visit.

6. Initial Accreditation Status Granted

Upon favorable evaluation and recommendation by the Team and the relevant PAASCU Commission, the PAASCU Board of Trustees grants initial accreditation, which FAAP certifies, for three (3) years. Accreditation indicates overall excellence in the delivery of programs and services and that the program or institution has no major deficiencies that compromise its educational effectiveness. With this initial accreditation, the school becomes a full member of PAASCU.

The process of reviewing the Team's decision by their respective Commission and the granting of accreditation status by the Board of Trustees, including the certification done by FAAP, are done online.

7. Full Accreditation Status Granted

After the three (3)-year period, the program undertakes another self-assessment and is visited by the Team. After the initial 3-year accreditation period, a favorable re-evaluation merits the program's full accreditation for five (5) years. Full accreditation indicates optimal compliance with PAASCU standards and requirements and demonstrates the program's overall excellence in delivering programs and services. The institution or program is also granted FAAP Level II re-accredited status at this time.

The process and guidelines for the conduct of the self-assessment, the action taken on the recommendations given by the previous team who visited the school, the accreditation visit,

including the process of reviewing the accreditation decision and granting of the accreditation status will be the same as in the Formal Survey Visit.

Levels III and IV status will be granted in the future following the existing FAAP Guidelines. Submission, however, will be in soft copy and done through a digital storage file, preferably Google Drive.

There will be instances throughout the process when "special" visits are done. These are as follows:

1. Interim Visit is done when there are major deficiencies in certain areas under accreditation during the previous formal or re-survey visit. Although done for only one (1) day, the process and guidelines in this visit's conduct will follow that of a Formal or Re-survey visit.
2. Revisit, which is done when accreditation is deferred on the previous accreditation visit. The process and guidelines in this visit's conduct will follow that of a Formal or Re-survey visit.

Appendix H shows a comparative matrix of processes under face-to-face and virtual program accreditation.

Appendix I also show the accreditation fees charged to the school for the virtual program accreditation visit. The fees are socialized based on the annual membership fees contributed by the school. Please note that the fees will only be collected when doing a remote site visit.

Depending on the situation, particularly government regulations on the conduct of face-to-face classes and travel restrictions, and accreditors' availability, a blended approach can also be adopted. The process for this blended approach will have to be agreed upon by the school and PAASCU.