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STATE OF WASHINGTON

Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board

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November 19, 2001

Court Reporting Institute, Inc. d/b/a
Court Reporting Institute/CRI Computer Training
Alen Janisch, Director
929 North 130 Street #2
Seattle WA 98133

Dear Mr. Janisch:

Enclosed is the report of the agency's recent investigation of Court Reporting Institute. As you will see, the agency is requiring that you make certain changes to your written materials and enrollment practices. Please contact me after you have had a chance to review the report if you would like to meet to discuss our findings.

Sincerely,

Peggy L. Rudolph, Program Specialist
Private Vocational School Licensing
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cc: Walter Wong
Lee Williams

Enclosure



Court Reporting Institute Investigation

Background

On October 18, 2001, the agency conducted an on-site investigation of Court Reporting Institute's enrollment practices. The investigation was in response to nine letters sent to Governor Locke, the Office of the Attorney General, and several legislators. The issues identified in the students' letters first came to the agency's attention in 1999 when one of the students (Blair Mitchell) filed a complaint against the school based on his belief that the school had misled him with regard to the length of time it takes to complete the court reporting program. The agency determined at that time that the school had, in fact, misled Mr. Mitchell and directed the school to make a partial tuition refund. The school was also directed to submit to the agency a corrective action plan describing procedures it would undertake to ensure future students received clear information about how long it might take them to complete the court reporting program. The agency's October 18, 2001, investigation was for the purpose of determining whether the school was abiding by its 1999 corrective action plan.

File Review and School Input

The agency reviewed the files of the students who had written the letters described above and discovered that each of the students had started school in the early to mid-1990s and with the exception of one, all had left the school prior to the agency's November 1999 determination in the Blair Mitchell case. The students had been in school varying lengths of time and two had graduated; the others had dropped out prior to graduation. Since they were all students during the timeframe of Blair Mitchell's attendance, the agency has determined that it is quite possible the students were misled with regard to program length. However, the private vocational school regulations allow students to file complaints up to one year from their last date of attendance and none of them, except Blair Mitchell, filed complaints with the agency.

An important issue that needs to be understood with regard to the students who wrote the letters is that the school had a policy during the 1990s that allowed students to stay in school as long as necessary to allow them to complete their programs. The school collected a finite amount of tuition from students and did not charge them for any subsequent hours of training. Most of the students who wrote the above-referenced letters attended the school free of charge for several years beyond the 3,000 hours specified in their contracts. The school did not collect any additional money from these students, nor did they prod them to finish. The school has indicated that in retrospect, it was a mistake to allow them to stay in school indefinitely, in many cases, taking several leaves of absence and not making any concrete attempt to improve their skill level. Even though several of the students were no longer making satisfactory progress, the school stated it did not feel it could terminate them because the students were not being charged for the extra hours and might complain that the reason they were being terminated was because the school wanted to make room for paying students. Several of these students also took out large loans to support themselves while they were in school; one in particular took out approximately \$21,000 in loans, \$9,000 of which was for her living expenses.

Following the file review, the agency interviewed the school's Assistant Admissions Director, Director of Education, and School President and inquired about current enrollment practices. The school pointed out changes it had made to its brochure, catalog, and enrollment agreement to indicate that program length varies and that it may take a student longer than the stated length based on the amount of time a student

spends outside the classroom, the student's attendance, and his/her innate ability. The school stated that it conducts new student orientations during the first week of class during which it discusses program length and cautions students that it cannot predict how long it will take individuals to complete the program because so many of the factors related to completion time are under the control of the student, not the school. The School President stated that admissions staff tells students that although the program is advertised as being 3,000 hours in length, it may take a student considerably longer depending on how quickly they progress at speedbuilding.

In addition to the disclosures described above, the school indicated it has purchased a new software program that is allowing students to progress through the speed levels more quickly. The school President stated that the new program actually results in the students getting more in-class, speed-building time and they are encouraged by the results.

Completion Rate and Average Program Length

The agency reviewed three years worth of student outcomes reports provided by the school. Eleven of the nearly six hundred court reporting students who attended school between July 1, 1998, and June 30, 2001, graduated during that period. The average length of time it took the four evening program graduates to complete was 63.25 months. The average length of time it took the seven day program graduates to complete was 52.5 months.

Student Interviews

Finally, to complete the review, the agency telephoned several students who enrolled at Court Reporting Institute after the November 1999 review. The school's day program is described in the current catalog as being 30 months in length and the night program is 45 months in length. Students were asked what they were told about the length of the program and what they were told about additional study time outside the regular class hours.

Student 1 is a day student who started in October 2001: She indicated she had been told the program could be completed in as little as a year and a half if she worked really hard. She asked what the average length of time was and was told it was between two and two and one-half years.

Student 2 is a day student who started in October 2001: She indicated she had been told the average time it took to complete the program was two and one-half years.

Student 3 is a night student who started in January 2001: She stated that she was told the program would take her between two and two and one-half years. She was told that it was not necessary to spend time outside class but if she did it would allow her to complete more quickly.

Student 4 is a day student who started in October 2001: She stated that she was told it was possible to finish the program in a year and a half but the average completion time was two years. Practice time outside class was not discussed.

Student 5 is a night student who enrolled in January 2000: She stated that she was told it was possible to complete the program in one year but that it could take as long as four years. Practice time outside class

was not discussed, however, she does spend time outside class and is confident she can complete the program in three to four years.

Conclusions

Although the school has made changes to its catalog, enrollment contract, and other documents, the agency does not believe those changes are adequate to ensure potential students have the information necessary to make informed enrollment decisions. The school's current catalog and enrollment agreement state that "Graduation Dates May Vary and/or Exceed Program Length According to Practice and Study Habits." Nothing in the school's written materials cautions students that they must practice outside class if they hope to progress. There is also no language to alert potential students about how rigorous the program is; that they will not only be learning a new language but will be required to write it at 225 wpm. Court reporting is not for every one. It requires a great deal of manual dexterity and the ability to stay focused for long periods.

The school's current catalog advertises the program as being 3,000 hours in length. According to the program outlines in the catalog, the day program is designed to be completed in 30 months and the evening program is designed to be completed in 45 months. Based on the agency's review, those timeframes are grossly understated. As stated above in the Completion Rate and Average Program Length section, the average student cannot complete the program in the advertised length of time. In fact, only three of the eleven students who graduated during the past three years completed within the program length advertised in the catalog.

The school is now charging a dictation fee for students who go beyond the stated program length. That fee is one-half the monthly tuition plus a monthly lab charge. With the current tuition at \$19,800 for 30 months (day) and 45 months (evening) and considering the average program length the agency calculated is 52.5 months (day) and 63 months (evening), students will end up paying considerably more than \$19,800 for the program.

Determination

The agency has determined the school must do the following:

1. Revise its catalog, enrollment agreement, and all advertising materials to accurately state the length of its court reporting program. Based on the eleven students who graduated during the past three years, the average program length appears to be approximately 63 months for the evening program and 52 months for the day program (See WAC 490-105-040(4)(m)(ii));
2. Revise its catalog, enrollment agreement, and all advertising materials to accurately state the amount of tuition a student can expect to pay during the course of the training. This should be stated as a specific amount per year (See WAC 490-105-040(4)(I));
3. Revise its catalog to include the method used to calculate its placement and retention rates (See RCW28C.10.110(10));
4. Distribute written materials during new student orientations that caution students that graduation times could take anywhere from two to six years or more depending on the student's innate ability, the amount of time spent practicing outside class, the student's attendance, and level of commitment (See WAC 490-105-040(4)(m)(ii)); and,

5. Institute a first quarter and midpoint evaluation (prior to the student completing 25 percent and 50 percent of the contracted training) that will determine how long it will take the student to complete at the rate the student is progressing at those points in time. Students who are not expected to complete in the advertised average program length must be counseled with regard to the probability of their successfully completing the program and obtaining employment as a court reporter. They must be reminded that according to the state mandated refund policy if they choose to continue beyond the 25 percent and 50 percent points, they will be responsible for 50 percent and 100 percent (respectively) of the tuition (See WAC 490-105-040(4)(j)).
6. Include in the Student Acknowledgement form signed by the student and school the following: completion rates, placement rates, and retention rates; and
7. Disclose in the catalog the types of jobs the training leads to (See WAC 490-105-040(4)(m)).