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## CHAPTER 3. FOREIGN TRAVEL

### 3.01 PURPOSE

This chapter establishes policies, approval/disapproval authorities, and procedures relating to foreign travel by VHS&RA personnel.

### 3.02 DEFINITION

This chapter addresses travel while in duty status (including authorized absence only) to foreign countries. Travel to Canada and Mexico, U.S. Territories and Possessions and Puerto Rico are exempt from these requirements. (See MP-1, pt. II, ch. 2, app. A.)

### 3.03 BACKGROUND

Many important international meetings and educational opportunities occur annually throughout the world. VHS&RA physicians, scientists, and other staff members are in demand as participants in these activities and many find it worthwhile and important to attend, present their own work, learn new advances, or acquire new skills. Similarly, VHS&RA staff may be requested to participate in administrative, technical, or other onsite reviews of activities, e.g., inspecting hospitals or health care delivery systems. When the efficiency and effectiveness of VA is enhanced by such involvement, participation is considered desirable.

### 3.04 BASIC POLICIES

a. VHS&RA management has the responsibility to review carefully all foreign travel of VHS&RA employees, including those trips where only authorized absence is requested.

b. All requests for foreign travel, including shipboard cruises which exit U.S. territorial waters and/or visit foreign ports, require review and approval/disapproval by the delegated official (see par. 3.05).

c. The travel must not be for routine purposes or to accommodate personal interests.

d. The review process must give primary consideration to the importance and value of the trip to the VHS&RA and VA, to the employee, and to any other relevant factors. Justification must clearly indicate how the proposed trip will further the mission of VA. Public relations or good will on their own

merits are not ordinarily considered appropriate justification to warrant approval of authorized absence.

### **3.05**

#### **DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY FOR APPROVAL/DISAPPROVAL OF FOREIGN TRAVEL REQUESTS**

Authority to review and approve/disapprove foreign travel is established as follows:

a. VHS&RA facility Directors are authorized to review and approve/disapprove foreign travel of staff under their supervision following a formal review process (see par. 3.06) when:

(1) No VA-appropriated funds other than salary (authorized absence) are involved for trips to foreign countries. **(NOTE: If any VA appropriated travel funds are involved for domestic travel to the point of embarkation, for per diem, or for registration fees, the request and justification must be submitted to the ACMD (Assistant Chief Medical Director) for Academic Affairs (144C) with a recommendation for approval/disapproval by the staff member's supervisor, facility review committee (see par. 3.06), and the facility Director.)**

(2) Only earmarked General Post Funds are involved, and where the trip is (a) related to an approved project for which the travel portion of the donation was made, and (b) approved by the facility Research or Education Committee;

**NOTE:** See VHS&RA Supplement MP-4, part VII, Chapter 4, "General Post Fund," and VHS&RA Manuals M-3 and M-8 for agency policy on General Post Funds. When use of General Post Funds is authorized by the facility Director, the funding guidelines outlined in paragraph 3.08j will be followed.

(3) An individual's cumulative foreign travel for a calendar year does not exceed:

(a) Absences of 20 calendar days away from the facility or

(b) three trips including the trip for which the request is made.

The 20 days away from the facility includes traveltime and holidays and weekends occurring within the approved period, and is not prorated in any way because of full- or part-time VA appointment.

b. The Chief Medical Director retains approval/disapproval authority for:

(1) Any requests involving travel of a facility Director and all VHS&RA Central Office staff;

(2) Requests involving VA appropriated travel funds; and

(3) Requests when an individual's cumulative foreign travel for the calendar year will exceed 20 calendar days away from the facility or three trips, including the trip for which the request is made.

### **3.06 FACILITY REVIEW PROCESS**

a. VHS&RA facility Directors must establish a formal review process and establish or designate an existing committee for considering all foreign travel

requests whether to be approved locally or forwarded to the ACMD for Academic Affairs (144C) (see par. 3.05). The review criteria, guidelines, and process to be used locally must be established in writing by the facility Director.

b. An existing facility committee or subcommittee may be assigned the review and recommendation function, or the facility Director may establish a new committee. The committee must be multi-disciplinary and represent a cross-section of facility responsibilities. (**NOTE:** *When the Research and Development Committee review General Post Fund travel, the decisions shall be noted in the minutes of the committee meeting.*)

c. A facility appeal mechanism must be established for reconsidering those requests disapproved by the facility Director.

d. The authority to approve/disapprove requests or appeals to decisions made under the authority of paragraph 3.05a may not be redelegated to any facility official other than the Director.

### **3.07 CENTRAL OFFICE REVIEW PROCESS**

The Chief Medical Director's Foreign Travel and Extended Leave Panel will review each request submitted requiring the Chief Medical Director's approval/disapproval in accordance with the basic policies, criteria, and guidelines. The panel will submit its recommendations through the Assistant Chief Medical Director for Academic Affairs to the Chief Medical Director. Requests disapproved by the Chief Medical Director may be appealed in writing through the facility Director. Appeals will be directed to the Assistant Chief Medical Director for Academic Affairs (144C) and must contain any administrative or technical explanation/justification not included in the original request. Requests disapproved by the facility Director under authority of paragraph 3.05a may not be appealed to the Chief Medical Director.

### **3.08 REVIEW PROCESS, CRITERIA, AND GUIDELINES**

The following review process, criteria, and guidelines apply for any VHS&RA foreign travel request.

a. All requests will be submitted via a forwarding letter signed by the facility director and contain a statement that it has been reviewed and recommended for approval by the facility education committee or other appropriate committee. Requests will also include a completed VA Form 10-5504, Foreign Travel Request--Briefing Slip, a brochure of the meeting, letter(s) of invitation, a complete itinerary of the trip, title(s) of paper(s) if presenting, a signed approved copy of VA Form 10-0101B if non VA support is being provided (see par. 3.08i), and any other substantiating documentation.

b. The request must be submitted in time to allow sufficient time for review. Requests for review by the Chief Medical Director must be received in Academic Affairs (144C) no fewer than 30 calendar days prior to the proposed travel date; requests not meeting this timeframe will be automatically returned "disapproved--not received within sufficient time for consideration." If there are special circumstances for late submission, such as being a last minute substitute of a previously approved attendee or documented late notification of an applicant, this shall be highlighted in the Director's transmittal letter.

c. A firm determination must be made by the reviewing and approving officials that the travel involves a scientific meeting, educational experience, or other

appropriate opportunity not reasonably available in the United States, or involves representing VA at an international meeting.

d. Only one employee may be approved from any one facility for any one meeting or activity unless there are clearly documented and compelling programmatic reasons for an exception. This restriction embraces both the facility Director and CMD approval authorities; i.e., if a facility Director has approved attendance for one person to attend a meeting or other activity under the authority contained in paragraph 3.05a, no other requests shall be approved nor shall requests be submitted for CMD approval under the authority of paragraph 3.05b.

e. Presentation of a paper in a foreign country by VA medical/dental house staff (resident) may be supported for authorized absence only under the following circumstances:

(1) The paper is to be presented by the traveler as primary or secondary author.

(2) Only one person receives VHS&RA authorized absence to present the paper.

(3) The paper and the conference at which it is presented are both closely related to the resident's specialty/subspecialty program.

(4) When presenting the paper, the resident identifies oneself as a resident serving in a VA health care facility.

f. Requests for VHS&RA staff to serve as visiting professors or teachers may only be considered under the following circumstances:

(1) The invitation comes from an institution with acceptable credentials in the country involved.

(2) The visiting professor or teacher shall give evidence of the ability to favorably represent VHS&RA, VA, and the United States in presenting a particular expertise, and in interpersonal relationships within the host country.

(3) The amount of time requested is adequate to achieve the required impact/involvement, but not excessive.

(4) No honorarium is paid in cash or in kind to VHS&RA staff member or to family or associates.

(5) Credit is given to VHS&RA and VA in any printed materials prepared for or resulting from the activity.

g. The "People-to-People Program" sponsored by People-to-People International, Kansas City, MO, has been reviewed and accepted as a worthwhile endeavor because of unique educational opportunities and may be approved by facility Director for authorized absence if in accord with the 20-day/3-trip limitations

and other criteria established by facility review committees. Otherwise, the request will be submitted for the Chief Medical Director's consideration through the ACMD for Academic Affairs (144C).

h. Programs conducted in foreign countries by U.S. professional societies or schools will not normally be approved, nor will those sponsored by professional consultant organizations.

i. No appropriated funds are set aside by the Chief Medical Director for foreign travel. Therefore, requests for funds must be based on local availability. Block 9 of the request, VA Form 10-5504, Foreign Travel Request-Briefing Slip, must specify the source of funds, e.g., medical care appropriation. Block 10 of VA Form 10-5504 refers to support other than VA. When other than VA support is being provided, a completed copy of VA Form 10-0101B, Request for Approval of Acceptance of Gifts or Donations for Travel/Subsistence Expenses in Connection With Official Travel by VHS&RA Facility Employees, approved by the facility Director, MUST accompany VA Form 10-5504 submitted to VA Central Office. If non-VA support is not involved, indicate "none" in block 10.

j. When the traveler is presenting a paper or otherwise formally participating in a meeting or activity in an official capacity (e.g., Officer of sponsoring society, Chairperson of a session or panel), the Chief Medical Director generally authorizes:

(1) Domestic travel and per diem costs to and from the nearest convenient point of embarkation;

(2) Per diem for the duration of the meeting(s) or activity, or 5 days total, whichever is less; and

(3) Registration fees.

*Exceptions may be made only by the Chief Medical Director.*

k. When attending a meeting in the absence of formal participation, only authorized absence may be approved.

l. Agency travel provisions relating to employee travel management contained in MP-1, part II, chapter 2, are applicable.

m. Passport information for official travel is contained in MP-1, part II, chapter 2, paragraph 5.

n. The Office of the General Counsel has advised that there is no objection to participating--without remuneration and for educational purposes--in the treatment of a non-VA beneficiary while on authorized absence. While providing such treatment, the VHS&RA physician or dentist involved may not assume the responsibility for the medical care of any patient other than a patient admitted for treatment in a VA facility. However, the employee would not be entitled to the protection provided by 38 U.S.C. 4116 for personal liability (for malpractice).

o. Requests for additional time away from the facility (annual leave and/or LWOP) in conjunction with approved foreign travel is the responsibility of local management in accordance with existing guidelines covering absences. (See VHS&RA Supp. MP-5, pt. II, ch. 7; and MP-1, pt. II, ch. 2, par. 18a(8), and app. K, par. 2b.)

### **3.09 EXCEPTIONS**

Where there are extenuating circumstances which warrant consideration as an exception to the provisions of this chapter, an appropriate communication from the facility Director may be addressed to the ACMD for Academic Affairs (144C) for consideration by the Chief Medical Director .

### **3.10 DEPARTMENT OF STATE CLEARANCES**

Attendance at international conferences, medical, scientific, and similar meetings, and routine professional visits do not require Department of State clearances. On occasion, travel to certain countries may be restricted and that becomes a matter of public record. If the American Embassy in a foreign country becomes involved in planning or coordinating a trip, the Department of State in Washington, DC, must be contacted (202/647-4000). It is better to err on the side of contacting the Department of State and informing them of plans than to not do so. (**NOTE:** *The U.S. ICIS (Interdepartmental Committee on Internal Security) developed a standardized defensive security briefing for all personnel traveling to Communist countries (see app. 3A). The briefing material is to be provided to any regular or contract employee traveling to Communist countries, either*

*on Government business or for personal reasons, and irrespective of the sensitivity of the employee's current position or the employee's access to classified information.)*

### **3.11 EXTENDED EDUCATIONAL LEAVE INVOLVING FOREIGN TRAVEL**

Requests for foreign travel which exceed 90 calendar days will be considered as extended leave for educational purposes and must be submitted in accordance with chapter 4.

### **3.12**

#### **ACCEPTANCE OF CONTRIBUTIONS, AWARDS, AND PAYMENTS FROM OTHER THAN VA SOURCES IN CONNECTION WITH OFFICIAL TRAVEL INVOLVING TRAINING IN NON-GOVERNMENT FACILITIES OR ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS**

Approval of any foreign travel trip by the Chief Medical Director does not convey authority for an employee to accept non-VA support. Approval for acceptance of any non-VA support remains the responsibility of the facility Director under the circumstances described in chapter 5, and other VHS&RA policy directives regarding VHS&RA employees accepting gratuities, gifts, and honoraria. As indicated in paragraph 3.08i, a completed copy of VA Form 10-0101B, Request for Approval of Acceptance of Gifts or Donations for Travel/Subsistence Expenses in Connection With Official Travel by VHS&RA Facility Employees, **MUST** accompany all foreign travel requests submitted to VA Central Office.

### **3.13 RECORDS AND REPORTS**

a. MP-1, part II, chapter 2, paragraph 3.1., requires the Chief Medical Director to provide the Director, Office of Information Management and Statistics (734) with quarterly reports showing all foreign travel requests reviewed each quarter of the fiscal year. Facility reports, including negative reports if applicable, must be submitted to reach the ACMD for Academic Affairs (144C) no later than the 10th workday following the close of each quarter. Submit the report in duplicate in the format shown as appendix 3B, RCS 10-0157.

b. In addition, MP-1, part II, chapter 2, paragraph 3.1., requires that records be retained in the following format on all incidents of foreign travel.

(1) Name, grade, and position or title of each employee who performed foreign travel during the quarter.

(2) Date departing from and returning to the duty station, destination of the travel (city and country), and purpose of travel.

(3) Total cost of the trip indicating funding sources (i.e., VA appropriated funds; General Post Funds; personal funds; contributions, awards, and/or payments from other-than-VA sources) as follows:

(a) Round trip transportation cost;

(b) Subsistence, per diem, and miscellaneous costs; and

(c) Other associated costs (registration fees, membership fees, etc.), if any.

(4) Justification for the trip.

Facilities will maintain the above records on all facility employees regardless of whether the foreign travel was approved locally or by the Chief Medical Director. It is not the intention to require submission of the above records to Central Office unless requested by agency officials.

c. It is recommended that VA Form 10-5504, Foreign Travel Request--Briefing Slip, be used to record foreign travel actions, with whatever local modifications are deemed necessary, for providing the basis for the required records and reports.

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INSPECTOR GENERAL'S MEMO: DEFENSE SECURITY BRIEFING TO BE PROVIDED  
U.S. GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES TRAVELING TO  
COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED COUNTRIES

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3-17

3-17

2. Beyond your hotel room, you should assume that conversations in vehicles (including embassy vehicles), train compartments, restaurants, conference rooms and other public places, may be monitored. Miniature microphones with transmitters or recorders can easily be secreted on the person of an individual in your group. It is even technically possible to record your conversations in open, outdoor areas; however, those areas are normally more secure than indoor locations.

3. Avoid unnecessary discussions concerning your job, your work place and other official matters. Also avoid discussing other U.S. employees' habits, character, or other matters which reveal weaknesses or idiosyncrasies.
4. Assume that your personal luggage will be searched at some time in your hotel room. If you discover evidence of this, do not make a big issue of it. Positive evidence of such activity, however, should be reported to the U.S. Embassy and your security officer upon your return. It is just as well not to bother locking your luggage, as most locks will be readily picked. If the lock cannot be picked, this will only increase the curiosity of the intelligence agent and the lock may be broken. Never leave your luggage unattended containing valuable papers or documents you do not wish anyone else to read. If you surprise someone searching your possessions, don't take any violent or physical action, but report the incident to local and U.S. authorities.
5. You may receive a "wrong number" or otherwise mysterious telephone calls in the hotel room at any hour of the day or in the middle of the night. Do not let this unduly upset you. It may be a crude but effective method of determining whether or not you are in your room. It may be only a result of poor telephone service.
6. Do not rely on hotel employees for protection service. In these countries; you should always assume that chamber maids, elevator operators and hotel employees, as well as waiters or the maitre d' in restaurants are in the employ of the intelligence services. Be particularly circumspect in your relations with guides, interpreters, and Communist travel agency personnel, as these people are invariably used by intelligence agencies.
7. You may be placed under physical surveillance as you travel either on foot or by vehicle. You may suspect you are being observed when actually you are not. In either event, the best tactic is to ignore it. Communist intelligence agents at various times observe visitors on a spot-check basis for no apparent reason. On the other hand, they may be collecting detailed data concerning your activities in preparation for a more direct intelligence approach. Do not attempt to lose the surveillance. If you are actually being followed for intelligence objectives, you will be covered by a team of several agents, and your evasion attempts will only make you more suspicious.
8. You will be permitted to take photographs with your personal camera, but be careful not to photograph restricted areas. Travelers should refrain from taking photographs from aircraft, photographing military and police installations and personnel, industrial structures, harbor, rail and airport facilities, and border areas. Communist countries also resent your photographing items which put them in a bad light, such as slum areas, public drunks, scenes of civil disorder or other public disturbances. If you do take such photographs, your film may be confiscated.
9. Be particularly circumspect in approaches which may be made offering social companionship, especially of a sexual nature. Many of these persons are "plants" of Communist intelligence agencies and will offer themselves attractively for the purpose of getting you in a compromising situation which

will be followed by a blackmail threat to force your cooperation in intelligence activities. Under no circumstances should you seek or accept this kind of social companionship in a Communist country. The intelligence services are fully aware of the possibilities inherent in human frailties, and will capitalize immediately upon any indication of immoral or indiscreet behavior of American

3-20

3-20

travelers. Even when failing to detect a vulnerability, Communist agents have attempted entrapment of innocent travelers. For this reason, you should maintain the highest level of personal behavior at all times, avoid long walks at night alone, and endeavor to always be in the company of someone you can trust. Be especially careful to stay well within your capacity for alcohol so as not to weaken your defense or lose your self-control.

10. Do not accept from anyone (including friends, relatives or professional contacts) letters, photographs, packages or any other material to be smuggled out of the country or carried in your effects when you depart. Be firm in your denials in these matters, as such requests may be acts of intelligence provocation to entrap you.

11. Bear in mind that there are many political, cultural and legal differences between the U.S. and Communist countries. Actions which are innocent or, at worst, carry wrist-slapping penalties in the U.S., are often considered serious offenses against the law in Communist-dominated societies. Persons violating the law, even unknowingly, run the risk of arrest or expulsion. Do not, for instance, take "souvenirs" from hotels or institutions, however insignificant in value they may appear.

12. Do not engage in any private currency transactions with individual citizens. Do not try to sell or trade any personal items, including clothing, which you have brought into the country, or purchase bargains from street peddlers or other questionable vendors. Do not engage in blackmarket activities. Many Communist countries have laws governing exportation of art work and historic relics. Be familiar with these laws if you intend to purchase such items, and make these purchases only at official establishments.

13. Should you be detained or arrested for any reason by police or other officials of these countries, be cooperative, but insist promptly, politely, and repeatedly, if necessary, that the U.S. Embassy or Consulate be notified. Do not make any statements or sign any documents you do not fully understand, until you have had an opportunity to confer with an embassy representative. You may possibly be accused of having some connection with an American intelligence service, or of having accepted an assignment by such service to be carried out in the host country. You should make no admission whatever indicating you have ever had any dealings, under any circumstances, with any U.S. intelligence agency.

14. Mail which you receive or transmit is subject to censorship in a Communist country. In all mail you write prior to, during, or after your visit to a communist country, make no reference to classified information nor reveal information of possible value to a hostile intelligence service. Be careful in writing to or about relatives or friends in these countries, as they may become targets for investigation or exploitation.

15. There have been several incidents in Communist countries wherein speech-inducing drugs, medicines, etc., have been used under the guise of medical treatment for the purpose of aiding in interrogation. In non-emergency

situations, every effort should be made to avoid Communist hospitals or medical facilities without first having notified the U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

16. Report immediately any action which might form the basis of pressure or compromise, or any attempt to pressure or compromise you, to the American Embassy

(security officer) in the country being visited, and also to your security officer immediately upon your return to your job. Also report any unusual subsequent contacts with Communist country nationals.

We have discussed above many, but not necessarily all, pitfalls which may befall an American traveler. New espionage techniques and tactics are constantly being developed, and the highest degree of alertness is necessary at all times. While the techniques employed by Communist countries' intelligence services seem far-fetched, illicit, or taken from "spy novels," they are in fact used in day-to day activities and operations. Although these techniques are revolting to an American, one must nevertheless recognize them as a part of the Communist system, in order that he or she may successfully counter such practices.

Well, so much for the dark side of the picture. All of these things had to be said so you would be forewarned of the possibilities. Now for the probabilities:

You probably will not be entrapped by Communist intelligence services, and you probably will not have any problems if you respect local laws and customs, be honest in your dealings and behave discreetly. You can expect friendly treatment from most of the citizens with whom you come in contact, and you will find that they are very interested in all aspects of American life. You can therefore serve as a valuable good will ambassador for the U.S., while you enjoy the interesting and innocent features of the country (s) you visit. Be open to this experience, have a good trip and come home safely. Foreign Countries (Other Than Canada and Mexico) Approved/Disapproved by the Facility Director Under Authority of M-8, Part V, Paragraph 3.05a(2) or (3).

Authorized Absence      VA Appropriated Funds      General Post Funds

Only--Number

| Number | Amount | Number | Amount |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|--------|--------|--------|--------|

a. Requests Approved

xxx

3-23

3-23

xxx

\$

b. Requests Disapproved

xxx

xxx

\_\_\_\_\_  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_

c. TOTAL

xxx

xxx

\$

Part III Total Foreign Travel Requests Approved/Disapproved by the Facility Director Under Authority of paragraph 3.05a (1), (2) and (3).

Authorized Absence  
VA Appropriated Funds  
General post Funds

Only---Number

Number            Amount  
Number    Amount

**3-24**

**3-24**

a. Requests Approved

\$

\$

b. Requests Disapproved

\$

\$

c. TOTAL

\$

\$

3-25

3-25

**Part IV** Reconsiderations/Appeals.

**NOTE:** *This information is requested only for determining the number of appeals and their disposition by facility Directors. Requests should be included in part I or II based on the Director's action (approved or disapproved); the following counts are for information only.*

VA Appropriated Funds

Authorized Absence  
(Canada & Mexico Only)  
General post Funds

Only---Number            Number            Amount

Number    Amount

a. Total facility Director decisions appealed by

\$

\$

employee

b. Facility Director original decision. Reversed  
upon review

c. Facility Director disapproval sustained upon  
review

**REPORT DUE DATE:** Information shall be transmitted in time to reach the ACMD for Academic Affairs (144C) no later than the 10th workday following the close of each quarter. Negative reports are required if applicable.

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INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE ON INTERNAL SECURITY

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FORMAT FOR REPORTING

VHS&RA REPORT OF FOREIGN TRAVEL

Fiscal Year \_\_\_\_\_ Quarter \_\_\_\_\_ VHS&RA Report of Foreign Travel.

Facility Name and Number:

RCS 10-0157

Name and FTS Number of Person To Contact About Information in the Report:

**Part I** Total Foreign Travel Requests Approved/Disapproved by the Facility Director Under Authority of M-8, Part V, Chapter 3, Paragraph 3.05a(1) and (2).

Authorized Absence

General Post Funds

Only---Number

Number Amount

a. Requests Approved

\_\_\_\_\_

3-28

3-28

\_\_\_\_\_

\$\_\_\_\_\_

b. Requests Disapproved

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

c. TOTAL

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\$\_\_\_\_\_

**Part II** Reconsiderations/Appeals

**NOTE:** *This information is requested only for determining the number of appeals and their disposition by Facility Directors. Requests should be included in Part I based on the Director's action (approved or disapproved); the following counts are for information only.*

Authorized Absence  
General post Funds

Only---Number  
Number Amount

a.  
Total facility Director decisions  
appealed by employee

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\$\_\_\_\_\_

b.  
Facility Director original decision  
reversed upon review

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

c.  
Facility Director disapproval  
sustained upon review

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\$\_\_\_\_\_

**3-30**

**3-30**

**REPORT DUE DATE:** Information shall be transmitted in time to reach the ACMD for Academic Affairs (144C) no later than the 10th workday following the close of each quarter. Negative reports are required if applicable.