

EVALUATOR'S APLOMB AND DECORUM AT ACCREDITATION VISIT

A WORKSHOP FOR PROGRAMME EVALUATORS OF OUTCOME-BASED
ENGINEERING ACCREDITATION

BY

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Outcomes of the Workshop

At the end of this webinar, participants are expected to:

1. Define aplomb and decorum for accreditation
2. know typical complaints against evaluators
3. What the expected evaluator's aplomb and decorum during accreditation visit

Outline of the Workshop

1. General complaint against evaluators
2. General aplomb and decorum expected from an evaluator

Some Definitions

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1. “Aplomb” can be understood as assurance, self-confidence, composure, cool, style, ease and poise, whereas
2. “Decorum” can be understood as good manners, good behaviour, modesty, politeness, respectability, correctness, etiquette and protocol.
3. These are expected from each evaluators

General Complaints Against Evaluators

- self-centered,
- hot-tempered,
- inconsiderate,
- disrespectful,
- ignorant and
- Unprofessional
- Use your common sense

Appearance

Accreditation is an official function and as such evaluators are expected to dress formally.

Gracious

- It is a norm that evaluators will be greeted by officials /academic staffs. It is imperative that evaluators do not exhibit “over-friendly” gestures.
- Accreditation is an official function and there is the need to create an atmosphere of seriousness.

Impartial

- Sometimes friendship may blind judgment in the evaluation process.
- If that would be the situation, evaluators must shy away from volunteering for the job.
- Evaluators must also be able to make independent judgment without fear of retaliation or reprisal.

Composure

- Being an official function, it does not mean that one cannot smile nor crack jokes, BUT tread carefully so as not to overdo things.
- Prior preparation is necessary - understanding the subject matter, and the approach to be taken prior to the visit.
- You must be able to read the situation and adjust accordingly.

Composure ...

- For the head of the delegation (team leader), when confronted with a high ranking official, there is the need to rise to the occasion and not feel subdued.
- Being composed means able to communicate effectively at all situations, regardless of who the audience is.

Industrious

- Prior preparation in the form of identifying gaps from the submitted self-study report is important.
- Evaluators should not be quitters despite the heavy expectation.
- Every single minute available at the visit must be filled with efforts to determine compliance and performing advisory role.
- There should not be the wasting of time or the allowing of time to be wasted.

Patient

- Students and technicians may not be forthcoming and this may irritate evaluators. Patience is a virtue.
- Sometimes evaluators become impatient at the request of information, throwing sarcastic remarks on the late or suspicious document retrieved. Being patient with fellow colleague is also sought for.
- Evaluators may not be contented working with a new or a senior evaluator due to experience or perception.
- Tolerance is needed to ensure the evaluation team can function effectively.

Polite

- Questions to students such as, “who is your poorest lecturer?” or “what is your worst course?” may be construed as trying to bring down a particular lecturer in front of the students.
- There is a need to always think of what information is being sought.
- Evaluators must focus on identifying the extent of the learning process (delivery mode) and not leading to character assassination.

Inquisitive

- Asking the staff to explain through using words like “how”, “what” and “why” would encourage them to open up, rather than direct questions, such as, ”Have you done this?” or “Is this your work scope?”.
- Be prepared to ask the right question to the right person.
- Evaluators must be clear and concise in formulating the questions.
- Similarly, evaluators must also speak with a clear voice but not in an interrogative or aggressive manner.

Equality

- Try placing the staff or student at the same level during the meeting, not that of a “boss” and a “worker”.
- Try making them feel the importance of their contribution or participation to the program or institution.
- Give assurance that anonymity will be maintained but tell them that the issues brought forward would be highlighted to the management.
- However, evaluators must be able to distinguish between responses from disgruntled and destructive staff to that with constructive views.

Punctuality

Time management is the essence in conducting an evaluation process.

Analytical

- Accreditation is not a fault-finding exercise as some evaluators may have approached.
- No institution/program would be without shortcomings.
- Evaluators must determine how serious are the shortcomings and whether they could be clustered together and deemed as major or isolated and minor.
- Only with analytical approach from the triangulation process that one can be fair in arriving at the conclusion.

Honesty

- Evaluators may try to massage the information obtained in order to fit in with the earlier drawn conclusion.
- As an example, it may be that the standard of final examination is clearly low i.e., below the expectation for an engineering program, and yet the evaluator would prefer to hide the fact or write it in a way that may camouflage the evidence.
- This act of trying to help the program to beat the rules despite in good faith should be avoided.

Demeaning and cynical

- Statements that may offend the institution such as, “the program is only attracting below par students” or “the program has no prospective future” should not be used.
- Instead, evaluators could say “the program designed does not fit with the capability of the students enrolled” or “the institution may need to consider conducting a market study”.

Demeaning and cynical ...

- Evaluators should approach with, “what do you think of it?”, “how would you consider it?”, “have you ever thought of it?”, “don’t you think it would be appropriate?” These sentences prompt them to open up or make them think before they answer.
- The evaluator may not brag on his own university life experience.

Irritant

- The cordial relationship between the institution and evaluators should also be extended to between evaluators.
- Disrespectful or disregarding attitude among evaluators during the accreditation visit creates distrust and breakdown in the teamwork.

Irritant ...

- Evaluators are unaware that they irked their fellow colleagues due to unmindful (be it unintentionally) behavior by not allowing them to participate (asking questions) in the meeting.
- Ending a conversation requires tactfulness or else would be very irritating on the part of those trying to answer.

Unprepared

- Unprepared evaluators tend to depend on information provided by the institution on the day of visit and would not be able to focus on the real issue.
- Sometimes evaluators question on the information that has been furnished in the self-assessment report, which indicate that they may not have read the report.
- It is the task of evaluators to be able to triangulate evidences submitted in the self-study report.

Nitpickers

- Nitpickers are those evaluators that raise insignificant issues that do not influence the overall quality of the program.
- The act of following through on an issue is not nitpicking. For example, when an evaluator noticed that the final examination questions are not challenging or not examining the depth, he may pursue further with the academic staff responsible for the course.
- He would also seek clarification from other academics on their courses as well. That is an act of being thorough and fair before concluding on the seriousness of an issue.

Receiving gifts/asking for favor

- Institutions usually feel obliged to present some mementoes to evaluators at the end of the visit.
- The reason given is that we are Nigerians/Africans, it is customary to give gifts as a sign of respect or of being appreciative.
- It is suffice to facilitate evaluators in the process of accreditation.
- Evaluators should politely decline the gifts.
- Evaluators should not request for assistance for personal reasons.

Body language

- The body language is equally important, as any signs of disrespect shown by the evaluators could create an atmosphere of tension that does not help both parties.
- Introducing who you are at the beginning of a session with a pleasant smiling face rather than a stern facial expression would help to calm the situation.
- The act of throwing files or documents on the table as a result of disappointment should not occur.

Conflict of interest

- Conflict of interest may come in many ways. Some conflicts may be inevitable and at times only known during the visit.
- An evaluator may refrain himself from participating in the meeting session in the presence of the person that may induce the conflict.
- Clear conflict such as having spouse/child/close relative studying at the institution of concern, involvement as an external examiner/adviser/part-time lecturer at the institution or having disputes/dissatisfaction/poor perception with the institution should be avoided.

Unreasonable demand

- Demanding special of facilities such as accommodation/ meeting place or else “threaten” that the accreditation report could not be completed within time, tantamount to placing the establishment under ransom.
- The spirit of volunteerism and professionalism in evaluators is thus questionable.
- Commitment to accreditation visits and any programs is expected once evaluators have committed.
- Absence without valid excuse or taking the course/workshop lightly is an act of irresponsibility.

Conclusion

- Evaluators are not susceptible to commit mistakes.
- Equipped with the right knowledge on best behavior or conduct, evaluators can exhibit excellent qualities.
- Knowledge must be accompanied with practice, and practice makes perfect.
- With evaluation experience increases, an evaluator should be improving and be a leader by example.

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Thank
you



The End

Q & A