Dr. Belle S. Wheelan, President  
Commission on Colleges  
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools  
1866 Southern Lane  
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097

July 8, 2009

Dear Dr. Wheelan:

The purpose of this letter is to notify the Commission on Colleges that Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi is one of five full members of the Texas Electronic Coalition for Physics (TECP), along with Texas A&M University-Kingsville, West Texas A&M University, Texas A&M International University, and Tarleton State University. All of the institutions are members of The Texas A&M University System and are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. TECP offers 12 upper-division physics courses through distance education, using interactive television provided through the A&M System's TTVN network (formerly the Trans-Texas Video Network), the Internet, and other electronic media. A&M-Corpus Christi offers one course every two years through the coalition. The institution does not have a B.S. degree program in physics, but does offer a minor through the Department of Physical and Environmental Sciences in the College of Science and Technology. We regret the delay in notification of our participation in this consortium.

The coalition was an informally organized group when the institution began participating in 1995. A grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), awarded 2001-2005, fostered the coalition's development. In 2003 the TECP was established more formally through memoranda of understanding (MOUs) signed by the five institutions. A&M-Corpus Christi completed a MOU with the coalition on June 28, 2003, in order "to strengthen [its] undergraduate program in Physics" and "to enhance the cooperation of both faculty and students . . . in education and research." The university president, the provost, the college dean, the department chair, and the coordinator for the physics program signed the MOU, along with the chair of the TECP. An attachment contained a course equivalency table. A&M-Corpus Christi agreed to list the courses being offered through the TECP in a particular semester as part of the institution's physics course offerings for that semester.

The TECP's stated goals are to provide high quality upper-division physics courses to students, to provide research opportunities for undergraduate physics majors, to create the administration infrastructure necessary to enable TECP to function as a distributed or virtual department, and to provide a functioning model to other programs for adoption elsewhere. All courses are taught by tenured and tenure-track faculty from these SACS accredited, member institutions. The TECP does not award any degrees.

Since 1997, A&M-Corpus Christi has offered a 20-semester-hour undergraduate minor in physics. TECP courses count toward completion of the minor. To earn the minor, students must satisfactorily complete University Physics I and II, which are offered on campus, and four upper-division courses (12 hours) offered through the TECP. A&M-Corpus Christi faculty members teach some of the TECP courses. Although the minor in physics includes courses provided electronically through the TECP, A&M-Corpus Christi maintains control of the minor and awards the minor. Students enrolling in the minor must meet the university's admission requirements and must comply with college and university academic rules and requirements for undergraduate education. The physics minor meets the institution's standards for academic minors, which are stated in the undergraduate catalog. Any changes in the course requirements for the minor must be reviewed through the college's curriculum review process and by the Faculty Senate and provost as part of the catalog approval process.

The TECP bylaws recognize the need for institutions to maintain control over their programs. The bylaws say that undergraduate "(s)tudents desiring to enroll in TECP courses will apply at the university from which they plan to graduate . . . known as the HOME INSTITUTION . . . through the usual undergraduate admissions procedures."

THE ISLAND UNIVERSITY
Students enrolled in TECP courses "will abide by the university rules and undergraduate . . . policies at the HOME INSTITUTION."

The TECP and its participating institutions are committed to offering physics courses of high quality. The TECP curriculum committee, consisting of all faculty members teaching in the coalition including A&M-Corpus Christi's representative, reviews course syllabi in terms of content, objectives, and student outcomes. Through this process, the faculty agrees on course content and a common syllabus to be used for each course. To assess the quality of courses, including the effectiveness of the electronic delivery methods, the TECP has used pre- and post-tests that are jointly developed by the faculty members, surveys of students, and other methods. Faculty members communicate through electronic means and face-to-face meetings regarding ways to improve the content and delivery of TECP courses.

By offering a scheduled rotation of upper-division physics courses through distance education, the TECP has helped to protect the vitality of small physics programs within the A&M System. Although the number of A&M-Corpus Christi students taking TECP courses is small, the students benefit from the institution's participation. They can take physics courses taught by professors at other institutions and can pursue research opportunities that would not otherwise be available to them. Additionally, the coalition encourages collaboration between physics faculty members at different universities and the sharing of resources for teaching and research. If A&M-Corpus Christi develops a major in physics at a future date, it will utilize the 12 upper-division courses offered through this coalition. The TECP mission statement says, in part, "Students completing the TECP curriculum will have received sufficient education and training to enable them to succeed in graduate school, professional school, and industry."

The TECP goals are consistent with the guidelines in the SACS policy on joint curricular ventures involving the award of credit by member institutions. The primary purpose for offering courses through the TECP is educational. These courses are consistent with the educational purpose and goals of A&M-Corpus Christi. Acceptable practices have been used for determining the amount and level of credit for the courses offered through the TECP. The enclosed MOU and TECP bylaws discuss the coalition's purpose and scope, objectives, membership criteria, and organization. Because the MOU signed in 2003 does not address every topic mentioned in the policy on joint curricular ventures, efforts are underway to develop an updated MOU more closely based on the current SACS policy. We will be happy to provide any additional information on the TECP that you may need.

Sincerely,

Flavious C. Killebrew
President/CEO

/icc

enclosures

cc: Dr. Anantha Babbili
Dr. M. K. Balasubramanya
Dr. David Billeaux
Dr. Robert Nelsen
Dr. Frank Pezold
Ms. Christine Shupala

bcc: Ms. Kathy Winston