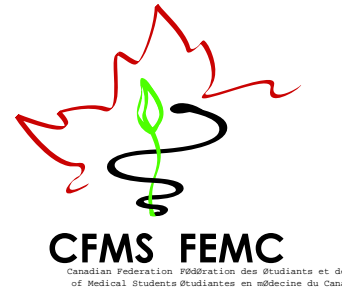


ACCREDITATION

HELPFUL TIPS



There are various stages at which medical students can be involved in an accreditation, including, but not limited to:

- Membership on Faculty Committees
- Participating in the Independent Student Accreditation Report
- Facility tours
- Facility preparation
- Meeting with the Accreditation Survey Team

Medical schools may have different ways of arranging which students will be involved in any stage of the accreditation process. Regardless of the methods used by the medical school, there are multiple opportunities for students to take a proactive role in the process. Outlined below are some tips for the organization and execution of the student role in an accreditation.

- 1) The student body should be informed by the Dean's Office about the upcoming accreditation visit. Students are heavily involved in any accreditation; students should be involved in organizing their participation in the accreditation process. Student involvement at this stage is usually limited to members of the school's medical students' organization. Their role is to liaise with the faculty for discussion and subsequent organization of the student body with regards to accreditation. This is obviously a demanding task. Given that student leaders are extremely busy even without the added burden of organizing an accreditation, it may be worthwhile for the medical students' organization to consider having additional student representation in the year of an accreditation.
- 2) The medical school will create a "Self-Study Task Force" for the internal assessment of all aspects of medical education. This task force will appoint various committees for the assessment; these committees will vary depending on the particular strengths/weaknesses of the medical school. The LCME and CACMS specify the inclusion of students on all of the Self Study Committees. Student leaders should help in the recruitment of students to serve on these important subcommittees. The faculty should be seeking the student perspective on all aspects of the program. It is important to maximize student input at an early stage to prevent surprises from being brought to the attention of the faculty (or worse, the accreditation survey team) at a later stage.
- 3) Students have to complete an "Independent Student Analysis". This is usually organized by the student organizing committee, and serves to elicit information from the student body about various issues identified as important by the task force. At this point, information from other student groups / medical schools who have recently undergone accreditation can be very useful to aid the development of an appropriate survey. As well, the survey results are taken as more accurate by the Accreditation Survey Team if there is a high student response rate. The entire medical student body should be encouraged to complete the survey – the

traditional means of prizes / draws / some other material award might help to encourage participation. Also, the survey needs to be developed and distributed in such a way that it does not become unwieldy and inefficient for students to complete, so someone with advanced technological acumen might be very useful at this point.

- 4) The final point where students are involved with accreditation is the site visit. This is a potentially dangerous time for a previously streamlined accreditation process. The accreditation team will meet with two groups of students: one group of first- and second-year students, and one group of third- and fourth-year students. Often, students are asked to volunteer for these committees. This is where the danger comes in. Students who carry a grudge about something – the curriculum, their professors, the call schedule, various hospital sites – have been known to choose the accreditation site visit as the forum to air their concerns. **THIS SHOULD NOT HAPPEN.** Nothing should be aired at the accreditation site visit that has not previously been brought to the attention of the faculty, so that steps can be taken to deal with this problem. Also, an accreditation visit is not the appropriate time or place for the broadcasting of concerns which are personally motivated. If a problem has arisen since the faculty review and assessment has been completed, the issue should be presented in the context of a new-onset problem, not as something that is an ongoing issue unaddressed by the medical school. The obvious question that arises is the process of selection of students for the site visit focus groups. The accreditation team wants to hear an unbiased and widely representative student population, not a group of sycophants parroting the virtues of their medical school, but selection of students randomly or on a volunteer basis runs the risk of selecting one or many students who will choose the site visit to air personal grievances with some aspect of the medical school. Student leaders should discuss how they wish to select student representatives for the site visit bearing these pros and cons in mind. Students should be open and honest with their discussions with the survey team. Finally, a small number of students will be asked to conduct a tour of the medical school facilities for the accreditation team. Make their lives easier, and your school look better, by compiling a tour directory and factoid booklet for the tour guides that they can read beforehand and follow, thereby providing a streamlined, uniform tour that highlights the advantages of the medical school. The Accreditation Team values the time spent with students. They commonly take the opportunity to speak to the student tour guides to better understand the student's perspective on the school.

Every school will have a different role for students in the accreditation process, but the opportunities for student involvement are basically the same at every site; it is merely a matter of taking advantage of these to maximize student input into and participation for a successful accreditation. More information about the student role in accreditation can be found on the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) website at www.lcme.org/roleofstudentsguide.pdf.

Drafted April 2008 • Sarah Johnson, University of Alberta