

Certification Advisory Council (CAC)

Friday, November 4, 2016

Summary Notes

Members Present: Carolyn Wilson Green (chair); Dianna Miller; Donna Jurick; Jennifer Ramm

Staff Present: Cathie Maeyaert; Rex Peebles; Garry Tomerlin; Paul Shuler

Others Present: Beth Wuest, Texas State University (site team chair); Hamed Ghazali and Main Alqudah, Al-Huda University (applicant)

The webcast of this meeting is available at the following link:

<http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/apps/Events/>

1. Welcome and introduction of CAC members

Cathie Maeyaert opened the meeting and asked for self-introductions by Certification Advisory Council (CAC) members, Jennifer Ramm, Donna Jurick, Dianna Miller and Carolyn Wilson Green. A quorum was met.

THECB staff, Cathie Maeyaert, Rex Peebles, Paul Shuler, and Garry Tomerlin, introduced themselves.

Beth Wuest, site team chair, Hamed Ghazali and Main Alqudah, representing Applicant Al-Huda University, introduced themselves.

2. Consideration of Summary Notes from the August 12, 2016 meeting

Carolyn Wilson Green, chair, asked for review and motion to approve the August 12, 2016 meeting summary notes. Motion to accept by Donna Jurick; second by Jennifer Ramm. Motion carried to accept notes as written.

3. Consideration of the application for Certificate of Authority from Al-Huda University

Dr. Wilson Green asked representatives from Al-Huda University to give a short background of the school and the applied-for programs. Dr. Ghazali explained that Al-Huda University was born out of need to combine Islamic and American culture in the academic community. Identified areas of need, including Islamic teacher education and Islamic finance. The school also looked into counseling, but limited its programs to Islamic studies (religious degree), and Master's degrees in Islamic Education and Islamic Finance. Dr. Hamed stated the school has learned a lot from the application process.

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Dr. Main stated there are many unaccredited Islamic institutions in the US, but Al-Huda University wants to integrate Islamic civilization, history, knowledge into educational system so that general public gets the correct information. Therefore, the school will seek accreditation.

Dr. Wilson Green asked Beth Wuest, site team chair, to give a summary of the site evaluation visit. Dr. Wuest stated the visit took place at the end of July 2016. The team had many questions and concerns, not in terms of what they are teaching, in terms of the peripheral structure of what it takes to run an institution of higher education. In the two months since the visit, Dr. Wuest said the school had done a phenomenal job in taking the team's advice and getting systems in place; however, since it had only been two months, only so much can be accomplished to-date. Dr. Wuest said the team met with faculty, administration and students. All meetings were very positive.

Ms. Maeyaert clarified that Al-Huda University started as an exempt religious institution for two years, with its Islamic Studies degree, which is considered religious education. At the point that Al-Huda wanted to expand to Islamic Education and Islamic Finance, degrees that allow a student to work outside of a religious institution, they were required to apply for a Certificate of Authority.

Dr. Wilson Green asked for questions from the CAC members and THECB staff. Dr. Jurick clarified that the religious exemption is still valid for the undergraduate Islamic Studies degree and the application is only for the two master's degrees.

Dr. Shuler asked Dr. Hamed how the need for the degrees was determined. Dr. Hamed stated he works as a consultant for K-12 Islamic schools throughout the US. He is very familiar with other schools and what areas are needed. There is a great need for Islamic students to get a degree and be part of American culture. Specifically for Islamic Education, the school goes beyond the language and religious courses to help students have classroom management skills and have professional teaching skills.

Ms. Ramm asked about the number of undergraduate students. Dr. Main estimated that approximately 350 people had applied. 150 students have taken at least one course. 65-70 students are currently taking a class. Approximately 65% are undergraduate students and 35% are graduate students.

Ms. Ramm requested the annual operating budget. Dr. Main stated the annual operating budget was \$450,000 to 500,000 per year.

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Dr. Miller inquired as to the completion rate and any sequence for improvement. Dr. Main stated two students have completed their studies, one in Islamic Education and one completed one component in Islamic Studies teaching methodology.

Dr. Wuest noted that many of the students already have master's degrees and are coming back to get a second degree. Dr. Main said that if someone already has a teacher certification, the school accepts that certification as 20 credit hours. Dr. Hamed explained the credit transfer policy allows a certain number of credits to transfer.

Dr. Jurick congratulated the applicant on the policies and procedures that they have already put into place. Dr. Jurick expressed concern that some items which will be needed for accreditation were still missing. These items include an audit and being able to get appropriate faculty credentials documented. Outlines of plans are in place, but Dr. Jurick questioned when results would be available. Dr. Main estimated that within a month the 2015 financial audit would be completed. The 2016 audit would be started as soon as that fiscal year is complete.

Regarding educational credentials, Dr. Main explained a new policy was adopted. Persons holding degrees from unaccredited universities will not be allowed to teach. The Board of Trustees did consider Dr. Main as a special case based on his teaching background and qualified him to be Director of the Islamic Studies department. Dr. Hamed stated that in terms of the Islamic Education and Islamic Finance degrees, he assumed responsibility based on his degrees and experience. Added four other persons with sufficient advanced educational qualifications.

Dr. Hamed, based on the site report, looked at the assessment piece, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Both assessments are necessary, with input from stakeholders. Have received data from staff to see areas for improvement and areas of strength. Dr. Hamed estimated by the end of January 2017, they will see more results. The committee also added requirements for teachers to pass certain TEA-required tests, such as for teaching foreign languages. Dr. Hamed referenced a chart showing input from all stakeholders which is data-driven.

Ms. Ramm asked about the three positions added. Dr. Hamed confirmed two are adjunct positions and one is a full-time position. Dr. Main clarified there are currently three full-time instructors. Others are adjunct.

Dr. Wilson Green asked about the most urgent item to address next. Dr. Main responded that addressing the curriculum and obtaining more involvement from

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professors was necessary. The difficulty is that there are no national standards for Islamic studies with which to evaluate the curriculum in these areas. Overall, Dr. Hamed said there needs to be more surveys and data collection.

Dr. Peebles asked for what the Islamic Education master's degree prepares students. Dr. Hamed identified five areas – disciplinary knowledge, academic and critical thinking, personal and social skills, community engagement, moral and ethical commitment. Al-Huda University blends Islamic and American culture to ensure students work ethically. When assessed, each course is reviewed in each area.

Dr. Peebles asked what type of jobs Islamic Education graduates would be able to hold. Dr. Hamed said the graduates would be qualified to teach in Islamic schools. The graduates would have enhanced teaching skills. Graduates could also teach Arabic as a second language in a public school or other institution. Dr. Main stated there are about 500 Islamic schools, but most teachers don't have any credentials. Al-Huda University wants to fill that credential gap.

For Islamic Finance, Dr. Main said the industry is growing in the US, with Islamic finance, mutual funds, and Islamic mortgage companies. The goal of this program is to help Muslims minority find an alternative that complies with their religious restrictions. The institutions must be in compliance with both Islamic and American law. Dr. Hamed gave an example of a bank that makes loans based on Islamic finance. Graduates are needed who understand both financial systems.

Dr. Peebles asked about the physical infrastructure and financial capabilities of the school. Dr. Peebles expressed concern about the financial sustainability of the institution in the future. Dr. Hamed stated that based on his experience with other schools, sustainability will be there. Dr. Hamed said that need drives financial resources.

Dr. Main explained 10-15% of budget is covered by tuition. They can't raise fees until the school is accredited. The Board of Trustees won't allow the school to accept international students as they don't know with what organizations these international students might be affiliated. If this policy changes, international students can be charged a tuition amount that is double the current tuition.

Dr. Main described the financial resources, including an endowment fund, investment property, and a brokerage account with Fidelity. Hopefully, more investments will be obtained. Dr. Main estimated the school would be financially self-sufficient within seven

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years. Dr. Main's experience is that the Muslim community is very generous and supportive. They community believes in the education and trusts the leaders of Al-Huda University, so he does not believe they will have financial difficulties. The school has never experienced a financial deficit since its establishment. The community provides a lot of funds in support of the school. Dr. Hamed also believes that obtaining a Certificate of Authority would assist in raising additional funds.

Dr. Shuler asked if the Katy school Dr. Hamed referenced and was affiliated with was a K-12 school. Dr. Hamed said it is an accredited K-12 school which is one of the top schools in the nation. Dr. Main said that some of the graduates of the K-12 academy are joining Al-Huda University as students.

Dr. Wilson Green asked for a motion regarding the application for a Certificate of Authority. Dr. Jurick stated that Al-Huda University has done incredible planning, including first-rate strategic planning, but the follow-through documentation is not available yet. Dr. Hamed offered to share some data that has now been collected.

Dr. Peebles explained the options available to the CAC members. A recommendation goes to staff and the Coordinating Board, which has the final determination of approval or disapproval. The CAC members can recommend approval as is, denial, or tabling the application to allow for more information to be brought before the committee. Dr. Miller asked about the timeline if they tabled the application. Dr. Peebles said tabling the application would table it to the next meeting in January 2017.

Ms. Ramm made a motion: With 16 of the 24 Standards not being met at the time of the site visit, the application is tabled until the next meeting. Dr. Jurick seconded the motion. The CAC members were polled and the motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Jurick asked if the application would need to be brought back in January. Dr. Peebles stated that the timing of the application being reassessed would be left to the applicant. At the January meeting, if the application was not being reassessed, another motion to continue tabling the application would be necessary.

Dr. Peebles, on behalf of the staff, noted that Al-Huda University has made significant progress. Follow through is not quite there, although the applicant is on the right track.

4. Update on upcoming meeting dates and expected activities during AY 2016-2017

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Ms. Maeyaert provided an update on meeting dates. The CAC is scheduled to meet on Tuesday, January 24, 2017; Tuesday, April 25, 2017; and Tuesday, July 25, 2017.

Dr. Main requested clarification on what Al-Huda University will be required to report for an upcoming CAC meeting. Dr. Peebles said staff would discuss with applicant the standards and concerns which continue to need to be addressed. Any documentation provided by Al-Huda University would then be shared with the CAC members prior to the next meeting where the application is considered.

Dr. Hamed noted that three or four standards relate to assessment. He is hopeful that more data will be collected. It will just take a matter of time to show plan in action.

5. Adjournment

Dr. Wilson Green adjourned the meeting at 10:52 a.m.

Dr. Peebles thanked Dr. Wuest and her fellow site team members.