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Closing of the MSW course offerings in Memphis, Tennessee (Follow-up)

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND STUDENT SUCCESS

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August 11, 2011

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

Dear Dr. Wheelan,

On August 1, 2011, we received your letter relative to organizational changes at The University of Tennessee (copy attached.) In that letter, you asked that we provide additional information on the closing of the Master of Social Work course offerings in Memphis, Tennessee.

We are happy to provide that information.

Background. In 2007, a series of events commenced that resulted in the decision to close the UT Knoxville Master of Social Work course offerings in Memphis.

The UTK MSSW program in Memphis had a long tradition of accepting students from Arkansas under the joint Academic Common Market agreement between Arkansas and Tennessee. This allowed students from Arkansas to attend the University of Tennessee MSSW program in Memphis at the in-state rate for tuition. In 2007 Arkansas discontinued their Academic Common Market agreement with Tennessee and the number of applicants from Arkansas plummeted.

UT Knoxville in Memphis also enrolled many students from Mississippi. About the same time Arkansas withdrew from the Academic Common Market, the University of Mississippi (just across the state line in Oxford, MS) developed and began offering an MSW program.

Union University in Jackson, Tennessee (about 45 minutes from Memphis) also began offering an MSW program.

The University of Memphis, which has successfully operated an undergraduate Social Work program for many years and was well entrenched in the Memphis social service community, notified the Council on Social Work Education (the national accrediting body) that it was planning to develop and implement an MSW program.

The discontinuance of the Academic Common Market agreement with Arkansas, coupled with the development of MSW programs by the University of Memphis, Union University, and the University of Mississippi, seriously affected enrollment in the UT Knoxville MSSW program that was based in Memphis.

In Spring 2008, all academic units at UTK were instructed to prepare for a significant permanent base budget reduction. As applications to the Memphis MSSW program declined it became apparent that the Memphis area could not sustain two Tennessee public university Masters of Social Work Programs.

The UT Knoxville College of Social Work had offered MSSW programs in Knoxville, Nashville, and Memphis, and an online MSSW program. Given the declining enrollment at the Memphis location and impending budget reduction it was determined that duplication of the same program in the Memphis area was not sustainable. The decision was made to consolidate the UTK College of Social Work Memphis faculty and resources into the Nashville and Knoxville programs. Faculty were consulted and involved in the planning of the consolidation.

The College of Social Work continues to offer the MSSW program to the Memphis area through its distance education MSSW program. Currently, the UTK College of Social Work offers the BSSW degree in Knoxville, the MSSW program in Nashville and Knoxville and throughout the state through its distance education MSSW program, and the Ph.D. in Social Work in Knoxville. The College will begin offering a DSW, an online doctoral program in advanced clinical practice and leadership, in January 2012.

Effective Termination Dates. The UTK Memphis MSSW program was terminated on May 31, 2011. The UTK College of Social Work continues to offer the MSSW program to the Memphis and surrounding areas through the MSSW distance education program.

Notification to students and faculty of closure of program. Students, faculty, and members of the Memphis community began discussions of closure of the Memphis program in Fall 2008. Final determination of closure was made in summer 2009.

In summer 2009 students were notified by email communication, notification on the College website, written letters mailed to their place of residence and in-person discussions with the Dean of the College of Social Work and the Assistant Dean of the Memphis Campus of the College of Social Work. The College of Social Work continues to offer the MSSW program through distance education to the Memphis area and field internship sites are available in Memphis for students living in the Memphis and surrounding area.

Faculty were notified in fall 2009 of the closure of the UTK College of Social Work MSSW Memphis program via letter and through individual and group meetings with the Dean of the College of Social Work. No faculty were terminated and all faculty were assured their positions with the College and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Counseling Students on Program Completion. The Dean and faculty advisors worked closely with students to assure them that courses would be offered so that all currently enrolled MSSW students could graduate by the closure date (May 2011). All but two of the students graduated. These two students had personal reasons to delay graduation and have been admitted into the College of Social Work distance education MSSW program to finish their course of studies. The distance education MSSW program is identical to the MSSW Memphis program except that all content is offered on line.

Faculty Re-deployment. All faculty of the UTK College of Social Work MSSW Memphis program were assured in writing of the continuation of their positions with the College of Social Work. Faculty were assured by the Office of the Provost that relocation costs would be covered for reassignment to either the Nashville or Knoxville programs. Reassignment was made based on faculty preference, location teaching needs, and location research synergies. Two of the UTK Memphis faculty ultimately resigned their positions and accepted positions at the University of Memphis effective July 2010 (before the closure of the UT Knoxville Memphis Program). A third faculty member resigned his position August 2011 (two months after closure of the Memphis program) and joined the faculty at the University of Memphis. Two faculty members retired prior to the closure of the Memphis program and one faculty member is retiring September 2011. As a result, all faculty on the UTK MSSW Memphis faculty lines voluntarily vacated their positions and accepted positions at the University of Memphis or retired. Faculty lines were retained in the College of Social Work. Some of those lines have been filled and the remainder of the lines will be filled for academic year 2011-2012.

I trust the above explanation will answer the questions you posed in your letter of August 1, 2011. Please contact me should you have additional questions or have need for more information.

Sincerely,



Katherine N. High, E.D.
Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs
and Student Success and SACS Liaison

Attachment: August 1, 2011, letter from Dr. Belle Wheelan

C:	Dr. Steven Sheeley	Provost Susan Martin
	Dean Karen Sowers	President Joe DiPietro
	Chancellor Jimmy Cheek	Assistant Vice President India Lane
	Associate Vice Chancellor Mary Albrecht	