

May 11, 2004

Ms. Renea H. Eshleman, Coordinator
Nonpublic Postsecondary Institution Licensing
South Carolina Commission on Higher Education
1333 Main St., Suite 200
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Ms. Eshleman:

The purpose of this letter is to present by findings from the review of the application for a license by the School of the Building Arts to offer two and four year degree programs.

Organization, administration and faculty – I feel the Application demonstrates that a viable organization comprised of qualified administrators is in place as well as an assessment process for their performance. It was difficult for me to ascertain whether or not sufficient resources to support the School and its operation are in place. I do feel the matter of financial and other needed resources needs to be closely monitored especially in the first five years of formal operation. In terms of the faculty, I only found that one full time faculty member was noted in the Application (Simcon Warren) but his resume or vita was not included. Therefore, I was not able to assess whether or not he is qualified to teach in the School. In addition, I was not able to find any information as to what criteria the School plans to use in hiring additional faculty, what the faculty hiring plan is or anything concerning faculty career development

Education program – It appears from reviewing the two and four year programs and the individual course outlines that the students will receive a comprehensive education relating to the practice of trade work in the specific crafts in the area of historic preservation. While the Application provides justification for the need for the two programs it is specifically focused on the need for construction craft workers throughout in the United States in all types of construction work and less specifically for the preservation sector of the industry. In addition, I do not feel the Application contains sufficient specific information as to the projected need (in terms of numbers) for individuals attaining either of the two degrees including the types of construction companies for which they will go to work. In other words, the Application does an effective job in presenting the overall need of carpenters, masons, ironworkers and plasters from a holistic standpoint but not from the sector of the construction industry for which graduates will be trained to work. The Application should have contained the results of a comprehensive industry study of what the needs are for graduates of the two programs which should include types and locations of companies and a range of starting wages. I noted the application did indicate that there is a waiting list to be accepted into

the program, but I wonder how many of the existing students and those applying are doing so to obtain a degree and work in the industry as compared to just being interested in the specific skills taught and wanting to learn them not for a future occupational but more for a hobby. I felt it would have helped if more specific information concerning career goals of the current students and those applying were provided.

My major concern is that students in the program may feel they are receiving a comprehensive education in any one of the crafts being studied and will be able to easily obtain employment in that field with any type of construction company. But carefully reviewing the topics of the various courses, this is not the case for all of the crafts in that instruction in many specific craft-related tasks is missing. It is clear in the application that those students graduating from the program will be prepared for an entry-level position in the craft(s) of their choosing but the School will need to be very careful in their recruitment and career guidance processes to insure students understand what actual employment prospects are available to them.

In terms of the quality of education the students may receive in any one of the specific courses I found it difficult to arrive at any conclusions because the syllabi were incomplete in that they did not contain specific objectives of what students will be able to do as the result of taking the course and what instructional materials will be used including text books, etc. Also the syllabi did not contain course prerequisites and how the students will be specifically assessed (just stating assessment in the topical outline is not sufficient). In terms of prerequisites, I feel administration and faculty need to identify what fundamental skills and knowledge the students need for each of the courses. In more closely reviewing some of the content of the courses of which I am very familiar, I feel some additional thought needs to be given as to the ability of the students to succeed without first having mastered certain fundamental skills and knowledge related to the specific course. For instance students need to understand and be able to perform mathematical calculations in algebra, geometry and trigonometry before they will be successful in understanding the behavior of structures and their various elements and connections. As presented in the Application, students will be taking MATH 101 and 102, which provide instruction in the three areas mentioned above at the same time they are taking Building Construction 101 and 102 that requires the students to apply the math fundamentals. Based on my experience I would recommend that the construction courses be placed in the second year of the program and be replaced with more fundamental courses contained later in the programs. In light of this suggestion I also recommend that a thorough and thoughtful review be conducted of the entire two programs to ensure the students will have the appropriate prerequisite skills and knowledge to succeed in succeeding courses and the results of this review be presented in a matrix (flow chart) format.

Finally, being that both programs are industry specific, it is critical that the School establish a formal advisory committee of practicing professionals representing a cross section of companies in which graduates will be employed. This committee would serve in an advisory capacity to the School and its faculty and can assist in various ways including curriculum and course content reviews, fund raising, providing resources, etc.

Library and student services – In reviewing the Application for the various issues related to this area. It appears there exists sufficient library resources and related support. In reviewing the Bibliography I did note however, that it was missing some major sources of craft training curricula especially the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) series and the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) craft training material. As the programs develop it will become important from both a cost and student preparation standpoint that existing related craft training materials be carefully reviewed and total or in part adopted so as to first not “reinvent the wheel, thus saving costs, and second to insure a greater portability of the education received by the students to other geographic locations of the United States and other sectors of the industry. For example the NCCER has a craft worker national recognition program in place whereby those students who have successfully demonstrated the mastery of specific skills and knowledge through written and performance testing, using the Contrend series of educational modules, are placed in a national registry acknowledging the successful completion of the training. This serves as a form of certification in the construction industry and assists workers in obtaining new employment and assuring employers that they hire qualified individuals. The NAHB is embarking on a similar program. It is highly recommended, therefore, that the School make every effort to create partnerships with similar educational organizations to work together for the benefit of their students and the construction industry and not become insular and thus negatively impact the quality of the two programs.

Issues relating to admissions, recordkeeping, transfer policy from another institution and advising appear to be adequate. I did not find a School catalog. In addition, in terms of students from the School transferring to another college or university, I did find a statement in the Application that the School does not guarantee transferability of its courses. I am concerned that at the same time nothing was mentioned about beginning to work with other institutions in the state on the issue of transferability of courses. I would think this would be important in two directions. First, I could see opportunities for upper division high school students interested in the building trades attending classes at the School or even possibly the School offering classes at a large high school that was adequately equipped to support the specific courses. Likewise, many two year vocational institutions are already providing craft worker training in some of the standard trades and thus have the needed tools, equipment, space and faculty to effectively teach trade-related classes. Creating more formal partnerships with other educational institutions should result in a more efficiently managed School. And finally, some of the students who succeed in obtaining a two or four year degree may wish to continue their education in the professional disciplines of architecture or construction management and may want to transfer to such a baccalaureate degree program within or outside the state.

Finance and facilities – It does not appear that adequate resources and space are in place though commitments have been made and work continues to obtain them. I note that even the Application states that adequately equipped space is not sufficient to begin classes in the fall of 2005. This may be another reason to seek formal working relationships with other educational institutions in the area such as Trident Tech so as to

begin classes in an adequately equipped facility on the timetable noted in the Application. I do feel that the presented Building Program was very thorough and thoughtful to meet the School needs now and for the near future. The types of equipment listed in the Application appear to be appropriate in type but I am not sure about quantity. In addition, it will become important that all equipment be state-of-the-art and not antiquated donations to the School.

My last concern pertains to assessment. While the School has included various needed components of a comprehensive assessment process, it has not presented how the components integrate into an institutional program, how the results of individual assessments will be used to make improvements and how the results will be made available to the public. The School should have an academic quality plan identifying the process used for continuous improvement. The plan will serve as a tool for continual improvement and improvement of all of its programs. This process should contain measurable objectives (for not just students but for all academically-related aspects of the two programs) a systematic means of collecting, quantifying and analyzing data relative to the objectives, development of conclusions based on the data collected, and program modifications, when deemed appropriate to improve the programs. Finally, the plan should be reviewed and updated on an annual basis and the results of same, where appropriate should be made available to the public through a website and/or School promotional and other materials.

In closing the mission of the School of the Building Arts appears to be appropriate and fill a critical need in a specialized sector of the construction industry. However, I feel the leadership of the institution needs to more carefully consider the issues I have raised in my letter in order to insure both the students and the construction industry that they are delivering and maintaining a quality comprehensive educational program. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly,

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Chair and Professor