



South Carolina Commission on Higher Education

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CHE
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Mr. Ken Wingate, Chair, and Members, S.C. Commission on Higher Education

FROM: Dr. Bettie Rose Horne, Chair, and Members, Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing

**Consideration of Request for Amendment to Existing License to Add New Site
A.A.S., Business Administration; A.A.S., Criminal Justice; A.A.S., Healthcare
Reimbursement; A.A.S., Medical Assistant; A.A.S., Medical Office Administration;
A.A.S., Surgical Technology
Virginia College, New Site in Florence**

Summary

Virginia College (VC) in Birmingham, AL (www.vc.edu) requests approval of an amendment to its license to add a new site in Florence. The College proposes to offer at the new site existing programs leading to the A.A.S. degree in (1) Business Administration, (2) Criminal Justice, (3) Healthcare Reimbursement, (4) Medical Assistant, (5) Medical Office Administration, and (6) Surgical Technology. After approval by the Commission, Virginia College officials expect to choose a location in Florence, renovate the site to their specifications, and implement the programs at the new site. With the approval of CHE, classes will begin at the Florence site in July 2012. The programs will be offered on-ground with the option to take courses through Virginia College Online.

At its December 1, 2011, meeting, the Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing (CAAL) considered the request of Virginia College, tabled the request, and asked that Virginia College officials provide additional information addressing enrollment, placement, and graduation statistics; specialized accreditation; projected loan debt and income; and placement testing.

Virginia College officials provided additional information and CAAL reconsidered the item at its February 2 meeting. The Committee members and Virginia College officials discussed the proposal at length whereupon the Committee voted to recommend the item for the Commission’s consideration.

Virginia College is a private, for-profit institution owned by Virginia College, LLC, an Alabama-based limited liability company that is a wholly owned subsidiary of Education Corporation of America (ECA), a Delaware corporation. Virginia College was founded in 1983 and operates 19 campuses in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia, as well as Virginia College Online. The network of schools enrolls a total of approximately 15,000 students.

The Commission licensed Virginia College in Greenville in July 2008. Additional sites licensed by the Commission include Charleston (September 2009), Columbia (March 2010), and Spartanburg (December 2010). Approximately 3,000 students are enrolled among the four sites.

The Accrediting Council of Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS) has accredited Virginia College since 1990. Current accreditation extends through December 31, 2013. ACICS will initially grant interim inclusion for the Florence branch; final inclusion of a branch campus is granted after a site review, which is typically conducted within 18 to 24 months after establishment of a new branch. The U.S. Department of Education recognizes the interim accreditation and allows the school access to Title IV financial aid. Virginia College is licensed by the Private School Licensure Division of the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education.

The following information from the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) shows student loan default rates at Virginia College (combined averages for all Virginia College campuses).

OPE ID	School	Type	Control	PRGMS		FY2009	FY2008	FY2007
030106	Virginia College	Master's Degree or Doctor's Degree	Proprietary	Federal Family Education Loans and Federal Direct Loans (FFEL/FDL)	Default Rate %	13%	5.4%	7.9%
					No. in Default	1041	305	368
					No. in Repay	7950	5570	4657
Students enrolled at any time during the year						15,263	10,005	5,739
Percentage of borrowers entering repayment						52.1%	55.9%	81%

To provide context for the Cohort Default Rate (CDR), USDE includes enrollment data (students enrolled at any time during the year) and a corresponding percentage (borrowers entering repayment divided by that enrollment figure). While there is no direct relationship between the timing of when a borrower entered repayment (October 1 through September 30) and any particular enrollment year, these data are for the academic year ending on the June 30 prior to the beginning of the cohort year (e.g., FY 2009 CDR Year uses 2007-2008 enrollment).

The USDE sanctions a school when the school’s three most recent cohort default rates are 25 percent or higher or if a school’s current default rate is greater than 40 percent. Except in the event of a successful adjustment or appeal, such a school will lose Federal Family Education

Loan, Direct Loan, and Federal Pell Grant program eligibility for the remainder of the fiscal year in which the school is notified of its sanction and for the following two fiscal years. According to Virginia College officials, an estimate of the average Title IV student loan debt for graduates of programs leading to an associate degree is \$22,206.

Virginia College officials have challenged the Department's calculations in determining the institution's 2009 default rate and are awaiting confirmation from the Department that the accurate default rate for 2009 is 11.4%.

Institution officials are seeking appropriate facilities in Florence that will include classrooms, a student lounge, faculty and staff work areas, administrative facilities, computer labs, simulated medical labs, and a library. Officials will provide the location lease agreement, diagram of facilities, and applicable fire inspection and business licenses to the staff when the facilities have been identified, leased, renovated and inspected.

Virginia College makes available sufficient learning resources to support the courses and degrees offered. A professional librarian at each campus manages the campus library; maintains an up-to-date, quality collection; and provides instruction on and assistance with informational resources. All students are provided access to the VC Virtual Library which includes more than 43,000 full-text books, 50,000 periodicals, and multiple databases.

Each Virginia College campus has an on-site campus president who reports to the respective regional vice president; regional vice presidents report to the Virginia College CEO. Personnel at each site also include directors of admissions, career services, financial planning, and student accounting. Also at each site is an academic dean who oversees the academic program directors to whom the faculty report.

Faculty at Virginia College branches in South Carolina who teach general education courses must possess a master's degree with 18 hours in the teaching discipline or must hold a master's degree with a major in the teaching discipline. Faculty teaching courses in professional, technical, and occupational areas that do not usually result in college transfer must possess appropriate academic preparation (usually a bachelor degree) or academic preparation coupled with work experience. Faculty teaching upper-division core courses at the bachelor degree level must hold master's degrees with at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline or a master's degree with a major in the teaching discipline. An appropriate number of faculty members must hold terminal degrees. Each degree must be from an institution accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

Applicants for admission must have at least a high school diploma or equivalent and must take an assessment exam unless they have already completed an associate or bachelor degree program. Transfer credits may be accepted by the College if an official transcript is submitted and the credits were completed at an institution accredited by a recognized accrediting agency with a grade of "C" or above with comparable content. Courses completed more than five years prior to enrollment may only be transferred at the approval of the academic dean. Computer and technology-related courses generally are not accepted for transfer if completed more than three years prior to enrollment.

Based on previous experiences at similar branches, Virginia College officials project enrolling 457 students at the Florence site during the first year. Enrollment projections are for students enrolled in degree and non-degree programs.

Tuition is charged per quarter. Depending on the program and number of hours attended each quarter, the total tuition cost for an associate degree program is \$35,040 to \$37,440.

The following are descriptions for each existing program. The Commission approved the curriculum for each program previously when it licensed other Virginia College sites.

A.A.S., Business Administration

Virginia College requests amendment of its license to offer a program leading to the A.A.S. degree in Business Administration at its new site in Florence. Students enrolled in the Business Administration program will develop the skills needed to gain positions in a variety of management settings. Coursework in this program focuses on decision-making skills, effective leadership, cutting-edge technology, and strategic planning.

Three specialized accrediting agencies for business programs are recognized by Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) requires regional accreditation. The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and the International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (IACBE) accredit only programs that award a bachelor degree or higher. Practitioner licensure or certification is not required for employment.

The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH), 2010-2011 Edition*, lists a variety of management employment opportunities for holders of business administration credentials in a myriad of settings. Business service managers work throughout private industry and government and have a wide range of responsibilities, experience, earnings, and education. The number of jobs for administrative service managers is projected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations.

Nine technical colleges and six private colleges and universities in the state offer programs leading to the associate degree in general business.

A.A.S., Criminal Justice

Virginia College requests amendment of its license to offer a program leading to the A.A.S. degree in Criminal Justice at its new site in Florence. The Criminal Justice program at Virginia College is designed to prepare veteran criminal justice professionals for career advancement and to train individuals to enter the field of criminal justice for the first time. Students in the program will learn the history and development of court systems, study techniques of crime scene investigation, and be able to explain legal and moral courses of action for various situations in the criminal justice system.

There is no specialized accrediting agency for criminal justice. Practitioner licensure or certification is not required for employment; however, those who wish to enter local or state law enforcement may require additional training.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-2011 Edition*, opportunities in local police departments will be favorable for individuals who meet psychological, personal, and physical qualifications. Employment of probation officers and correctional treatment specialists is projected to grow faster than the average for all occupations. Additional openings in this field will be created by

the need to replace workers who retire and those who leave local agencies for Federal jobs and private sector security jobs.

In South Carolina, 13 state technical colleges, one public college, and seven private colleges offer programs leading to the associate degree in criminal justice.

A.A.S, Healthcare Reimbursement

Virginia College requests amendment of its license to offer a program leading to the A.A.S. degree in Healthcare Reimbursement at its new site in Florence. Students in the Healthcare Reimbursement program will learn to utilize medical billing and coding software programs in the reimbursement process, classify coding and billing information to avoid claims rejections, become familiar with Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance policies, and analyze accounting and financial data to be used in the healthcare environment.

There is no specialized accrediting agency for healthcare reimbursement. Practitioner licensure or certification is not required for employment but is offered by the National Healthcareer Association, the American Health Information Management Association, the American Academy of Professional Coders, and the National Center for Competency Testing.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-2011 Edition*, job prospects for medical coders should be very good and employment is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations.

No other institutions in South Carolina offer a program leading to the associate degree in Healthcare Reimbursement, although most technical colleges and several private non-degree granting institutions offer certificate programs in Medical Billing and Coding.

A.A.S., Medical Assistant

Virginia College requests amendment of its license to offer a program leading to the A.A.S. degree in Medical Assistant at its new site in Florence. During the course of this program students will learn the administrative duties a medical assistant performs such as keeping records, scheduling appointments and tests, complying with insurance claim procedures, as well as clinical techniques such as reading vital signs and electrocardiograms, administering medicine, and assisting with patient exams.

The Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) and the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES) are the specialized accrediting agencies that accredit medical assistant programs. The Virginia College site in Greenville gained ABHES accreditation for its program leading to the A.A.S. degree in Medical Assistant in 2010. The Charleston, Columbia, and Spartanburg sites have applied for ABHES accreditation. Practitioner licensure or certification is not required for employment.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-2011 Edition*, employment for medical assistants is projected to grow much faster than average for all occupations. The *Handbook* ranks medical assistant among the

fastest growing occupations over the 2006-16 decade. Helping to drive this growth in employment is the increasing number of group practices, clinics, and other health care facilities that need a high proportion of support personnel, particularly medical assistants, who can handle both administrative and clinical duties.

Other institutions in the state that offer programs leading to the associate degree in medical assistant are Brown Mackie College, ECPI, Forrest Junior College, Miller-Motte Technical College, Remington College, and South University. No public institutions in the state offer a program leading to the associate degree in medical assistant. However, six technical colleges offer diploma programs and three offer certificate programs in medical assistant.

A.A.S., Medical Office Administration

Virginia College requests amendment of its license to offer a program leading to the A.A.S. degree in Medical Office Administration at its new site in Florence. Students enrolled in the Medical Office Administration program will be prepared for entry-level positions as administrative assistants in a medical environment. Students will study medical terminology, general office procedures, patient scheduling, record transcription, and customer service skills. Students are not trained to provide clinical care for patients.

There is no specialized accrediting agency for medical office administration. Practitioner licensure or certification is not required for employment.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-2011 Edition*, employment for administrative assistants is projected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations. Growing industries such as health care will continue to generate the most new jobs. Job opportunities should be best for applicants with extensive knowledge of software applications and should be very good for those with advanced communication and computer skills. The *Handbook* projects a 27 percent increase in employment positions for medical administrative assistants over the 2008-2018 decade.

Spartanburg Community College offers a program leading to the associate degree in administrative office technology with the option to specialize in medical office technology. ECPI, Forrest College, and Fortis College also offer programs leading to the associate degree in medical office administration. Several technical colleges offer certificate programs in medical office administration.

A.A.S., Surgical Technology

Virginia College requests amendment of its license to offer a program leading to the A.A.S. degree in Surgical Technology at its new site in Florence. Students enrolled in the Surgical Technology program will learn the proper application of sterile surgical techniques and develop knowledge that will allow them to work alongside surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurse anesthetists, and registered nurses to deliver integrated patient care.

The Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) is the specialized accrediting agency for surgical technology programs. On June 15, 2007, the South Carolina General Assembly signed into law a bill that will require individuals who wish to practice Surgical Technology in the state to have graduated from an accredited surgical technology program and be certified by the National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting. Virginia College is seeking CAAHEP accreditation for the program.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-2011 Edition*, employment for surgical technologists is expected to grow much faster than the average for all occupations. Hospitals will continue to be the primary employer, although much faster employment growth is expected in other health care settings.

Brown Mackie College and Miller-Motte Technical College offer programs leading to the associate degree in surgical technology. No public institutions offer a program leading to an associate degree in surgical technology; however, ten technical colleges offer diploma programs in surgical technology.

Recommendation

The Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing commends favorably to the Commission authorization of an amendment to the existing license for Virginia College at Birmingham, Alabama, to establish a branch campus in Florence. Existing programs will be offered at Florence leading to the Associate of Applied Science degree in (1) Business Administration, (2) Criminal Justice, (3) Healthcare Reimbursement, (4) Medical Assistant, (5) Medical Office Administration, and (6) Surgical Technology to be implemented in July 2012. Further, that the license be issued with the condition that the institution limit enrollment to correspond with available employment opportunities and that the Commission authorize the Commission staff to license the site in Florence when the facilities have been developed and inspected by staff.