



April 4, 2016

Dr. L. Fred Carter  
President  
Francis Marion University  
Stokes Administration Building  
P. O. Box 100547  
Florence, SC 29502-0547

Dear Dr. Carter:

Thank you for the letter and prospectus of October 19, 2015, notifying SACSCOC of your intention to offer a new Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies (PA) degree program, effective August 2016. The new degree program was approved by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education on October 2, 2014.

Francis Marion University (FMU) began planning the development of its healthcare program in 2008. The Pee Dee Health Education Partnership (PDHEP) was established that year with the University of South Carolina, the Carolinas Hospital System, and McLeod Health to facilitate development of graduate professional programs for Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants in Florence. The demand for these healthcare professionals to provide care for the underserved population in the rural Pee Dee region of South Carolina is great. FMU now offers the MSN Nursing Practitioner and the MSN Nurse Educator degree programs. FMU has obtained funding from state, local, and private sources to begin construction of a new Health Science Complex to house the new PA program and existing healthcare programs.

The institution is seeking approval from the Accreditation Review Commission for the Education of Physician Assistants (ARC-PA) with provisional accreditation expected in March 2016. Based on the curriculum standards of the ARC-PA and the Competencies for the Physician Assistant Profession, the new program curriculum will require approximately seven semesters for completion. The program has four semesters of didactic instruction and three semesters of clinical rotations. Syllabi (including course descriptions) were provided for each course in the curriculum. Along with the two major healthcare hospital providers in the region (noted above), students will receive supervised clinical practice training under the direction of licensed providers within a given medical specialty. Once the program is completed, students will be qualified to take the Physician Assistants National Certifying Examination (PANCE) and be eligible for licensure in South Carolina. The program will be offered in the traditional format and projected enrollment in the first cohort is 32 students. A new cohort will begin the program in August of every year.

The program is projected to employ four full-time faculty members and two are currently employed. The Faculty Roster Form describes the qualifications of each full-time faculty member: two have the MPAS and DNP degrees and one has the Doctor of Pharmacy degree



Page 2  
Dr. Carter  
April 4, 2016

(these last three also teach in the MSN degree program). The two PA faculty members are the Program Director and the Academic Coordinator. Each one is qualified by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants as a Certified PA. The Medical Director has also been employed and will do some teaching as a visiting lecturer. As noted, the University also plans to employ two additional faculty members to be assigned full-time to the PA program. All of the faculty members appear to be qualified to teach the coursework assigned.

Library and learning resources appear to be adequate for the degree program. Standard library resources include adequate library staff, print and electronic materials, computer equipment, instructional services, and library consortia agreements. Discipline-specific resources to support students and faculty members in the new PA program also appear to be adequate. The library provides access to discipline-specific electronic resources like MEDLINE, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, CINAHL Plus with full-text, SciFinder Scholar, STAT!Ref, and Science Direct. A listing of the specific journal titles and related journals in the discipline was also provided.

Student support services also appear to be adequate for the degree program. Along with standard administrative services, these include student recreation and activities, multicultural affairs, counseling, testing, disability services, career development, and student health services.

Physical resources also appear to be adequate for the degree program. As noted, construction for a new Health Science Complex is underway with completion expected in the summer of 2016, in time for the enrollment of the first PA cohort in August 2016. The complex will house the PA and Nursing programs as well as the graduate clinical psychology program. The complex will be a three story building containing 50,000 square feet of space. The facility will contain offices for all faculty and staff, six classrooms, a 150 seat auditorium, labs for anatomy and diagnostic testing, eight rooms for Observed Structural Clinical Examinations, two skills labs, a computer lab, and multiple small study group rooms. The facility will contain a simulation center to be shared by PA and NP students. The simulation center will feature two fully equipped simulation labs and multiple task managers for instruction in various procedures. Space will also be provided for a conference room, faculty lounge, lockers for each student, and a student lounge.

Financial support appears to be adequate for the degree program. The program will be supported by a recurring appropriation from the state of South Carolina and students' tuition. The new Health Science Center has been fully funded from external sources and requires no ongoing debt funding. The first-year budget projects that revenues will exceed expenditures for the program.



Page 3  
Dr. Carter  
April 4, 2016

Evaluation and assessment appear to be adequate for the new PA degree program. Student assessment will be based on approaches recognized as strategies within the PA education and medical education literature, including multiple approaches with multiple observations, by multiple individuals. Assessment will include objective testing, case study reporting and self-reflections, observed standardized clinical evaluations, direct observation by community providers (using evaluation rubrics), and facilitated discussion and debates. Students will be evaluated for all critical components of learning and the attainment of learning outcomes aligned with national competency benchmarks. Students must demonstrate competency across the six core domains established within the Competencies for the PA Profession: medical knowledge, interpersonal and communication skills, patient care, professionalism, practice-based learning and improvement, and systems-based practice. The learning outcomes goals for the PA program were provided in the prospectus. As noted above, a syllabus for each course provided a course description and learning outcomes for each course in the curriculum.

**The Board of Trustees of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges reviewed the materials seeking approval of the Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies 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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Belle S. Wheelan".

Belle S. Wheelan, Ph.D.  
President

BSW/LCS:iy

Enclosure

cc: Dr. Charlene Wages, Vice President for Administration  
Dr. Crystal A. Baird