# MEDICAL SCHOOL HOTLINE

# Liaison Committee on Medical Education Accreditation: Part I: The Accreditation Process

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The John A. Burns School of Medicine at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa is scheduled to undergo its Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) accreditation visit in early 2017. This article is the first in a series that will address various aspects of the LCME accreditation process. In this initial installment, we will provide an overview of the LCME accreditation process — from preparation and organization through the actual site visit and notification of the LCME accreditation decision. The goal is provide a preview of the important work that will need to be done in preparation of the upcoming accreditation site visit.

Future articles in this series will take a more detailed look at a number of related accreditation issues. These will include descriptions of the JABSOM Graduation Objectives, Educational Philosophy, Program Evaluation process, Student Wellness programs, Pipeline programs, Faculty Development, Curriculum Management, and Clinical Supervision. We anticipate that these will be published here in the *Hawai'i Journal of Medicine and Public Health* on alternate months moving forward.

*"Imagine you are sitting in your office reading e-mail. A message appears in your in-tray with the subject "LCME Site Visit." The message says that JABSOM's accreditation visit will take place from January 29th – February 1st in the year 2017. You reflect on the importance of LCME accreditation and the completion of some important tasks such as the Data Collection Instrument (DCI), the Independent Student Analysis (ISA), and the Self-Study Summary. You recall there are 12 LCME accreditation standards."*

## The Importance of LCME Accreditation

While accreditation is considered a voluntary process, in reality, it is essential for all US medical schools for the following reasons. Within the United States and Canada, medical students or graduates from LCME-accredited programs are allowed to sit for the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE). Graduation from an LCME-accredited medical school and passing the USMLE exam are accepted as prerequisites for licensing in most states. Graduates of LCME-accredited schools are eligible for residency programs accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). Finally, accreditation by the LCME establishes eligibility for select federal grants and programs such as Title VII student loan programs.[1,2]

## The LCME Accreditation Standards

There are twelve LCME standards, each encompassing numerous sub-standards that schools must meet.[3]

Standard 1: Mission, Planning, Organization, and Integrity
Standard 2: Leadership and Administration
Standard 3: Academic and Learning Environments
Standard 4: Faculty Preparation, Productivity, Participation, and Policies
Standard 5: Educational Resources and Infrastructure
Standard 6: Competencies, Curricular Objectives, and Curricular Design
Standard 7: Curricular Content
Standard 8: Curricular Management, Evaluation, and Enhancement
Standard 9: Teaching, Supervision, Assessment, and Student and Patient Safety
Standard 10: Medical Student Selection, Assignment, and Progress
Standard 11: Medical Student Academic Support, Career Advising, and Records
Standard 12: Medical Student Health Services, Personal Counseling, and Financial Aid Services

## The Data Collection Instrument

The Data Collection Instrument (DCI), previously called the educational database, consists of an extensive list of questions that require narrative responses and tables requiring completion. The questions are related to each of the standards. The DCI report must be completed by an agreed upon date and forwarded to the LCME accreditation team which reviews it prior to arriving at the host school. To illustrate the depth and breadth of DCI questions, some examples are shown below.[4]

### Standard 1.1: Strategic Planning and Continuous Quality Improvement
*A medical school engages in ongoing planning and continuous quality improvement processes that establish short and long-term*

*programmatic goals, result in the achievement of measurable outcomes that are used to improve programmatic quality, and ensure effective monitoring of the medical education program's compliance with accreditation standards.*

- Provide the mission and vision statements of the medical school.

- Describe the process used by the medical school to establish its most recent strategic plan, including the school's mission, vision, goals, and associated outcomes. How often is the strategic plan reviewed and/or revised?

- Describe how and by whom the outcomes of the school's strategic plan are monitored.

- Describe how the medical school monitors ongoing compliance with LCME accreditation standards. The response should state which standards are monitored, how often compliance is reviewed, what data sources are used to monitor compliance, and which individual or groups receive the results.

**Standard 6.3: Self-Directed and Life-Long Learning**
*The faculty of a medical school ensures that the medical curriculum includes self-directed learning experiences and time for independent study to allow medical students to develop the skills of lifelong learning. Self-directed learning involves medical students' self-assessment of learning needs; independent identification, analysis, and synthesis of relevant information; and appraisal of the credibility of information sources.*

- Describe the learning activities, and the courses in which these learning activities occur during the first two years of the curriculum, where students engage in all of the following components of self-directed learning as a unified sequence (use the names of relevant courses and clerkships from the Overview tables when answering):

  - Identify, analyze, and synthesize information relevant to their learning needs
  - Assess the credibility of information sources
  - Share the information with their peers and supervisors
  - Receive feedback on their information-seeking skills

- Describe the amount of unscheduled time in an average week available for medical students to engage in self-directed learning and independent study in the first two years of the curriculum.

- Describe the content of any policy covering the amount of time per week that students spend in required activities during the preclerkship phase of the curriculum. Note whether the policy addresses only in-class activities or also includes required activities assigned to be completed outside of scheduled class time. How is the effectiveness of the policy or policies evaluated?

## The Independent Student Analysis

The Independent Student Analysis (ISA) is a self-study process led by medical students.[5] They create a survey to be completed by all medical students that addresses various aspects of the medical education program, student services, learning environment, and the adequacy of educational resources. The results are analyzed and synthesized by the students into a report that is shared with the medical school administration and the LCME site visit team. Although medical school officials can provide logistical support and technical advice to students to help them conduct their survey and analyses, they must not participate in the development of the student survey, in the analysis of survey data, or in the preparation of the independent student analysis report. The overall survey and analysis should address the following areas:

- Accessibility of dean(s) and faculty members
- Participation of students in medical school committees
- Curriculum, including workload, organization, instructional formats and adequacy of content, balance between scheduled class time and time for independent learning
- Student assessment, including quality and timeliness of feedback
- Opportunity for the evaluation of courses or clerkships and teachers, and whether identified problems are corrected
- Student support services and counseling systems (personal, academic, career, financial aid), including their accessibility and adequacy
- Student counseling and health services, including their adequacy, availability, cost, and confidentiality
- Availability and cost of health and disability insurance
- The learning environment, including policies and procedures to prevent or respond to mistreatment or abuse
- Facilities, including quality of educational space, availability of study and relaxation space, security on campus and at affiliated clinical sites
- Library facilities and IT resources, including access to and quality of holdings and information technology resources.

## The Institutional Self-Study

The Institutional Self-Study (ISS) is a process that brings representatives from the school's administration, faculty, student body, and other constituencies together to review the data gathered in the Data Collection Instrument and Independent Student Analysis.[6] This information is used to generate a summary report guided by a list of questions that evaluates the quality of the medical education program and the adequacy of the resources to support it. Institutional strengths and weaknesses are also identified at this time. Self-study reports are mandated by the US Department of Education in all accreditation processes.[7] Examples of self-study questions are provided below.

**Standard 7: Curricular Content**
Evaluate whether the curriculum includes sufficient experiences to ensure that students develop skills in medical problem-solving and evidence-based clinical judgment.

**Standard 8: Curriculum Management, Evaluation, and Enhancement**
Does the central committee responsible for the curriculum have appropriate responsibility and authority for overseeing and approving the design, management, and evaluation of the curriculum to ensure that it is coherent, coordinated and integrated horizontally and vertically? Is this authority codified in institutional bylaws and/or policy? Is there evidence that this authority is being appropriately exercised?

**Standard 10: Medical Student Selection, Assignment and Progress**
Critically review the medical school's criteria for admission and the process for the recruitment and screening of applicants and the selection of students. How are the medical school's selection criteria reviewed and validated in the context of its mission and other mandates? Are the criteria for admission, including technical standards, available to potential applicants and their advisors?

**Standard 12: Medical Student Academic Support, Career Guidance, and Educational Records**
Evaluate the effectiveness of the medical school's system for early and ongoing identification of students in academic difficulty and of the counseling and remediation processes in place for all students. Comment on the level of academic difficulty and student attrition in relation to the school's academic advising and support programs.

## Timeline for the LCME Accreditation Preparation Process

*"As you consider how to galvanize the faculty and staff of JABSOM to meet this challenge, you reflect on the LCME accreditation timeline established by the LCME Planning Committee."*

April 2015 — Students prepped on the Independent Student Survey

May 2015 — JABSOM team begins work on the DCI

July 2015 — Students begin creation of the Survey

September 2015 — Students distribute the survey to their colleagues

December 2015 — Students present the results and analysis of their survey to the school DCI completed

January 2016 — DCI and ISA are distributed to the Self-Study Task Force

September 2016 — DCI, ISA, and Self-Study Summary Report submitted to the LCME

January 2017 — LCME accreditation site visit at JABSOM

June 2017 — JABSOM receives the accreditation decision by the LCME

## Preparing for the LCME Site Visit: Tips for Success

*"You sit down with other members of the planning team and review a list of key principles and practices that will help you prepare for the site visit…"*

- In the period leading to the site visit and during the visit, the JABSOM team will need to be prepared to promptly respond to requests and questions from the LCME site visit team.

- The team should be careful to follow the LCME guidelines for the submission of any updates to the DCI and self-study.

- All groups should be prepped for their sessions prior to the visit and should be provided with reminders in gatherings before their session.

- Students should be prepared for their role in meeting with site visitors. While students must answer questions honestly, it is appropriate for them to be reminded of how the school has attempted to address student concerns and address related LCME standards. They are often asked if they are aware of key policies and procedures set by the school and whether their educational experience matches that described in the DCI and self-study.

- Similarly, participating faculty should also be prepared for their roles in meeting with the site visit team. The faculty should be able to conceptualize the means by which students are taught, supervised, and evaluated. They should also be able to articulate the responsibilities they have in developing the curriculum and advising students.

- Approximately two weeks before the visit, the school should hold practice sessions with the participating faculty and students. These sessions might include a "mock session" and reminders about how the medical school has addressed the various LCME standards.

### What to Expect During the Actual Site Visit

*"The formal site visit has begun. You are asked to be one of the individuals at a meeting with the LCME site visit team related to the section on Curriculum Management…"*

The LCME accreditation site visit will be organized around a series of meetings between JABSOM faculty, administration and students and a small team of LCME site visitors. Samples of possible questions that might be asked at a session regarding Curriculum Management:

- How are the educational objectives of the curriculum determined and how they are integrated throughout the four-year medical student curriculum? What are the related desired outcome measures, and how are they monitored?

- How are the required disciplines and subject areas covered in the curriculum?

- What instructional methods and student assessment strategies are used to ensure the achievement of the school's objectives?

- How are resident physicians prepared for teaching and assessing students?

- Describe the system for implementation and management of the curriculum. Are there adequate resources to support the educational program and its management?

- What methods are used for evaluating the effectiveness of the educational program?

- Is there evidence that demonstrates the comparability of educational experiences at all clinical training sites?

## After the Site Visit

At the end of the final day of the site visit, the LCME site visit team will meet with Dean and campus leadership (usually the UH Manoa Chancellor) to provide their initial feedback.[8] A draft document will be shared subsequent to the site visit to allow the medical school to address potential errors of fact. The site visitors will then complete a formal report that will be submitted to the LCME for their discussion and formal determination of accreditation status. The medical school will receive a letter of notification from the LCME roughly six months after the site visit has been completed.

## Final Thoughts

The LCME accreditation process is a critically important endeavor for any medical school. It requires the concerted efforts and meaningful contributions of the entire medical school community, including faculty, administrators, students and community partners. The ultimate goal of the process is not only accreditation itself, but rather to ensure that the medical school is providing the best possible educational experience for its current and future students. In doing so, the medical school will continue to contribute to the betterment of the health of the people of Hawai'i, and fulfill its mission of achieving excellence and leadership in educating current and future healthcare professionals and leaders.

*"As you read through the accreditation letter from the LCME, you can't help but feel proud to have been an active participant in the accreditation preparation and site visit. You realize that the collective efforts of the JABSOM team will benefit current and future medical students, and the patients and communities they will go on to serve as graduates of the John A. Burns School of Medicine…"*

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