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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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GOVERNOR

STATE OF TENNESSEE  
**HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION**  
**STUDENT ASSISTANCE CORPORATION**  
312 ROSA L. PARKS AVENUE, 9<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243  
(615) 741-3605

TO: Dr. Mark Byrnes, University Provost  
Middle Tennessee State University

FROM: Dr. Julie A. Roberts, Chief Academic Officer  
Tennessee Higher Education Commission

SUBJECT: Middle Tennessee State University  
Letter of Notification: Organizational and Professional Communication, Master of Arts

DATE: November 22, 2023

Thank you for the submission of the Letter of Notification (LON) for the Organizational and Professional Communication, Master of Arts (MA) program. Per THEC Policy A1.0 New Academic Programs: Approval Process, the LON is evaluated on the following criteria: alignment with state master plan and institutional mission; feasibility; institutional capacity to deliver the proposed academic program; and program costs and revenues.

After reviewing the revised LON, I approve Middle Tennessee State University's (MTSU) plan to develop the New Academic Program Proposal (NAPP) for the Organizational and Professional Communication, MA. As MTSU continues to develop the proposed program, all concerns italicized on the attached LON evaluation must be reflected in the NAPP. It is understood the proposed program will be developed in accordance with the mission of MTSU and will meet the Master Plan for Tennessee Postsecondary Education 2015-2025 degree completion and workforce development objectives.

#### Attachment

cc: Dr. Sidney A. McPhee, MTSU, President  
Dr. Steven Gentile, THEC, Interim Executive Director  
Dr. Amy Aldridge Sanford, MTSU, Vice Provost of Academic Programs  
Dr. DeAnne Priddis, MTSU, Associate Professor of Communication Studies  
Ms. Anjelica Jones, THEC, Director of Academic Affairs

**Tennessee Higher Education Commission**  
**Letter of Notification Evaluation**  
**November 22, 2023**



The evaluation of the Letter of Notification (LON) is in accordance with the THEC Policy A1.0 New Academic Programs: Approval Process. The evaluation is conducted by interested parties and THEC staff. The LON is posted on the THEC website for a 15-day period of comment by interested parties. Based on the internal and external evaluation, THEC will make a determination to support, not to support, or defer a decision based on a revised LON.

<b>Institution:</b> Middle Tennessee State University	<b>LON Submission Date:</b> October 11, 2023
<b>Academic Program, Degree Designation:</b> Organizational and Professional Communication, MA <b>Concentration(s):</b> N/A	
<b>Proposed CIP Code and Title:</b> 09.0101 Organizational Communication, General	
<b>Proposed Implementation Date:</b> May 2024	
<b>Time Period Posted on Website for Public Comment:</b> October 11-26, 2023	
<b>Academic Program Liaison(s):</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Amy Aldridge Sanford, PhD, Vice Provost for Academic Programs, <a href="mailto:amy.aldridge.sanford@mtsu.edu">amy.aldridge.sanford@mtsu.edu</a></li> <li>▪ Dr. DeAnne Priddis, Associate Professor, Communication Studies, <a href="mailto:deanne.priddis@mtsu.edu">deanne.priddis@mtsu.edu</a></li> </ul>	

**Note: Comments in italics within this document should be addressed in the New Academic Program Proposal (NAPP).**

<b>Letter of support from President/Chancellor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A letter of support date October 9, 2023, sent from MTSU President McPhee was included.</li> </ul>
<b>Section II: Background</b>	
<b>Background on academic program development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ This proposed Master of Arts in Organizational and Professional Communication (MOPC) will target working adults seeking an advanced degree for improving oral and written communication, analyzing audiences, fostering teamwork, providing feedback, and motivation in the workplace and improving soft skills.</li> <li>▪ The proposed program will be offered online, providing flexibility to working professionals interested in upskilling.</li> <li>▪ Hanover Research identified speech communication and rhetoric as number two of the top three regional high growth master programs.</li> <li>▪ If approved, the proposed program will be the only of its kind offered in the state.</li> </ul>
<b>Purpose and nature of academic program</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The proposed program is a 30-credit hour fully online program aimed towards currently working professionals, primarily targeted to those in the communications field. On-ground and hybrid</li> </ul>

	<p>options may be offered to online classes once the program has been established.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The proposed program will provide students with advanced interpersonal, group, and organizational communication skills for a variety of organizational and professional environments.</li> <li>▪ The MTSU Communication Studies Department currently offers an undergraduate Organizational Communications concentration. As the largest enrolled concentration in the department (40%), the addition of the proposed program will also provide further education opportunities to many communication graduates.</li> <li>▪ MTSU will also work with Walter’s State Community College (WSCC) to create continuing education by offering an 18-credit hour graduate certificate. This certificate will allow high school teachers and other interested individuals to earn the requisite 18 hours of graduate-level communication instruction to qualify for teaching dual-enrollment courses in public speaking.</li> <li>▪ The proposed program allows students already working in communications an opportunity to improve their communication and critical thinking skills to advance their careers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Alignment with State Master Plan and Institutional Mission</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The proposed program aligns with two key initiatives outlined in the State Master Plan for Higher Education. First, MTSU maintains low tuition increases and institutional costs aligning with THEC’s goal to keep education affordable (pg. 24). Second, the proposed program aligns with the industry needs of 2030 and beyond acknowledged in the Master Plan (pg. 35) by providing students with identified in demand skills such as digital building blocks and human skills that can be applied both in their field and broadly.</li> <li>▪ The proposed program also aligns with MTSU’s institutional mission and strategic goals. First, the program will prepare students to transition into the professional world and help facilitate career advancement, by providing students with high quality affordable academic training with demonstrably effective methods that include experiential and integrative learning and both of which are key goals in MTSU’s Quest 2025.</li> <li>▪ In addition, MTSU’s Strategic Plan initiative is to have 35 percent of its graduates continue their education within six years of graduation. This program will target current students and recent graduates to assist in reaching the institution’s goal.</li> <li>▪ The proposed program will support the mission of MTSU by providing a learning opportunity for students to thrive personally and in their chosen profession. Students will sharpen their skills through teaching and learning opportunities, research, and public engagement.</li> <li>▪ In the 2020-2021 academic year, MTSU began the process of converting graduate classes into experiential learning classes (EXL) which allows students to apply class concepts directly to their</li> </ul>

	<p>current jobs. These types of classes fit the MTSU mission by providing professional development and training opportunities for the community and area employees.</p>																														
<p><b>Institutional capacity to deliver the proposed academic program</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The proposed Organizational and Professional, MA will complement and not compete in the department of Communication Studies. The target population will be those students wishing to continue their specialization in communication skills without having to leave the state of Tennessee.</li> <li>▪ MTSU does, however, anticipate a shift of students leaving general graduate programs (ex. Liberal Arts, MA and Professional Studies, MA) to a more specialized degree. To rectify this, the proposed program will provide course options from already existing programs.</li> </ul>																														
<p><b>Existing programs offered at public and private Tennessee institutions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No other institutions in Tennessee offer an organizational professional communication program in CIP 09.0101.</li> <li>▪ Currently, seven other institutions (six public, one private) offer master level communications related programs.</li> <li>▪ Tennessee Tech University offers a 30-credit hour online program not housed in the communications department and no experiential learning component.</li> </ul> <table border="1" data-bbox="561 932 1421 1843"> <thead> <tr> <th>CIP Code</th> <th>College/ University</th> <th>Concentration</th> <th>2019-2020 Completion</th> <th>2020-2021 Completion</th> <th>2021-2022 Completion</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>09.0102</td> <td>Austin Peay State University (Communication, MA)</td> <td>General Comm, Corporate Comm, Marketing Comm, Media Management</td> <td>21</td> <td>18</td> <td>25</td> </tr> <tr> <td>09.0100</td> <td>East Tennessee State University (Communication, MA)</td> <td>Communication and Storytelling Studies</td> <td>18</td> <td>29</td> <td>13</td> </tr> <tr> <td>09.0102</td> <td>University of Memphis (Communication, MA &amp; PhD)</td> <td>Film &amp; Video Production, Communication Studies</td> <td>9</td> <td>2</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>09.0102</td> <td>The university of Tennessee-Knoxville (Communication)</td> <td>Advertising, Communication</td> <td>13</td> <td>22</td> <td>24</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	CIP Code	College/ University	Concentration	2019-2020 Completion	2020-2021 Completion	2021-2022 Completion	09.0102	Austin Peay State University (Communication, MA)	General Comm, Corporate Comm, Marketing Comm, Media Management	21	18	25	09.0100	East Tennessee State University (Communication, MA)	Communication and Storytelling Studies	18	29	13	09.0102	University of Memphis (Communication, MA & PhD)	Film & Video Production, Communication Studies	9	2	4	09.0102	The university of Tennessee-Knoxville (Communication)	Advertising, Communication	13	22	24
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		n and Information, MA & PhD)	Studies, Journalism & Electronic Media, Public Relations			
	09.0999	University of Tennessee-Martin (Communications, MA)	Strategic Communication	1	7	4
	09.9999	Tennessee Tech University (Professional Studies, MA)	Corporate Comm Concentration, Training & Development	1	0	4
	N/A	Belmont University (Strategic Communication & Leadership (MA)	Strategic Communication & Leadership	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Accreditation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The proposed master’s degree will be accredited by Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)</li> <li>▪ The proposed master’s degree will undergo external program review under the THEC and the National Communication Association (NCA) for program development resources.</li> </ul>					
<b>Administrative Structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The degree will be housed in the Communication Studies department under the College of Liberal Arts at MTSU. The existing program director for the Organizational and Professional Communication, BS will also direct the proposed program.</li> <li>▪ The current organizational chart is provided in the LON (pg. 13).</li> </ul>					

**Section III: Feasibility Study**

<p><b>Student interest</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Electronic interest surveys were sent to existing undergraduate students, alums, and area professionals, with 107 (53 existing students and 54 alums and professionals) total responses between March 3 – April 26, 2023.</li> <li>▪ Existing students (N=53) consisted of 45.3 percent communication majors. Other majors included double majors with:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Health Care Administration</li> <li>○ Professional Studies</li> <li>○ Integrated Studies</li> <li>○ Allied Health</li> <li>○ Psychology</li> <li>○ English</li> <li>○ Information Technology</li> <li>○ Information Systems</li> <li>○ Public Safety</li> <li>○ German</li> <li>○ Marketing</li> <li>○ Nursing</li> <li>○ Business</li> <li>○ Human Geography</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ When existing students were asked if they would consider graduate school on a scale of 1-5 (5 being definitely yes), the mean score was 3.35, with a mean score of 3.46 opting to stay in middle Tennessee to complete the additional degree.</li> <li>▪ Alums and professionals indicated becoming more competitive in the workplace, career advancement, and additional income as their top three reasons to pursue a master’s degree.</li> <li>▪ When participants were asked their interest level in pursuing the proposed program on a scale of 1-6, 6 being extremely interested, the results indicated a mean score of 4.93.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Local and Regional Demand</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ THEC’s Tennessee Employment Projections for middle Tennessee residents 2020-2030 lists several communication related jobs as being in high demand both locally (state) and regionally.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Advertising, Marketing, Promotions, Public Relations, and Sales Managers</li> <li>○ Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists</li> <li>○ Marketing Managers</li> <li>○ Training and Development Managers</li> <li>○ Training and Development Specialists</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ These positions also have a large salary range, with median earnings of \$24.49 - \$46.62 per hour. Middle Tennessee Employment Projections, provided by THEC, indicate a significant increase in salary for those with additional degrees.</li> <li>▪ <b><i>Please provide additional local demand data</i></b></li> </ul>

<b>Employer Demand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A random sample of 402 job postings on LinkedIn indicated a preference of an upper-level degree for senior level positions with about 25-38 percent of those filled positions having a master’s degree.</li> <li>▪ A LinkedIn sample search also reported a wide gap of estimated salaries (from \$44k-\$121k difference) for in-demand positions such as Communications and Marketing Managers.</li> <li>▪ The proposed program will allow its graduates the opportunity for a higher starting salary and potential job placement.</li> <li>▪ MTSU provided a current LinkedIn job posting for a Change Realization Specialist, whose responsibilities include communication and collaboration, that utilizes many of the foundation skills identified in the THEC Master Plan and covered in the proposed program.</li> </ul>																														
<b>Community and Industry Partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Letters of support are provided by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Middle Tennessee Electric Company</li> <li>○ Jarrad Inc.</li> <li>○ Ascend Federal Credit Union</li> <li>○ State of Tennessee</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ These letters demonstrate strong support for the proposed program and a willingness to partner with MTSU to offer job placement, continuous education opportunities for existing employees, and experiential learning opportunities.</li> </ul>																														
<b>Section IV: Enrollment and Graduation Projections</b>																															
<b>Projected Enrollment and Graduates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The proposed program is structured to allow students to complete the 30-credit master’s degree in two years. This calculation does not include students enrolling as a part of the certificate program with WSCC for instructors seeking communication credits.</li> <li>▪</li> </ul> <table border="1" data-bbox="565 1224 1425 1486"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Academic Year</th> <th>Projected Fall Enrollment</th> <th>Projected Attrition</th> <th>Projected Graduates</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2024-2025</td> <td>6</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td>2025-2026</td> <td>14</td> <td>1</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td> <td>2026-2027</td> <td>18</td> <td>2</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4</td> <td>2027-2028</td> <td>24</td> <td>2</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5</td> <td>2028-2029</td> <td>30</td> <td>2</td> <td>6</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Academic Year	Projected Fall Enrollment	Projected Attrition	Projected Graduates	1	2024-2025	6	0	0	2	2025-2026	14	1	5	3	2026-2027	18	2	5	4	2027-2028	24	2	6	5	2028-2029	30	2	6
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<b>Section V: Projected Costs to Deliver Proposed Program</b>																															
<b>Faculty</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No new faculty are currently anticipated.</li> <li>▪ An existing faculty member will assume the role of Graduate Program Director at \$14,600 annually.</li> <li>▪ Growth of the proposed program’s enrollment may result in the addition of one tenure-track faculty by the fourth year with a salary and benefits cost of \$97,398 annually.</li> </ul>																														
<b>Non-Instructional Staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No new costs associated with the non-instructional staff are expected for this program</li> </ul>																														

<b>Graduate Assistants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ One Graduate Assistant is projected beginning in the 2nd year of the program. The reoccurring cost is calculated at \$9,144 annually.</li> </ul>
<b>Accreditation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No accreditation costs are associated with the proposed program.</li> </ul>
<b>Consultants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ As part of the THEC approval process, the program will require an external reviewer in the planning year, with a one-time cost estimated at \$4,000, which includes a \$1,500 stipend.</li> </ul>
<b>Equipment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No equipment costs are required to develop or run this program.</li> </ul>
<b>Information Technology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There are no new information technology costs associated with this program for year one. Everything needed for the program, including D2L and media-related software, are already covered under MTSU licenses. One laptop will be supplied to the department's teaching assistant at \$1500 in year two.</li> </ul>
<b>Library Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No new library acquisitions will be required.</li> </ul>
<b>Marketing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A projected marketing cost of \$3,600 in the planning year, \$6,000 in year one, \$3,000 in year two through four, and \$3,600 in year 5 is expected to generate and sustain awareness of the program.</li> </ul>
<b>Facilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No new facilities will be required for this program.</li> </ul>
<b>Travel</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ An anticipated \$750 annually for recruiting.</li> </ul>
<b>Other Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No additional resources will be required for this program.</li> </ul>
<b>Section VI: Projected Revenues for the Proposed Program</b>	
<b>Tuition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Anticipated revenue in Year 1 is \$44,496, which will cover anticipated expenses (\$21,350). These calculations are based on the \$601 per credit hour cost of tuition.</li> <li>▪ Projected revenues for Year 2 through 5 are based on increases in enrollment.</li> </ul>
<b>Grants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No grants are anticipated to fund this program.</li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No other revenue is anticipated at this time.</li> </ul>
<b>Appendices</b>	
<b>Letters of Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Letters of support for the proposed program were received from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Renee Crosslin, Vice President of Talent and Culture, Ascend Federal Credit Union</li> <li>○ Ann Cannon, Vice President of Talent and Development, Jarrard Inc.</li> <li>○ Chris Jones, President/CEO, Middle Tennessee Electric</li> <li>○ Emily Gibson, Executive Director, Enterprise Governance &amp; Administration</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>THEC Financial Projections Form</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Financial Projections Form provided in Appendix C of the LON.</li> </ul>
<b>Public Comment</b>	
<b>Public Comments Received</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No public comments were received for this proposal.</li> </ul>