



## TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

---

**REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM:** IV. B.

**MEETING DATE:** May 19, 2022

**SUBJECT:** New Academic Program  
Middle Tennessee State University  
Public Writing and Rhetoric, Bachelor of Science (BS)  
CIP Code: 23.1301 (Writing, General)

**ITEM TYPE:** Action

**ACTION RECOMMENDATION:** Approval

---

### **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) proposes a Public Writing and Rhetoric, Bachelor of Science (BS) program which will require 120 credit hours and will need minimal new resources. The proposed program is an interdisciplinary degree designed to strengthen written communication skills and was developed in response to feedback from industry partners indicating a desire for graduates to have more developed writing and rhetorical skills. Instructors and researchers in rhetoric and writing studies are specifically trained and prepared to teach students how to write effectively for complex public audiences, which often involves addressing multiple sets of stakeholders. Currently, few majors focused on preparing students with these types of writing skills are prevalent in the United States in spite of the importance of written communication skills to perspective employers.

The proposed program will be housed in the Department of English in the College of Liberal Arts and will be comprised of public writing and rhetoric courses and complemented by courses offered in several disciplines including English, communication studies, and journalism departments. There will be an emphasis on the development of strong writing skills and will focus on preparing students to write in a range of civic, digital, and professional contexts for public, professional, and academic audiences. Additionally, the proposed program is designed to be a viable second major for students in other fields that require strong communication skills.

### **INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNING BOARD APPROVAL**

The proposed Public Writing and Rhetoric, BS program was approved by the Middle Tennessee State University Board of Trustees on April 5, 2022.

### **PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

August 2022

### **ALIGNMENT WITH STATE MASTER PLAN AND INSTITUTIONAL MISSION/STRATEGIC PLAN**

The proposed program aligns with several components of the Tennessee Higher Education Master Plan including equipping students with flexible, transferable written communication skills for a rapidly changing

global economy; addressing a need for writing skills and helping close the writing skills gap; supporting the Tennessee Transfer Pathways; and acknowledging that liberal arts degrees can be workforce degrees.

The proposed program aligns with MTSU’s institutional mission by preparing students to “communicate clearly and precisely and understand the proper role of free expression and civic engagement in our society” and fostering a student-centered environment conducive to lifelong learning, personal development, and success.

## CURRICULUM

The proposed program will be delivered on campus and will consist of 120 credit hours which is comprised of 41 credit hours of general education; 12 credit hours of the Public Writing and Rhetoric Core; 24 credit hours of Public Writing and Rhetoric Electives; 25-28 credit hours of electives; and 15-18 credit hours toward a required minor. Six new Public Writing and Rhetoric courses will need to be developed for a total of 18 credit hours.

Student learning objectives for the proposed Public Writing and Rhetoric program will ensure students:

- analyze and produce effective and informed written documents in a range of public, technical, and professional genres;
- exercise rhetorical awareness, adapting written communication to various audiences, purposes, and technological platforms;
- design and present written information in ways that demonstrate competence across media and modes, including but not limited to matters of accessibility, universal design, visual and aural literacy, and facility with digital platforms; and
- collaborate effectively and ethically with others on complex public, professional, and academic projects that involve substantial written components.

## PROGRAM PRODUCTIVITY

The proposed Public Writing and Rhetoric, BS program anticipates an initial enrollment of 15 students increasing to 55 students by year five. Attrition rates are calculated at 10 percent. The proposed program projects 12 graduates by year five.

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
<b>Enrollment</b>	15	25	35	45	55
<b>Graduates</b>	--	--	4	8	12

## PROGRAM DUPLICATION

The proposed program will be the first standalone major of its kind in Tennessee. The University of Memphis offers a concentration in professional writing and Tennessee Technological University currently offers a concentration in professional and technical communication within their respective English majors.

## EXTERNAL JUDGEMENT

An external review of the proposed program was conducted during a virtual institutional site visit on June 28, 2021. Dr. Lisa Melonçon, Director of the Undergraduate Program in Professional Writing, Rhetoric, and Technology; and Director of the Rhetoric and Composition Graduate Program at the University of South

Florida served as the external reviewer for the proposed program. The site visit included meetings with campus administrators, faculty, prospective students, and community partners.

Dr. Melonçon recommended approval of the Public Writing and Rhetoric, BS program and stated “Report after report indicates that writing, communication, critical thinking, and collaboration are key components that employers find valuable. The proposed degree program foregrounds those skills rather than these being tangential to other skills and knowledges.”

## **STUDENT DEMAND**

Middle Tennessee State University conducted a survey of current students enrolled in upper division writing courses and those with declared English minors. Over two-thirds (n=53) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed when asked if they would be interested in a bachelor’s degree focused on writing which included courses in public, digital, creative, and professional writing. Additionally, approximately, 50 percent indicated a willingness to change their major to the proposed Public Writing and Rhetoric program.

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRAM GRADUATES**

Graduates from the proposed program will be qualified for employment in various industries that require writing-intensive skills for content strategy, document design, multimedia storytelling, and technical documentation. MTSU conducted a labor analysis in Tennessee over a 30-day period in 2020 and found over 2,600 writing-centered positions in the greater Middle Tennessee. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Occupational Outlook Handbook show the technical writing field is growing at 7 percent a year which is greater than the average increase for other positions. Further, US News and World Report listed technical writing as the second-best job for creative and media careers.

Letters of support for the proposed program were included from a variety of business and industry leaders including the Office of the Federal Public Defender Middle District of Tennessee; Books Forward; Life is Brewing; Kirkland’s; Nelson’s Green Brier Distillery; MP&F Strategic Communications; Tennessee Library for Accessible Books and Media; Mina and Vine; Digital at Discovery; Susan Severn Consulting; Adams and Reese, LLP; and Trend Sales.

## **INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY TO DELIVER THE PROGRAM**

The MTSU Department of English currently has capacity to support and deliver the proposed program with 42 tenured and tenure-track faculty, including five who specialize in rhetoric and writing studies. No new faculty are required for the proposed program. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the degree, the curriculum will have supplementary support from courses and faculty in areas such as communication studies, journalism, media arts, and business. Existing resources and facilities at MTSU are currently sufficient for the addition of the proposed program.

## **ASSESSMENT AND POST-APPROVAL MONITORING**

An annual performance review of the proposed program will be conducted for the first five years following program approval. The review will be based on benchmarks established in the approved proposal. At the end of this period, the campus, institutional governing board, and THEC staff will perform a summative evaluation. The benchmarks include, but are not limited to, enrollment and graduation, program cost, progress toward accreditation, and other metrics set by the institution and staff. If benchmarks are not met during the monitoring period, the Commission may recommend that the institutional governing board terminate the

program. If additional time is needed and requested by the institutional governing board, the Commission may choose to extend the monitoring period.

# FINANCIAL PROJECTIONS

**Tennessee Higher Education Commission  
Appendix A: THEC Financial Projections Form  
Middle Tennessee State University  
B.S. in Public Writing and Rhetoric**

*Seven-year projections are required for doctoral programs.  
Five-year projections are required for baccalaureate and Master's degree programs  
Three-year projections are required for associate degrees and undergraduate certificates.  
Projections should include cost of living increases per year.  
Planning year projections are not required but should be included when appropriate.*

	Planning Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
<b>I. Expenditures</b>						
<b>A. One-time Expenditures</b>						
New/Renovated Space <sup>1</sup>	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Equipment	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Library	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Consultants	\$ 1,500	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Travel	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Sub-Total One-time</b>	\$ 1,500	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>B. Recurring Expenditures</b>						
<b>Personnel</b>						
<b>Administration</b>						
Salary	\$ -	\$ 4,800	\$ 4,800	\$ 4,800	\$ 4,800	\$ 4,800
Benefits	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Sub-Total Administration</b>	\$ -	\$ 4,800	\$ 4,800	\$ 4,800	\$ 4,800	\$ 4,800
<b>Faculty</b>						
Salary	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Benefits	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Sub-Total Faculty</b>	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Support Staff</b>						
Salary	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Benefits	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Sub-Total Support Staff</b>	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Graduate Assistants</b>						
Salary	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Benefits	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Tuition and Fees* (See Below)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Sub-Total Graduate Assistants</b>	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Operating</b>						
Travel	\$ -	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,575	\$ 2,652	\$ 2,732	\$ 2,814
Printing	\$ -	\$ 500	\$ 515	\$ 530	\$ 546	\$ 563
Equipment	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other	\$ -	\$ 8,000	\$ 5,150	\$ 5,305	\$ 5,464	\$ 5,628
<b>Sub-Total Operating</b>	\$ -	\$ 11,000	\$ 8,240	\$ 8,487	\$ 8,742	\$ 9,004
<b>Total Recurring</b>	\$ -	\$ 15,800	\$ 13,040	\$ 13,287	\$ 13,542	\$ 13,804
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES (A + B)</b>	\$ 1,500	\$ 15,800	\$ 13,040	\$ 13,287	\$ 13,542	\$ 13,804

**\*If tuition and fees for Graduate Assistants are included, please provide the following information.**

Base Tuition and Fees Rate      \$ -      \$ -      \$ -      \$ -      \$ -      \$ -

	Planning Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
<b>II. Revenue</b>						
Tuition and Fees <sup>2</sup>	\$ -	\$ 116,380	\$ 207,080	\$ 297,780	\$ 388,480	\$ 479,180
Institutional Reallocations <sup>3</sup>	\$ 1,500	\$ (100,580)	\$ (194,040)	\$ (284,493)	\$ (374,938)	\$ (465,376)
Federal Grants <sup>4</sup>	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Private Grants or Gifts <sup>5</sup>	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other <sup>6</sup>	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>BALANCED BUDGET LINE</b>	<b>\$ 1,500</b>	<b>\$ 15,800</b>	<b>\$ 13,040</b>	<b>\$ 13,287</b>	<b>\$ 13,542</b>	<b>\$ 13,804</b>

**Notes:**

**(1) Provide the funding source(s) for the new or renovated space.**

N/A

**(2) In what year is tuition and fee revenue expected to be generated? Tuition and fees include maintenance fees, out-of-state tuition, and any applicable earmarked fees for the program. Explain any differential fees.**

Tuition revenue will be generated beginning in Year 1 and is calculated conservatively without increases in future years.

Year 1: (10 full-time students @ \$9,070 = \$90,700) + ( 5 part-time students @ \$2,568 = \$25,680) = \$116,380.

Year 2: (20 full-time students @ \$9,070 = \$181,400) + ( 5 part-time students @ \$2,568 = \$25,680) = \$207,080.

Year 3: (30 full-time students @ \$9,070 = \$272,100) + ( 5 part-time students @ \$2,568 = \$25,680) = \$297,780.

Year 4: (40 full-time students @ \$9,070 = \$362,800) + ( 5 part-time students @ \$2,568 = \$25,680) = \$388,480.

Year 5: (50 full-time students @ \$9,070 = \$453,500) + ( 5 part-time students @ \$2,568 = \$25,680) = \$479,180.

**(3) Identify the source(s) of the institutional reallocations, and grant matching requirements if applicable.**

N/A

**(4) Provide the source(s) of the Federal Grant including the granting department and CFDA(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance) nu**

N/A

**(5) Provide the name of the organization(s) or individual(s) providing grant(s) or gift(s).**

N/A

**(6) Provide information regarding other sources of the funding.**

N/A