

SACS COC

SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS
COMMISSION ON COLLEGES

January 8, 2015

Dr. Dana Gibson Hoyt
President
Sam Houston State University
Box 2026, SHSU
Huntsville, TX 77341-2026

Dear Dr. Hoyt:

Thank you for your letter and prospectus of July 10, 2014, notifying SACSCOC of your intention to offer the Doctor of Philosophy in Forensic Science degree program, effective spring 2015. The degree program was approved by the Board of Regents of the Texas State University System in August 2013. The degree program underwent an on-site review by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) in May 2014 and is in the final stages of approval. The program will be delivered on the Sam Houston State University (SHSU) Campus in the traditional classroom and laboratory format.

An assessment of need review for graduate programs in forensic science demonstrates a strong need for highly trained and well prepared professionals in the workplace. Along with a need for forensic examiners within the criminal justice system, a pressing need exists for forensic science researchers and faculty members with interdisciplinary and strong leadership skills. Built on a highly successful M.S. in Forensic Science at the University—the first of its kind in Texas, and the first to be accredited by the Forensic Science Education Programs Accreditation Commission (FEPAC) in 2009—the Ph.D. in Forensic Science is a natural progression of the existing degree program. The Ph.D. in Forensic Science will provide students with the critical thinking ability, problem-solving skills, and advanced discipline-specific knowledge to allow them to assume leadership positions within forensic organizations.

The degree program consists of 86 credit hours beyond the bachelor's degree. Students are required to complete 45 credit hours of core coursework and internship (6 credit hours), 15 credit hours of dissertation research, and 26 credit hours of electives across a period of four to five years of study. Students who do not receive candidacy to advance beyond year two may be allowed to complete the requirements for the master's degree program. The University anticipates an enrollment of six to seven students annually.

The Faculty Roster Form indicates a core Forensic Department consisting of six full-time faculty members and an interdisciplinary faculty of thirteen full-time, well-qualified faculty members to teach in the degree program. One additional full-time faculty member will be added to the department during the upcoming academic year. The faculty members have doctoral degrees, research grants, publications, and committee experience in chemistry, biology and genetics, anthropology, forensic medicine and toxicology, forensic genetics, psychology, botany, evolutionary biology, entomology, pharmacology and microbiology, criminology and criminal justice, and law.

Library and learning resources are adequate for the degree program. The Newton Gresham Library is well staffed and provides appropriate library services. The library provides a significant number of print resources including over 1.3 million books and journals. The library subscribes to over 200 databases and provides access to more than 45,000 full text journals and over 68,000 e-Books. CRCNetbase, a multidisciplinary collection in the areas of forensics/law enforcement, biology, and chemistry, provides specific e-Books in the field. A long list of discipline-specific resources for graduate research in forensics is documented in the prospectus.

SHSU provides a full complement of student support services to meet the needs of the students in the program. These resources include academic advising, mentoring, career placement, and professional development. The Office of Graduate Studies offers a variety of programming for graduate students, including professional career and academic development seminars. Workshops cover resume and vita building, dissertation 101, scholarly presentations, and scholarly publications. Students are also provided travel support to present research at conferences.

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The existing Department of Forensic Science is located in the Chemistry and Forensic Science Building, centrally located on the main campus. The \$16,000,000 state of the art scientific facility was constructed in 2006 and houses the Department of Chemistry. The 37,000 square feet facility offers classroom, office, and laboratory space. Also, in 2008, the University established the Southeast Texas Applied Forensic Facility (STAFS). Located on the 247 acre Center for Biological Field Studies, the STAFS is dedicated to forensic research and training, in particular, anthropological activities. A long list of capital improvements for scientific equipment, totaling almost \$1,400,000, is documented in the prospectus.

A table estimating the total program costs and anticipated sources of funding indicates that the institution expects that revenues will slightly exceed expenditures during the first five years of the program. Estimates are made using the THECB's "Program Funding Estimation Tool." Program costs include faculty salaries, program administration, graduate assistants, clerical/staff, supplies and materials, library and IT resources, equipment, facilities, and scholarships.

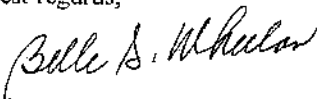
SHSU has a well-established process for assessment and evaluation. All educational and educational support programs at SHSU engage in an annual outcomes process whereby they define outcomes, measure the attainment of those outcomes, and use the collected data to drive continuous improvement within their programs. The Ph.D. degree program will be evaluated in accordance with the graduate program standards of the FEPAC. The new program will be incorporated into the existing Department of Forensic Science system for planning, evaluation, and assessment at the department level as well as in the evaluation framework for existing doctoral programs within the University.

The Board of Trustees of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges reviewed the materials seeking approval of the Ph.D. in Forensic Science degree program. It was the decision of the Board to approve the program and include it in the scope of the current accreditation.

Enclosed is an invoice for \$500 to help defray the cost of reviewing the prospectus.

The Commission wishes you success in this endeavor.

Best regards,



Belle S. Wheelan, Ph.D.
President

BSW/LCS:iy

Enclosure

cc: Dr. Somer Franklin, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs
Dr. Steven M. Sheeley