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Our School's Campaign for Distinction in Forensic Accounting

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Over a three year period beginning in 2000, our school

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experienced pressure on several fronts to make changes in its accounting program. First, like most other programs around the country, we experienced declining enrollments during the late 1990s due in part to the increasing popularity of information systems/information technology programs brought about by the dot.com explosion and the accounting profession's lingering struggle with negative stereotype issues.

Changes in the AACSB accreditation process were a second source of pressure for change at our business school. Citing the increasing use of technology-based distance learning approaches and the growing ranks of executive and non-tenure track faculty, due in great part to the dwindling supply of new PhD graduates, in 2000 the AACSB created its Blue Ribbon Committee to develop a new approach to assessing the quality of member schools. The AACSB also noted that globalization, the emergence of for-profit educational

enterprises and corporate universities, *demands for greater value from employers, students, parents and public officials*; and pervasive performance rankings by popular magazines were also key drivers for a growing focus on accountability in higher education (*italics added*). Our college was one of the schools that worked with the committee and actually underwent review under the proposed new standards prior to their official adoption.

Another source of external pressure surfaced in late 2001 when the financial press began reporting, with alarming regularity, major corporate bankruptcies, audit failures, and charges of corporate greed and misconduct on the part of corporate America. The collapse of major organizations such as Enron, WorldCom, and Arthur Andersen and charges of fraud and accounting improprieties at other major corporations such as Aldelphia, AIG, Tyco, Computer Associates, Qwest, and HealthSouth were alarming. To what extent

could educators respond to these failures? We began asking ourselves what we should and could do to prepare our students to search more aggressively for fraud.

The final event that led to our decision to create a forensic accounting program was the hiring of a new business dean in the Summer of 2002. The new dean began to immediately implement a strategy designed to help the college gain national distinction. Specifically, he encouraged each department to identify a niche area in which a new program or emphasis could be developed that had the potential of achieving national distinction within a decade.

In the next section, we review the literature in the forensic accounting area to assess the level of support for our decision to create a niche program in forensic accounting. The third section details the process we followed in choosing our niche and how we went about implementing the program. We conclude with a brief summary.

Review of Literature

According to the 2006 *ACFE Report to the Nation on Occupational Fraud and Abuse* (Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, 2006), U.S. organizations lose approximately 5 percent of their revenues to fraud; this translates to about \$652 billion in annual fraud losses.

This periodic survey and similar surveys routinely conducted by large consulting firms such as PricewaterhouseCoopers and KPMG clearly indicate the need for accounting schools to offer some type of forensic accounting education.

Zabihollah Rezaee has been a prolific advocate for integrating forensic accounting into the accounting curriculum. Rezaee, Lander, and Gavin (1992, 25-29) suggest incorporating forensic accounting material as a response to both the Accounting Education Change Commission's call for changes in accounting education and the passage of the 150-hour requirement in many states. In what may be a seminal work, Rezaee, Lander, Reinstein (1996, 147-162) describe the scope and nature of forensic accounting and suggest three ways in which academic accounting programs can integrate forensic accounting into their curricula: (1) incorporating forensic accounting topics into existing accounting courses; (2) offering a separate forensic accounting course; and/or (3) integrating forensic accounting modules into a second auditing course. In addition, the authors summarize the reference and resource materials then available for use by educators.

The following year, Rezaee (Rezaee & Burton, 1997) considerably strengthened his message by surveying CFE

practitioners to gauge their opinions regarding demand, challenges, benefits, coverage and delivery of forensic accounting education. Actually, the researchers surveyed both practitioners and academicians and reported that the majority of both groups agree that forensic accounting education should be integrated into accounting curricula. The two groups however, differed as to how forensic education should be delivered with practitioners favoring offering separate forensic accounting courses while the academicians preferred integration of forensic topics throughout all accounting and auditing courses. The survey also asked respondents to rank the relative importance of twenty-six specific forensic topics.

Rezaee surveyed academicians and practitioners again in 2003, this time asking respondents to consider forty-nine suggested forensic accounting topics gleaned from a review of actual course syllabi obtained from accounting educators. In this study, reported in Rezaee, Crumbley, and Elmore (2003, 193-232), the majority of the topics were considered very important for integration into the accounting curriculum by both survey groups, although the relative importance of the topics did vary.

The study also revealed that respondents expect that the demand for and interest in forensic accounting to

continue to increase and that more universities will begin providing forensic accounting education. Rezaee, Crumbley, and Elmore also describe how prior forensic accounting education research has fallen into two categories: those studies that focus on the “supply side” (i.e., studies that examined course syllabi to determine the coverage of forensic accounting in the curriculum) and those that focus on the “demand side” (i.e., studies that assess the perceived need among practitioners and academicians for forensic accounting education). For example, in the former category are studies such as the Rezaee, Lander, and Reinstein (1996) study mentioned earlier and Peterson and Buckhoff (2004) who explain several reasons why universities should offer a dedicated course in fraud examination and describe a comprehensive fraud examination course, along with enrollments, objectives, content, assignments, and grading. In the later category are the Rezaee and Burton (1997) and Rezaee, Crumbley, Elmore (2003) studies mentioned above.

In developing a niche in forensic accounting, the process of discussion and exploration evolved into a comprehensive five-course minor in fraud examination followed by a five-course graduate concentration in forensic accounting. Our

program is one of the most comprehensive fraud and forensic accounting (FFA) programs in the country. Another comprehensive FFA program is offered at West Virginia University (WVU). Houck et al. (2006) describe West Virginia University’s initiative to develop a model curriculum for fraud and forensic accounting. The West Virginia project, funded through a \$600,000 grant from the National Institute for Justice, identifies the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are necessary for success in working as fraud examiners and/or forensic accountants. The WVU model breaks down the FFA curriculum into three main categories:

1. Criminology, which includes the following topics,
 - The Fraud Triangle theory regarding why people commit fraud;
 - Legal, regulatory, and professional environment; and
 - Ethical issues.
2. Fraud and forensic accounting, which includes the following topics,
 - Asset misappropriations, corruption, and false representations;
 - Financial statement fraud; and
 - FFA in a digital environment.

3. Forensic and litigation advisory services, which includes the following topics,
 - Criminal, civil, and administrative engagements;
 - Consulting expert vs. testifying expert; and
 - Engagements include business valuations, marital disputes, business interruption losses, lost wages, insurance claims, tax issues, etc.

Although the WVU model curriculum provides a very comprehensive and useful list of topics that should be covered in a fraud and forensic accounting program, it does not convert those topics into specific courses along with detailed course descriptions.

Our program of ten fraud and forensic accounting courses encompasses all of the major categories proposed by the WVU model curriculum and goes well beyond the curriculum suggestions of Rezaee, Lander, Reinstein (1996). As noted elsewhere, our forensic program also satisfies the preferences of both practitioners and academicians by having both dedicated forensic accounting courses and the feature whereby the faculty incorporate forensic accounting related learning modules into each required accounting course.

How We Developed a New Emphasis Area: The Details

The School's strategy to develop a new emphasis involved five steps: identifying the emphasis area (i.e., niche); assessing its feasibility and level of stakeholder support; strengthening faculty qualifications; developing the curriculum and related activities; and promoting the emphasis.

Step One: Identifying the Niche

The faculty spent most of the 2002-03 academic year evaluating possible niche areas. First, we held a brainstorming session to identify potential niche areas. Our final list contained the ten possibilities shown in Exhibit 1.

In considering potential emphasis areas, we instructed our colleagues to take into

consideration factors such as faculty qualifications and interests, existing personal and professional relationships, and campus resources. For example, economic development was on the list because our university is one of only a few nationwide to have such a program, international trade was there because several of our faculty had experience in that area, information technology because the university had just established a new college of information technology, and so on. For each potential niche area, we identified advantages, disadvantages, barriers to entry including costs, and the likelihood of success. We paid particularly close attention to the level of enthusiasm the faculty exhibited for each alternative because we knew that to be successful a significant

number of our key faculty had to buy in to the emphasis area. The meeting in which we discussed the forensic alternative was well attended and had by far the most participation. The excitement mounted as the tax professors described how they could easily incorporate tax fraud issues into their courses, the systems professors talked about computer forensics, the financial professors talked about cooking the books and how they could help their students detect it, the business law faculty talked about fraud and the law and litigation issues, and so on.

We were soon convinced that our faculty had embraced the idea of incorporating the forensic accounting niche across the entire accounting curriculum. As we explored the potential demand for such a program we uncovered a *USA Today* article that reported the

Exhibit 1 Potential Niche Areas

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|---------------------------|--|
| • economic development | • health care |
| • ethics and integrity | • information technology (e.g., AIS, ERP) |
| • financial accounting | • international trade |
| • forensic accounting | • logistics |
| • governmental accounting | • tax-related (policy, speciality areas, etc.) |
-

demand for forensic accountants would increase by as much as fifty percent in 2002 and that forensic accounting was one of the 20 hot job tracks of the future. (*USA Today*, 2002).

As alluded to earlier, the faculty did sense some responsibility for what was happening to the accounting profession and believed they needed to do their part by better educating students in fraud detection, investigation, and prevention techniques. They also believed that students needed more legal training so that they would be prepared to deal with the issues associated with evidence gathering, protection, and admissibility.

Step 2: Assessing Feasibility

We spent the remainder of the Spring and Summer of 2003 assessing the feasibility of a forensic niche program. We encouraged every faculty member to obtain feedback from his or her students, colleagues, and professional contacts. This proved more difficult than initially expected because we made the mistake of using terms (e.g., forensic accounting, forensic accountant, computer forensics, etc.) that were unfamiliar to the average business person. We had to learn how to clarify and sharpen our message by first talking about the widely documented expectations gap that exists in financial auditing and then leading up to the need to train accountants to

detect and prevent fraud. We made presentations to our students, the university administration, and to both our college advisory board and the school's accounting advisory council to solicit their feedback and input. The dean gave several reports to the university administration, but focused primarily on the provost and vice president of academic affairs. Finally, both the dean and the school director made several trips to meet with employers and other external constituents to assess the level of interest in the proposed niche area.

Step 3: Strengthening Faculty Qualifications

In the beginning, we hoped to be able to develop an emphasis in forensic accounting with no additional faculty resources. Several of the school's existing faculty had varying degrees of practical experience in fraud detection and prevention although none were certified fraud examiners and none could be considered an expert in the area. By late Summer 2003, our research convinced us that we needed a credentialed expert to assist us if we were to develop a program that would produce graduates who were distinctly different from our existing graduates. We also believed that such an authority would provide our initiative with immediate credibility while the remaining faculty completed additional training, education and practical experience.

Finally, we wanted to tap into the expert's professional network of individuals and organizations to gain access to important resources and support for various components of our program such as case study data and consulting opportunities.

Fortunately, the dean was successful in lobbying the administration for permission to hire an academically qualified (AQ) forensic accounting faculty member. In the months leading up to his arrival in the summer of 2004, we tried to make additional progress on the faculty development front. Several advisory council members committed to offering faculty (and student) internships and other faculty/firm partnership opportunities. In July 2004, three faculty members won a university faculty development grant to attend the annual meeting of the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners. The following spring, five faculty members attended a 3-day practice-based training program designed to train fraud investigators in the field.

Step 4: Developing the Curriculum

Once the feasibility study was completed, a task force was appointed to coordinate, document, and monitor the activities needed to create the program and gain its approval through the university's various curriculum approval processes. The task force began by developing a list of

potential fraud detection and prevention topics that task force members believed should be covered in a forensic accounting emphasis. This list is presented in Exhibit 2.

They then determined if, where, and how these topics were being covered in existing accounting and business law classes. They encouraged each of us to include a forensic accounting module or learning objective in our courses to obtain the broadest possible coverage of these topics across the accounting and law curriculum.

With regard to new courses, we initially decided to develop two stand-alone forensic accounting courses. The first course, *Macro Fraud Examination*, would be an elective at the undergraduate level and would examine the pervasiveness of and the causes of fraud and white-collar crime in society. The macro course would also explore evidence gathering and admissibility, financial crime statutes, types and elements of fraud, investigative methods, and report writing.

The second course, *Micro Fraud Examination*, would take a micro look at fraud by examining over forty of the most common fraud schemes, including how they work and how they can be effectively detected, investigated, and prevented.

Two discoveries, however, convinced us to go well beyond just two courses. First, a number of the school's stakeholders (including members of the school's advisory council) expressed their conviction that forensic accountants could not be graduated but had to be developed over many years of practice, experience, education, and training. These constituents believed that even if it were possible to prepare students for entry level forensic accounting positions, it certainly could not be done in just two new courses plus limited exposure in other accounting courses. Second, during our benchmarking work, we discovered that over 150 schools in the United States alone were already

offering either one or two courses in forensic accounting. We were convinced that our school could not likely gain national distinction if its forensic accounting program was not significantly different from other programs. After much discussion among the faculty and our constituents we settled on a ten-course curriculum. Exhibit 3 provides a list of the ten courses organized by topical area.

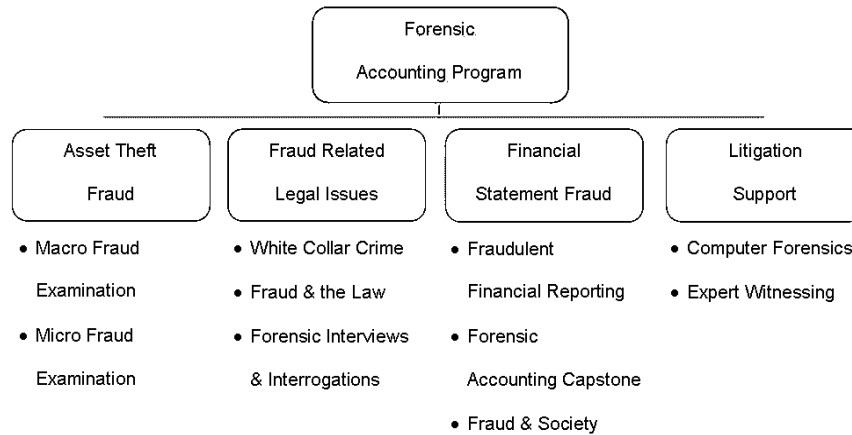
When the school director was informed that the task force wanted to develop ten new courses, he struggled for weeks to address all the ramifications: how many new faculty would be required and where would we get the funds to hire them? Which courses could be taught by our existing faculty? How would students fit ten courses, the equivalent of an entire year's worth of coursework, into their programs of study without substantially delaying their graduation?

From the outset our intent was to create an innovative

Exhibit 2
Potential Fraud Detection and Prevention Modules

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|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracing Illicit Funds • Conducting Internal Investigations • How to Testify • Computer-aided Fraud Detection & Prevention • Professional Interviewing Skills • Financial Statement Fraud • Auditing for Internal Fraud • Asset Misappropriation • Skimming • Cash Larceny • Check Tampering • Register Disbursement Schemes • Billing Schemes • Payroll/Expense Reimbursement Schemes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundamentals of Computer Fraud • Crossing the Line: Ethical Lessons • Recovering the Proceeds of Fraud • Fraud-related Internal Controls • Auditing Accounts Receivable • Inventory and Other Asset Schemes • Corruption • Bribery • Conflicts of Interest • Fraudulent Financial Statements • A Macro Look at Fraud • Cooking the Books and other Financial Shenanigans |
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Exhibit 3
Forensic Accounting Curriculum Organized by Topical Components



multi-disciplinary program taught by instructors from accounting, legal studies, justice studies, and information technology. Predictably, we fell victim to

the typical miscommunication, turf wars, and resource constraints common to such efforts and in the end the criminal justice faculty backed out. This left the accounting

faculty teaching five courses, the business law faculty three courses, and the information technology faculty teaching one course. We decided the forensic accounting capstone

course would be best if team taught.

In late 2003, we experienced a breakthrough on the program of study issue when we recognized that work in the area of fraud examination is directed at primarily two distinct categories of fraud: asset theft fraud and financial statement fraud (see Exhibit 3). Asset-theft fraud involves the use of one's occupation for personal gain through the deliberate misuse or theft of the employing organization's resources or assets. Statement of Auditing Standards (SAS) 82 refers to financial statement fraud as intentional misstatements or omissions in the financial statements. We therefore decided to organize the forensic accounting curriculum into two tracks, one track to prepare asset theft investigators and an advanced track to prepare future forensic accountants who would be trained to conduct both asset theft and financial statement investigations.

Asset-Theft Fraud Track

Federal, state, and local governments regularly hire personnel (e.g., law enforcement, treasury agents, auditors, etc.) to conduct asset fraud investigations. Asset fraud investigators also work as internal auditors, loss prevention specialists, corporate security specialists, private investigators, and fraud control specialists. Typically, only a bachelor's

degree is required for these types of jobs.

It should be noted that while some asset theft investigators are accountants, many investigators have backgrounds in other areas such as criminal justice, information technology, and law enforcement. But what all these professionals have in common is a thorough understanding of criminal law and the criminal justice system along with the necessary skills to conduct successful fraud investigations. Accordingly, we organized the courses shown in the first two columns of Exhibit 3 into an interdisciplinary fraud examination minor that can be completed by all students, not just accounting majors. The only prerequisite for the minor is accounting principles (two courses for business majors or one survey course for other majors). Since many programs of study at our university (including those in business) include 12 hours of free electives, students can complete this track by taking only one or two courses beyond those required for graduation.

Financial Statement Fraud Track

We designed the financial statement fraud track to be the more advanced track for those students aspiring to become future forensic accountants. Because of their understanding of generally accepted accounting principles and their specialized training

in financial reporting procedures, forensic accountants can do more than investigate asset theft fraud. Generally they are able to detect when organizations are cooking their books and they are frequently called upon to describe and defend their findings in court (litigation support). Forensic accountants work throughout the business world in public accounting, corporations, law firms, not-for-profit organizations, and in all branches of government from the FBI and CIA to the offices of various local enforcement authorities.

In addition to majoring in accounting, future forensic accountants must complete the entire ten-course forensic accounting curriculum. The five courses in the last two columns of Exhibit 3 are offered as a forensic accounting concentration within our master of accounting (MAcc) program. Because our thirty-hour MAcc program has only four free electives (12 hours), we decided to replace one of the core classes with a forensic accounting course in order to accommodate all five graduate forensic courses. We believe that replacing a financial statement analysis course with a fraudulent financial reporting course was reasonable.

Finally, we recognized that requiring the five undergraduate forensic accounting courses as prerequisites for the graduate forensic program creates a

barrier to entry for students who do not complete their undergraduate degree at our university. We addressed this problem by making our graduate forensic program a lock step program beginning each fall. Those students who have not completed the undergraduate forensic program are admitted during the preceding summer where they complete the undergraduate courses in two intense mini-semesters. Admission to the forensic accounting graduate program is competitive.

We designed our forensic accounting program to assist students in developing a strong investigative mentality and sense of professional skepticism. To support this objective, we incorporated a variety of experiential learning opportunities into the program to complement the academic coursework. For example, in addition to formal off-campus forensic internships in several courses, we include case studies or actual consulting engagements and other activities such as field trips, mock trials, guest speakers, and guest lecturers. During the graduate students' last semester we will encourage them to prepare for and sit for the Certified Fraud Examiner (CFE) exam.

Because of the difficulty of securing consulting opportunities for students and faculty on a regular and reliable basis, we decided to

incorporate student consulting projects in the graduate program only where we plan to restrict enrollment to approximately 15-20 students per year. In addition, we created an academic research center, named the Center for Forensic Studies in Accounting and Business, complete with its own independent advisory board, to assist in building and maintaining relationships with practitioners and researchers in the field. Exhibit 4 summarizes the center's responsibilities.

As noted in Exhibit 4, students and faculty will have the opportunity to gain real-world consulting experience via the center's fee based consulting services and its pro bono consulting to nonprofit entities. Faculty will also be involved in other ways as described in the exhibit.

Step 5: Promoting the Program

We launched the undergraduate fraud examination minor in Fall 2005 and we will launch the graduate forensic accounting concentration in summer 2007. Prior to the Fall 2005 launch, we began to promote the initiative in several ways. In early 2004, we launched a forensic accounting lecture series with two primary objectives: 1) to promote career awareness; and 2) to introduce students to nationally known practitioners and some of the more exciting

aspects of their work. Second, starting in Summer 2004, we began offering the macro and micro fraud examination courses as special topics courses to build initial interest and to give the instructors an opportunity to fine tune the material. Our forensic accounting faculty expert began speaking at academic and professional meetings, leading continuing education courses around the country, and writing a regular column for the weekly business periodical of a large nearby city.

Once we received final approval of the curriculum, the university's marketing and communications office helped us create a full color glossy brochure which we distributed widely across campus and loaded onto our school website. We use the brochure to recruit at university receptions around the state and at university and college open house events. We tried particularly hard to reach students who had not yet declared a major by volunteering to speak at university minority advisement programs and in the college's Introduction to Business classes. Finally, one of the primary responsibilities of our new Center is to provide public service and continuing education programs to assist us in building an effective network of professional associations.

Exhibit 4
Activities of the Proposed Center for Forensic Studies in Accounting and Business

- **Research.** The center will support efforts to gather, analyze, and disseminate fraud statistics and explore new approaches for evaluating the controls, policies, and procedures that are in place to minimize fraud, The center will produce a publication entitled *Journal of Forensic Studies in Accounting and Business* to disseminate the center’s sponsored research findings and the findings of other relevant studies.
 - **Public service.** The center will provide pro bono anti-fraud presentations to raise awareness for the center and educate the public about fraud detection and prevention and occasional pro bono consulting services for not-for-profit organizations led by faculty and students.
 - **Continuing education.** The center will conduct anti-fraud continuing education seminars for law enforcement, accountants, fraud examiners, and other anti-fraud professionals.
 - **Faculty development.** Faculty may participate in the center’s anti-fraud seminars and may accept center-sponsored consulting engagements.
 - **Fee based consulting services.** Faculty and students will provide fee based anti-fraud consulting services to both individuals and organizations.
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Exhibit 5
Forensic Accounting Curriculum

Course Number/Title	Course Description
LSTD 3630 White Collar Crime	This course examines the US criminal justice system along with its response to the escalating incidence of white-collar crime. Other topics include understanding human behavior, theories of crime causation, organization crime, occupational crime, and the constitutional rights of white-collar criminals. <u>Prerequisite:</u> Completion of 55 semester hours
LSTD 3631 Fraud and the Law	Fraud-fighting professionals must understand the laws governing a fraud investigation as it moves through the US legal system. This course examines the numerous legal issues associated with conducting fraud investigations including the federal rules of civil and criminal procedure along with issues involving discovery and evidence admissibility. <u>Prerequisite:</u> Completion of 55 semester hours
ACCT 4631 Macro Fraud Examination	This course takes a macro look at fraud by examining the pervasiveness of and the causes of fraud and white-collar crime in our society. Other topics to be explored include financial crime statutes, evidence gathering and admissibility, types and elements of fraud, general investigative methods, and report writing. <u>Prerequisite:</u> ACCT 2102 or ACCT 2030
ACCT 4632 Micro Fraud Examination	This course takes a micro look at fraud by examining about 40 of the most common fraud schemes including how they work and how they can be effectively detected, investigated, and prevented. <u>Prerequisite:</u> ACCT 4631

Exhibit 5
(continued)

Course Number/Title	Course Description
CISM 5131 Fundamentals of Computer Forensics	This course examines how computers are being used to perpetrate fraud along with how investigators can use the computer as a weapon against fraudsters. Other computer-related topics to be explored include security breaches, employee theft, asset abuse, theft of intellectual property, and imaging of computer drive contents including tables, operating and table system artifacts, and deleted tables or table fragments located in table slack or unallocated space. Graduate students will be given an extra assignment determined by the instructor that will not be required of undergraduates. <u>Prerequisite:</u> CISM 2530
ACCT 5633 Forensic Interviews and Interrogations	This course examines the distinctions between interviews and interrogations and how each can be used in resolving criminal or civil allegations. Other topics to be explored include the verbal and nonverbal cues indicating truth or deception, preparation of interview memoranda, and obtaining and preparing legally-admissible admission statements. Graduate students will be given an extra assignment determined by the instructor that will not be required of undergraduates. <u>Prerequisite:</u> ACCT 4631
ACCT 7634 Fraudulent Financial Reporting	While asset theft fraud is well covered in the two fraud examination courses, additional training in financial statement fraud is needed due to the technical nature of accounting and reporting standards. This course demonstrates how financial statement analysis can be used to uncover fraudulent financial reporting. In addition, the most common methods for “cooking the books” will be examined along with strategies for detecting and investigating such schemes. <u>Prerequisite:</u> Graduate Standing
ACCT 7635 Fraud and Society	This course examines the numerous legislative, administrative, and other societal remedies that have emerged in response to white-collar crime. Such remedies encompass securities fraud, pension fraud, environmental crimes, anti-trust violations, bribery, money laundering, and corporate governance (e.g. Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002). <u>Prerequisite:</u> Graduate Standing
ACCT 7636 Expert Witnessing	This course examines the role of accountants as either testifying or consulting experts in legal disputes involving professional negligence cases securities fraud, business/partnership disputes, business interruption losses, business valuations, and marital disputes. Topics include how to communicate opinions effectively at deposition, at trial, and in a written report; the law and procedure dealing with experts; ethics; and how to deal with attorneys. <u>Prerequisite:</u> Graduate Standing

Exhibit 5
(continued)

Course Number/Title	Course Description
ACCT 7637 Forensic Accounting Capstone	This is an integrative capstone course with potentially many modes of delivery including instruction from multiple professors, use of comprehensive cases, mock trials, and panel and round robin discussions of current issues. Guest speakers may present, or students may report on various projects that they have been conducting either independently or in groups. Students may be assigned projects designed to assist in their preparation to sit for the Certified Fraud Examiner exam. To successfully complete this course, student must demonstrate a growing mastery of the skills required of the forensic accountant. <u>Prerequisite</u> : ACCT 7634, 7635, 7636

Summary

In 2002, our school embarked on a journey to gain national distinction. We began by identifying a niche area that had not already been staked out or claimed by the research schools in our state's university system. We chose the area of forensic accounting and immediately launched a feasibility study to assess the level of stakeholder support. Our advisory councils strongly supported our initiative and the university administration committed to hiring three additional faculty to support the program.

We knew that to achieve national distinction we would have to create an innovative and effective program that went well beyond a one-or-two course offering. We developed the comprehensive ten-course curriculum summarized in Exhibit 5 that is flexible enough to prepare both future fraud examiners as well as future

forensic accountants. Finally, we launched a new academic center to provide regional fraud statistics, research, training, and professional development opportunities for our faculty and students, and to develop a potentially significant resource stream that can be used to enhance the program going forward.

This paper described our strategy, the five steps we followed, and some of the challenges we faced while creating a new forensic accounting emphasis at our school. Perhaps our experience will assist others in their program development initiatives.

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