

Visiting to Elevate

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Quite some years ago, as a new department chair, I hosted a PAB site visit team when they visited my school. I didn't realize how helpful they would be to me as a chair, how they would change the conversation in my department, nor how they would change the image of our department among the upper administration at our university. Soon after that visit, when ACSP's call for new site visitors came around, I thought this might be valuable and put my name forward.

I didn't know how valuable. Two years later, site visitor training behind me, I was second educator for a visit to a planning program in a policy school, working with an experienced team chair and a crack practitioner, and in the two decades that followed I visited five programs in as many states, all in design-college settings, partnered with some of the most insightful colleagues I've known. It is hard to overstate how much I learned and how much satisfaction I felt from those six visits, and the four more I joined after stepping down from PAB board membership in 2015.

Together those visits gave me a crash course in planning schools: curricula, budgets, faculty and staff workloads and career trajectories, recruitment, student services, professional and alumni relations, and governance. Site visitors are not allowed to talk about visits with colleagues back home, but I confess to borrowing more than a few ideas from other places to try out in my own schools. More importantly, I polished lots of tools for doing my own work as a teacher, researcher and administrator, as well as some pathways toward good, plain human relations.

Equally or more importantly, I came away from most all of the visits thinking I'd been part of improving a school. When word reached me later that one of our recommendations had been implemented, or that a conversation we started matured into a new direction at the school, I knew that the time and energy involved was very well spent.

I don't want to hide the work involved. It's considerable, but within well-prescribed time boundaries. Those tight time constraints add to the *esprit d 'corps* of the team, and give a measure of exhilaration to discovery and invention. The light-bulb-to-work ratio places PAB site visit service on my list of top ways to give back to our profession.