

ISA Minutes

Meeting: ABET Informational Workshop

Date: Sunday, 9 September 2001
Location: Hyatt Regency Houston
Chairman: Lowell McCaw
Minutes By: Elizabeth Price
Distribution: Attendees

Drafted 20 September 2001

Attendees: Roger Blais, Chun Cho, Jerry Cockrell, Tim Coppinger, Don Gillum, Tom Harrison, Lowell McCaw, Antonio Miranda, Yuri Starik, Ralph Staus, Tom Stout, Mark Wainwright, John Weese, Elizabeth Price (staff)

At 10:40am, McCaw welcomed attendees to the Informational ABET Workshop. The following agenda was distributed:

Informational ABET Workshop

- **Who Should Consider ABET and How Does a College/ University Apply?**
John Weese, Past ABET-EAC Chair
- **Preparing for a Site Visit**
Roger Blais, ISA Fellow
- **Site Visit Experience from an ABET Evaluator**
Lowell McCaw, ISA Representative to ABET Board and TAC Commissioner
- **Benefits of Accreditation**
Tim Coppinger, ABET Evaluator

McCaw asked for introductions. Starik stated his school, Salt Lake Community College, recently changed the name of their program to meet ABET standards. It is now an Instrumentation Technology Program. He hopes he is moving closer to applying for accreditation. After the introductions, Lowell stated his involvement with ABET has been as a Technology Accreditation Commissioner for ISA, an evaluator, and soon to be ABET Board representative.

He asked Coppinger to begin the workshop by reviewing the benefits of ABET accreditation. Coppinger stated:

ABET sets a minimum standard in education for program curriculum, faculty, facility, and infrastructure qualifications. Some specific benefits of accredited programs follow.

- Many employers search and hire students who graduate from ABET accredited programs.
- Universities are more likely to accept transferred credits from accredited schools than not.
- Parents often look for accredited programs for their children.
- The book, Profiles of Engineering Education Colleges and Universities, is limited to only ABET programs.
- Licensure programs often required degrees from accredited programs. If it is not required, applicants have to provide more years of work experience to make up for lack of accreditation.
- Government funded educational programs require accreditation.

Some schools, unfortunately, have not heard of ABET. A large issue for 2-year schools is that they are financed by local tax-bases where local industry provides the local support. Local industry is looking for benefits to them not necessarily in the student's best interest. Industry often confuses education with training. Some schools use regional accreditation where the school/university is accredited, not a specific degree program. These are very different qualifications.

McCaw introduced Weese. Weese has been on both sides of the coin of evaluating and preparing for ABET site visit. He stated:

ABET is open and easy to talk to about concerns with making application. ABET comes to your campus only when they have been invited. To do this, school contact downloads the criteria and application from the Web, writes a letter requesting a visit, and begins to gather information to support the schools activities. The cost is \$2500 per visit, and \$2500 for each additional program applying for accreditation.

ABET sends self-study material for the school to use to collect material for the site visit. Evaluators come to campus for a 2-day visit. Usually evaluators arrive Saturday, visit campus Sunday to become familiar, and then the official visit/review is Monday and Tuesday. Make sure your President, VP of Academic Affairs, etc. are available to meet the evaluators. Making application is a great deal of work, but those compiling material to complete the application learn more about the school's program than they ever thought they would.

ABET started a Substantial Equivalent status for schools outside of the United States. Weese visited Monterrey Tech in Mexico just as he would a U.S. school. The report after the visit indicated that the school program is Substantially Equivalent to U.S. criteria.

Question from Miranda:

His school recently received accreditation from a national organization in Mexico. Would ABET help their students when they apply for Masters programs in the U.S.?

Weese responded: It certainly helps. It indicates that an institution meets or exceeds specific levels.

It is difficult for students with A.A.S. to transfer into 4-year programs. These often have Calculus at the end of their program, but individuals need Calculus as a basis for most courses in 4-year engineering programs. A.S. programs can transfer more easily.

McCaw introduces Blais. Blais has been through the application process for multiple programs (in the same year). Blais stated:

He stated that there is always anxiety associated with preparing for a site visit. With the new form of criteria to meet, this is another area of anxiety. The last year programs could select to use the old EAC criteria was 2000. Interim reviews this fall will likely still be under the old criteria. For TAC, pilot visits will occur this fall using the new criteria, and it will be optional for the next 2 years. The new TAC criteria will be mandatory in fall 2004. ABET assists with the preparation as Weese stated. The ABET evaluators can provide documentation of needs that your program has (computer lab out of date, salary out of range). The evaluator is not your enemy. If your program has not been accredited before, it would be wise to bring in someone outside of your school to review your program and provide a candid, third-party review.

The evaluator's team will want examples of work (best and typical), samples of lab work, copies of textbooks and presentation material. Store these so they are accessible when you prepare your report and display these during the site visit.

The evaluators will also look for the basic awareness in engineering education. The professional ethics should be covered in the syllabus for your course or some way noted. Evaluators may ask students if they have been told about the professional ethics. A suggestion is to download the ethics code from ISA, NSPE and discuss this with your students.

You also do not want to underestimate the Team Chair or Evaluators. Even though their background may not match directly with your program, they do their homework before they come to your school.

Be sure you have your documentation in order. One suggestion is a balance sheet indicating what students have to do to graduate. Course credits need to meet ABET requirements as well as the schools requirements.

A final step is the assessment of your students. You will need to show that the students succeed with your curriculum. The mission statement of the school and the mission of the program need to be succinct with what is being taught. If the statement is too lengthy, it is too difficult to measure.

To measure a mission, you need to determine the following:

- What is the student's knowledge when they come to the school?

- What is their satisfaction level?
- Why did they choose this institution?
- How do graduates feel about the institution after they have earned their degree?
- Are they employed?
- Is the Department Advisory Board active: providing advice, contacts for internships?

And most importantly, in your recruiting material, emphasize the importance of accredited programs and list ABET as a competitive advantage. They may not know it in advance of attending the school, but make sure they understand it before they leave.

McCaw thanked all for attending. He hoped it provided insight for those in attendance on ABET and ISA's roll. For additional information on ABET, visit <http://www.isa.org/certify/abet> or contact Elizabeth Price at ISA headquarters at eprice@isa.org or (919) 990-9431.