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STATE OF TENNESSEE
TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION
TENNESSEE STUDENT ASSISTANCE CORPORATION

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TO: Bernie Savarese, Acting Vice President of Academic Affairs, Research, & Student Success
University of Tennessee System

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

SUBJECT: University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Letter of Notification: Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication, PhD

DATE: October 4, 2023

Thank you for the submission of the Letter of Notification (LON) for the Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) 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 UTK's plan to develop the New Academic Program Proposal (NAPP) for the Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication, PhD. As UTK continues to develop the proposed program, all concerns raised in 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 UTK and will meet the Master Plan for Tennessee Postsecondary Education 2015-2025 degree completion and workforce development objectives.

cc: Randy Boyd, UT System, President
Steven Gentile, THEC, Interim Executive Director
Donde Plowman, UTK, Chancellor
John Zomchick, UTK, Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor
Karen Galicia, UT System, Director of Academic Affairs
Christopher Stripling, UTK, Professor and Department Head, ALEC
Carrie Stephens, UTK, Professor, ALEC
Ryan Korstange, THEC, Director of Academic Affairs

Tennessee Higher Education Commission
Letter of Notification Evaluation
October 4, 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.

Institution: University of Tennessee, Knoxville	LON Submission Date: January 24, 2023 LON Resubmission: June 5, 2023 LON Resubmission: August 16, 2023
Academic Program, Degree Designation: Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication, PhD	
Concentration(s): None	
Proposed CIP Code and Title: 01.0801 (Agricultural and Extension Education Services)	
Proposed Implementation Date: August 2024	
Time Period Posted on Website for Public Comment: January 24 – February 8, 2023	
Academic Program Liaison(s):	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Karen Etzkorn, Director of Academic Affairs, etzkorn@tennessee.edu • Christopher Stripling, Professor and Head, Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications. cstripli@tennessee.edu • Carrie Stephens, Professor, cfritz@tennessee.edu 	

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

Letter of support from President/Chancellor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The LON was approved by the Executive Committee of the UT Board of Trustees on January 20, 2023. ▪ Letters of support were included from Bernie Savarese, dated November 29, 2022, and from John Zomchick, dated December 5, 2022,
Section II: Background	
Background on academic program development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) currently offers both Bachelor of Science (BS) and Master of Science (MS) degrees. ▪ Regular academic program review of the Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication (ALEC) department was conducted in August 2016, and the reviewers (Herb Byrd, Christopher Clark, Joanne Logan, and Greg Miller) suggested that the department should consider developing a PhD program, given that it had the “opportunity to develop a unique program focused on extension

	<p>education and youth development.” The next regularly scheduled academic program review happened in August 2021, and also supported the development of a PhD (Reviewers included Greg Miller, Neil Knobloch, Toni Wang, Christopher Clark, and William Klingeman), as did the department’s strategic planning process. These academic program reviews were conducted as a part of Quality Assurance Funding at THEC.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The department currently offers more than 20 graduate courses in the areas of agricultural and natural resource extension, teaching and learning, leadership, youth development, and communication. These offerings would form the foundation of the proposed PhD program, along with strategically added courses.
<p>Purpose and nature of academic program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implementing the proposed ALEC PhD will increase the status and reputation of the ALEC department, assisting in faculty and student recruitment. ▪ The intended student population includes middle and high school agricultural education and science teachers, community college educators, agribusiness professionals, Extension agents, communication specialists, administrators, and agency directors. The program has a ready-built pipeline for student enrollees in its bachelor’s and master’s programs and will also recruit students enrolled in similar programs at other Tennessee Institutions. ▪ The proposed program will require 72 credit hours beyond a bachelor’s degree, or 48 credit hours beyond a master’s degree. ▪ The program will include 24 credit hours of dissertation research, and 12 credit hours of graduate-level research methods and statistics coursework. The remaining credits will be in specialization course credit hours chosen in consultation with the student’s advisory committee. These courses could come from any department, but most likely will come from the College of Communication and Information and the College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences. ▪ Full-time students with a master’s degree in a related field should be able to complete the program in three to four years. ▪ The program will follow standard UTK Graduate School procedures related to supervisory committee, period of concentrated study, qualifying exam, and defense. ▪ At present, most of the required courses are offered online, and a completely online option will be offered in the future, complimenting ALEC’s online BS and MS programs.
<p>Alignment with State Master Plan and Institutional Mission</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proposed program aligns with the State Master Plan’s focus on “programs of distinction at the graduate and professional level to fully address Tennessee’s economic development, workforce, and research needs.” Accordingly, program graduates will be positioned to work in high-demand fields and undersupplied occupations in agriculture and related areas in Tennessee.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proposed program supports the state’s student success, family prosperity, and future work goals by providing an opportunity for adults to reengage in higher education, complete an advanced degree, prepare for the work of the future, and increase their earning potential. ▪ The proposed Agricultural Education, Leadership and Communication, PhD supports the mission and vision of UTK by providing accessible advanced education, and advancing the well-being of all communities, including rural and distressed counties. The program will further strengthen the research capacities of the ALEC department. ▪ The proposed program also aligns with the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture vision to (1) prepare students to make a difference, (2) discover knowledge that impacts real-world issues, and (3) connect with people and communities to help them prosper. The proposed program will accomplish these goals by attracting a diverse, high-quality student population; preparing graduates with broad academic skills, for domestic and international academic, research, and leadership positions, contributing to the advancement of teaching, research, and Extension programming; and foster application of new knowledge to state, national, and international problems.
<p>Institutional capacity to deliver the proposed academic program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The ALEC department received the 2021 National Association of Agricultural Educators’ Outstanding Postsecondary Agriculture Program award. ▪ Robust research will be offered to students, increasing the capacity of the institution by providing research-based PhD courses that other PhD programs can incorporate into their programs. ▪ In addition to the current ALEC faculty, funds from the Herbert College of Agriculture will be allocated to allow a 60 percent appointment of Dr. Brent Lamons, who will mentor/advise graduate students and teach courses. ▪ The ALEC department currently offers 22 500-level courses. Five 600-level courses will be developed to support the proposed program. ▪ Students will be recruited from existing Herbert College of Agriculture programs and from outside of UTK and Tennessee. ▪ Faculty, academic advisors, and staff will be involved with recruiting students to the proposed program. ▪ The proposed program is not expected to impact enrollment in other Herbert College of Agriculture programs – the other academic programs in the college are focused on technical agriculture skills.
<p>Existing programs offered at public and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No other PhD programs in Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication exist in Tennessee.

private Tennessee institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proposed program will not duplicate the efforts of other colleges in Tennessee and will provide opportunities for students who graduate from bachelor or master programs in related fields to further their education. ▪ Other “ALEC type” doctoral programs are listed in the Appendix.
Accreditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is not an accrediting body for this program.
Administrative Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An organizational chart is included on p. 17. The program will be housed in the Herbert College of Agriculture, in the Agricultural Leadership, Education & Communications department.
Section III: Feasibility Study	
Student interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seventy-nine current and former students of UTK’s Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication, MS were surveyed about their interest in the proposed program. Roughly 83 percent of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement “I believe UTK should offer a doctoral program in ALEC, and roughly eighty percent strongly agreed or agreed that they would be interested in learning more about the program.”
Local and Regional Demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The National Agricultural Education Supply and Demand Study (2021) indicates a strong need for agricultural education programs, pointing to the addition of 242 positions and 140 programs in 2020-2021. However, the same report indicates that “673 agricultural educators who taught in the 2019-2020 school year would not be returning to the classroom in 2020-2021.” ▪ The TN Department of Education projects that 5-10 high schools will add teachers to existing programs and 25-30 new middle school agricultural education programs will be added. These expansions will increase demand for trained agricultural educators. State law requires school districts to adopt and implement differentiated pay plans to aid in staffing hard to staff subject areas and to attract and retain highly qualified teachers. Agriculture programs that were 12-month programs prior to 1992 must be maintained at 12 months, requiring an additional 40 days of work beyond the typical 200 days, which results in higher compensation. ▪ BLS data does not address specific fields in agricultural leadership, education, and communication. Many existing and developing occupations require an understanding of how agriculture and natural resources impact lives. ▪ Graduates will be prepared for careers as Extension Specialists, Agronomy Technical Development managers, scientific communications program managers, science research writers, scientific research project managers, global vice president science and technology, and executive directors for STEM education/outreach. ▪ A Lightcast Q3 Job Posting Analytics report is included in Appendix E. The report details 50,509 job openings in 19 occupations

	<p>requiring a PhD. Occupations searched include: managers, postsecondary teachers, education administrators, public relations specialists, natural sciences managers, secondary school teachers, instructional coordinators, chief executives, statisticians, training and development managers, secondary career/technical education teachers, agricultural technicians, media and communication workers, education administrators, agricultural inspectors, media and communication equipment workers, agricultural workers, agricultural engineers, and middle school career/technical education teachers.</p>
<p>Employer Demand</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ According to the US Department of Agriculture, approximately 56 percent of all food, agriculture, renewable natural resources, and environment-related job openings between 2020 and 2025 will be in education, communication, government services, management, and business. Program graduates will gain specialization in research methods, statistics, and other specialized knowledge. A Lightcast jobs report was included in Appendix E (see above), but data specific to the programs listed was not. ▪ The most posted job titles that would capture graduates from the proposed program are: Extension Agents, Order Management Specialists, Smart Home Experts, County Extension Agents, Extension Agricultural Agents, Youth Development Professional and Family and Consumer Science Teachers. ▪ A Lightcast Q3 Job Posting Analytics report is included in Appendix E. The report details 50,509 job openings in 19 occupations requiring a PhD. National wage data indicates that median wages for general agriculture workers with a graduate degree earn \$68,000 while those with a bachelor’s earn \$53,000. ▪ A supplemental employment demand section was submitted 09/15 and will be Appendix F. This document includes the following information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ According to BLS, jobs for postsecondary teachers with masters or doctoral degrees are projected to have nearly 19,000 openings per year between 2019 to 2029. ○ A search on HigherEdJobs.com, conducted 09/15/2023 identified over 1000 faculty positions open in the field of agriculture at four-year degree granting institutions. ○ A search on indeed.com conducted on 09/15/2023 revealed 161 current openings for applicants with a PhD in Agriculture. These positions include: Ag Research Development Manager, Director of the Ag Professional Development Program, Senior Director, Program leader, Director of Program Management, and Technical Program Manager. ○ A search on linkedin.com conducted on 09/15/2023 identified several currently open jobs, including

	Postdoctoral research associate, Education and Science Principal, Portfolio Director for Comprehensive Leadership Program, River Sustainability Director, and Organizational Leadership Practitioner.
Community and Industry Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Letters of support were provided by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation ○ TN Department of Education ○ UT Extension ○ Farm Credit Mid-America ○ Farm Bureau Health Plans ○ UT Institute of Agriculture ○ Tennessee State University ○ UTK College of Communication and Information ○ UTK College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences ▪ Internal partnerships are in place to provide degree enhancements through collaborative course offerings.
Section IV: Enrollment and Graduation Projections	
Projected Enrollment and Graduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The program is anticipated to require three years of full-time enrollment for completion. ▪ The program projects the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Year 1: 3 enrolled (1 full-time, 2 part-time), 0 graduates ○ Year 2: 6 enrolled (2 full-time, 4 part-time), 0 graduates ○ Year 3: 9 enrolled (3 full-time, 6 part-time), 1 graduate ○ Year 4: 12 enrolled (4 full-time, 8 part-time), 2 graduates ○ Year 5: 14 enrolled (4 full-time, 10 part-time), 3 graduates ○ Year 6; 14 enrolled (4 full-time, 10 part-time), 3 graduates ○ Year 7: 14 enrolled (4 full-time, 10 part-time), 4 graduates ○ One full-time student will be hired as a Graduate Assistant per year. Program attrition is anticipated to be less than 10 percent, based on historical attrition rates for the college, which include part-time students.
Section V: Projected Costs to Deliver Proposed Program	
Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No additional faculty are being requested. Thirty percent of Dr. Lamon's position will be dedicated to managing the proposed PhD program, costing \$31,757 in year 1.
Non-Instructional Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No new non-instructional staff are requested.
Graduate Assistants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Four assistantships—which include tuition and stipend benefits--will be allocated to the proposed program (One hired per year, in years 1-4). Funding for these positions will come from converting existing ALEC MS Graduate Research Assistant and Graduate Teaching Assistant positions to PhD positions (the reallocation should have minimal impact on ALEC MS enrollment, currently more than 80 students are self-funded). Additional positions could be funded from faculty grant funds, and other university sources.

Accreditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No programmatic accreditation is available for this program. No cost.
Consultants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Two external reviewers will be hired for the THEC external review, at approximately \$1,500 each.
Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ \$10,000 is allocated for purchasing computers and equipment for GA's in the first five years of the program's implementation.
Information Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ \$200/year needed for subscription software.
Library Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No additional resources are necessary.
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No new resources will be needed for marketing.
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No new or renovated facilities are needed.
Travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The program will allocate \$1,000 per full-time graduate assistant for travel to conferences.
Other Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ \$2,000 is allocated for expendable supplies per year.
Section VI: Projected Revenues for the Proposed Program	
Tuition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ \$28,000 revenue is anticipated from tuition in year 1, which is projected to grow to \$140,206 by year 7.
Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Grant funds will be used to support GA positions. Examples of grant funding sources are included in the budget narrative.
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No other revenue is projected.
Appendices	
Letters of Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Letters of support were provided by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Eric Mayberry, President, The Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation ○ Steven Gass, Program Manager, TN Department of Education ○ Ashley Stokes, Dean and Professor, UT Extension ○ Tim Williams, Senior Vice President, Farm Credit Mid-America ○ Benjamin Sanders, Executive Director of Government Affairs, Farm Bureau Health Plans ○ Jonathan Walton, Senior Lecturer and Undergraduate Director, UT Institute of Agriculture ○ John Ricketts, Professor, Tennessee State University ○ Joseph Mazer, Dean, UTK College of Communication and Information ○ Ellen McIntyre, Dean, UTK College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences
THEC Financial Projections Form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Financial projections form is included on pg. 32-33.
Public Comment	
Public Comments	No public comments were received.