

Association for Behavior Analysis International
Accreditation Board

Site Visit Training Manual



ABAI
ACCREDITATION
BOARD

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Purpose

The purpose of this training manual is to describe the ABAI Accreditation Board's accreditation process and the roles and responsibilities of the Site Visitors working within it. The ABAI Accreditation Board requires that all Site Visitor applicants complete training before being approved as a Site Visitor.

The ABAI Accreditation Board

The Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) Accreditation Board is the governance body responsible for the accreditation of post-secondary training programs in behavior analysis at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels. The board's mission is to establish and implement standards for the accreditation of educational programs in behavior analysis. ABAI Accreditation Board's accreditation process is designed to encourage, support, and recognize exemplary training of behavior scientists and scientist-practitioners in the experimental and theoretical foundations of behavior analysis and in ethical and evidence-based practice, and to promote continuous improvement through voluntary accreditation. The ABAI Accreditation Board operates as a board of the Association for Behavior Analysis International and carries out its responsibilities in a manner consistent with the ABAI bylaws and articles of incorporation.

Accreditation

According to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)¹, the aim of accreditation is to assure academic quality and accountability, and to encourage improvement in higher education programs. Accreditation can also be understood as a process based on self- and peer review for quality assurance, accountability, and improvement of academic quality in higher education. Finally, accreditation is also a status granted by a recognized accrediting body to higher education programs that voluntarily submit a self-study and open their training to peer review.

ABAI Accreditation Board Site Visitors

ABAI Accreditation Board Site Visitors play a vital role in helping the board decide whether or not a training program applying for accreditation meets the ABAI Accreditation Board's standards. In fulfilling this role, Site Visitors have a number of responsibilities, including reviewing self-study documentation submitted by training programs applying for accreditation; collecting data relevant to ABAI Accreditation Board accreditation standards during an on-site visit; and collaborating with the rest of the site visit team to submit a site visit report in a timely manner.

ABAI Accreditation Board Site Visitor Qualifications

Individuals interested applying to become a ABAI Accreditation Board Site Visitor must meet one or more of the following qualifications. They must either be a faculty member in a ABAI

¹ Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2010). Recognition of accrediting organizations: Policy and procedures. Retrieved from http://www.chea.org/pdf/Recognition_Policy-June_28_2010-FINAL.pdf

Accreditation Board accredited program, an ABAI Fellow with a university or college affiliation, or a current or past Full Member of the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) Executive Council with a university or college affiliation. In cases when bilingual site visitors are needed for non-U.S. site visits, Site Visitors must be senior behavior analysts at universities who are Full members of ABAI. If needed, a professional translator will be provided at the expense of the program applying for accreditation.

Site Visitor Application Process

To become an approved Site Visitor, an applicant must first submit a current résumé or CV to the ABAI Accreditation Board Accreditation Administrator for approval and successfully complete a required site visitor training.

Participants in the Accreditation Process

There are four primary parties involved in the ABAI Accreditation Board's accreditation process. First, the ABAI Accreditation Board Members are responsible for reviewing accreditation documentation and deciding on the accreditation status of applying programs. These members are the governance body of the ABAI Accreditation Board. Second, the Accreditation Administrator reports directly to the Board Members; and, as the name implies, is responsible for handling administrative tasks assisting the other participants in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. All questions, communications and documentation related to accreditation should go through the Accreditation Administrator. Third, Site Visitors function as the ABAI Accreditation Board's eyes and ears on the ground and are responsible for reviewing self-study documentation, collecting data during an on-site visit, and submitting a site visit report. Finally, the program administrator is the point of contact for the program applying for accreditation. This individual's responsibilities include submitting a program's self-study, arranging the site visit and responding to the site visit report. These four parties work together throughout the accreditation process to verify the suitability of program's application for ABAI Accreditation Board accreditation.

Accreditation Process

ABAI Accreditation Board's accreditation process can be loosely grouped into 13 individual steps. Ushering in an accreditation application from start to finish requires that all parties involved have a clear understanding of their roles, remain in communication, and carefully attend to details and deadlines.

1. Self-Study Submission

The accreditation process begins when a training program sends the Accreditation Administrator their program's self-study and application fee(s). Upon receiving the self-study, the Accreditation Administrator verifies that all of the necessary content is included. If a self-study is not complete, the Accreditation Administrator notifies the program administrator.

2. Site Visitor Invitations

Once the self-study has been verified, the Accreditation Administrator identifies and invites at least two Site Visitors to serve on the site visit team. Site Visitors are required to sign and send back a conflict of interest form to the Accreditation Administrator when they accept the invitation to serve on the site visit team. Assignment to the site visit team may be revoked if a conflict of interest is identified. If a Site Visitor declines the invitation, or a conflict of interest is revealed, the Accreditation Administrator invites a different Site Visitor and the process is repeated until a full site team is formed.

3. Site Visit Team Formation

The Accreditation Administrator then submits a roster of the proposed site visit team and a site visit quote to the program administrator. Upon receiving the proposed roster, Program administrators have the option to object to one or more of the proposed Site Visitors on the basis of a conflict of interest by providing notice to the Accreditation Administrator within three business days of receiving the roster.

4. Scheduling the Site Visit

Once all site visit fees are paid and the site visit team is formed, the Accreditation Administrator puts the program administrator and Site Visitors in contact with one another to schedule a mutually agreed upon date for the site visit. Site visits are generally expected to last two full days with site visitors arriving the day or evening before the visit and leaving the morning or day after the visit. If a site visit team is assigned to evaluate multiple programs housed within a department during a single visit, the duration of a site visit may be extended. All communications between the program administrator and the site visit team must include the Accreditation Administrator for purposes of verification and facilitation. If a mutually agreed upon site visit date cannot be decided on because a Site Visitor's schedule is not flexible enough, the Accreditation Administrator will invite a new Site Visitor and send the updated roster to the program administrator for review. It's important to note that Site Visitors have a responsibility to select the most reasonable travel option available and may not be reimbursed the full cost of their travel if they choose a more expensive option. For example, the ABAI Accreditation Board will not reimburse car rentals but will reimburse taxi rides to and from the airport and hotel. Site Visitors are expected to make their own arrangements for travel after confirming the site visit schedule with the program administrator. Site Visitors are reimbursed by the ABAI Accreditation Board following submission of all applicable receipts and approval of the site visit report.

5. Preparation for the Site Visit

In preparation for the site visit, Site Visitors are responsible for studying the policy and procedure documents provided by the ABAI Accreditation Board, including the *Guidelines for Site Visits* document, and policies on confidentiality, conflict of interest, and document retention. Site Visitors must also review the self-study report to gain a general

understanding of the program applying for accreditation, identify points in the self-study report requiring clarification, and formulate questions and review tasks for addressing these topics during the site visit. When necessary, Site Visitors may also be asked to participate in meetings with the site team prior to the visit. Finally, Site Visitors are expected to respond in a timely manner to any queries related to their role as a Site Visitor.

6. During the Site Visit

During the site visit, Site Visitors are responsible for verifying the representations in the self-study report; collecting data by interviewing, observing, and reviewing documentation as appropriate; meeting with the other Site Visitor(s) periodically to discuss preliminary findings; and conferring with the program administration to allow the opportunity for additional information and/or clarification regarding issues and concerns identified by the Site Visitors.

During a site visit, Site Visitors are responsible for collecting data and verifying information about the applying program in the context of the ABAI Accreditation Board accreditation standards across nine domain areas. These areas include: the program's mission, curriculum, outcomes assessment, administration, resources, faculty, student services, public disclosure, and degree program. Standards are grouped within these nine domain areas. More details about each standard can be found in the *Guidelines for Site Visits* document. Additionally, during the site visit, Site Visitors are responsible for conducting an exit briefing and providing a brief summary of strengths and weaknesses under each of the standards of accreditation to the program faculty, and other administrators as appropriate. Site Visitors are also responsible for meeting with the other site visitor(s) to achieve consensus on findings and ratings pertinent to the standards of accreditation. During the visit, the Site Visit team should also begin drafting their report using the ABAI Accreditation Board's site visit report template that contains pertinent facts that outline areas where the program has met, has not met, or has exceeded the ABAI Accreditation Board's accreditation standards. Finally, each Site Visitor is responsible for conducting the site visit in all respects in accordance with the *Guidelines for Site Visits* and other policies and procedures of the ABAI Accreditation Board.

When conducting a site visit, Site Visitors are representing the ABAI Accreditation Board on official business. In this role, Site Visitors are expected to collect data relevant to the ABAI Accreditation Board accreditation standards. Site Visitors should not share personal opinions about the likelihood of the program being accredited by the ABAI Accreditation Board. Additionally, Site Visitors will be meeting with faculty and administrators who may gain a poor impression of the ABAI Accreditation Board and the applying program if its representatives fail to dress and present themselves professionally. To help ensure the site visit team gives a positive impression during these meetings, the ABAI Accreditation Board requests that Site Visitors wear professional attire during their site visit and avoid casual wear. At the conclusion of a site visit, Site Visitors are expected to

conduct an exit briefing and provide a brief summary of the strengths and weaknesses under each accreditation standard. At no time should Site Visitors provide personal judgments and opinions about the quality of the program they are visiting. Finally, Site Visitors are expected to begin drafting their site visit report with their site team colleagues during the visit. This may include setting up working dinners or evening meetings. At no time should Site Visitors socialize with program representatives when it is outside the scope of collecting data related to accreditation. For example, attending a luncheon sponsored by students for purposes of interviewing them about their experience with the applying program is appropriate. However, it would be inappropriate to meet up with faculty after the site visit for dinner or drinks.

7. After the Site Visit

After the site visit is completed, the site visit team reaches consensus and submits a site visit report to the Accreditation Administrator within 30 days. The Accreditation Administrator then verifies that the site visit report fits the ABAI Accreditation Board's reporting template and, if necessary, requests modifications from the site visit team before approving. After approving the site visit report, the Accreditation Administrator sends a survey to each member of the site visit team in an effort to collect information about their experiences during the visit. Finally, Site Visitors are reimbursed for travel, lodging and per diem after submitting the approved site visit report and all applicable receipts (e.g., flight, hotel).

8. Sharing the Site Visit Report

After the site visit report is submitted and approved in the ABAI Accreditation Board's reporting template, the Accreditation Administrator sends the report to the program administrator within thirty days of the visit.

9. Response to the Site Visit Report

Within 30 days of receiving the site visit report, the program administrator sends a written response back to the Accreditation Administrator. In the written response the program administrator should include any comments regarding the site visit report, a narrative description of its plans to address any concerns raised in the report about compliance with standards and policies, documentation of corrective action where required, and a response to any recommendations for improvements to the program. Upon written request from the program administrator and upon good cause shown, the Accreditation Administrator may extend the period for responding an additional thirty days.

10. Document Submission to the ABAI Accreditation Board Members

After receiving the program administrator's response to the site visit report, the Accreditation Administrator shares both documents with the Behavior Analysis Accreditation Board Members. The Accreditation Administrator also assigns two ABAI Accreditation Board Members to serve as the primary and secondary reader for these

documents making them responsible for presenting the report at the next ABAI Accreditation Board meeting.

11. Accreditation Decisions

During the next ABAI Accreditation Board meeting, the site visit report and the program administrator's response is reviewed by the ABAI Accreditation Board Members and an accreditation decision is made. ABAI Accreditation Board Members may vote to grant accreditation or re-accreditation, grant provisional accreditation, defer their decision, deny accreditation, or withdraw accreditation.

12. Notification of Accreditation Decision

After a decision has been made, the Accreditation Administrator notifies the program administrator and the site visit team. If a decision is unfavorable, program administrators have the option, at their expense, to appeal the ABAI Accreditation Board's decision.

13. Public Disclosure of Accreditation Status

If a program has been approved for accreditation or re-accreditation, the Accreditation Administrator sends the program administrator the annual report form in preparation for the following year, all applicable accreditation seals, and the ABAI Accreditation Board's policy on public disclosure of accreditation status.

The Importance of Accreditation

Through external peer review conducted by qualified Site Visitors, accreditation encourages confidence in a program's educational activities. Behavior analysts should support accreditation as it offers the field protection against fraud and abuse from programs offering sub-standard training in the field. Site Visitors serve on the front line of this effort and are a much needed resources for the ABAI Accreditation Board to achieve its mission. Eligible behavior analysts interested in supporting the ABAI Accreditation Board's mission by applying to become a Site Visitor should contact the ABAI Education Manager, Jenna Mrljak, at jmrljak@abainternational.org.