



## Letter of Notification (LON)

### *Policy A1.0 New Academic Programs: Approval Process*

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**Institution:** Middle Tennessee State University  
**Proposed Academic Program:** Digital Media, Master of Science (MS)  
**Proposed Implementation Date:** May 2024  
**Federal CIP Code:** 09.0102  
**Federal CIP Code Title:** Mass Communication/Media Studies

**Federal CIP Code Definition:**

A program that focuses on the analysis and criticism of media institutions and media texts, how people experience and understand media content, and the roles of media in producing and transforming culture. Includes instruction in communications regulation, law, and policy; media history; media aesthetics, interpretation, and criticism; the social and cultural effects of mass media; cultural studies; the economics of media industries; visual and media literacy; and the psychology and behavioral aspects of media messages, interpretation, and utilization.

**LON Submission Date:** June 19, 2023  
**Posted Date on THEC Website:** June 20, 2023  
**Public Comment Period:** June 20, 2023 – July 20, 2023

#### **New Academic Program Criteria for Review**

Per THEC Academic Policy 1.0 (Section 1.0.3A1) Criteria for Review, the following criteria are considered to maximize state resources in evaluating academic programs:

- Alignment with the state master plan for higher education and institutional mission
- Feasibility
- Institutional capacity to deliver the proposed academic program
- Program costs/revenues



LETTER OF NOTIFICATION (LON)  
M.S. in Digital Media

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**Office of the President**

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16 June 2023

Robert Smith, PhD  
Interim Executive Director  
TN Higher Education Commission  
312 Rosa L. Parks Ave, 9th Floor  
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Dr. Smith:

In accordance with Tennessee Higher Education Commission Policy A 1.0, Section 1.0.5A, this letter signifies my support for the development of the M.S. in Digital Marketing at Middle Tennessee State University. MTSU's Board of Trustees enthusiastically approved the program as a "Degree Under Consideration" in April 2023.

The Board and I believe that the addition of the 30-credit hour, online degree program will enhance MTSU's portfolio and will strengthen the University's contribution to the workforce demands of the Middle Tennessee region and beyond – as illustrated in the seven letters of support from industry leaders. The program will be housed in MTSU's College of Media and Entertainment.

We appreciate THEC staff's consideration of this Letter of Notification and look forward to continued collaboration with your office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sidney A. McPhee".

Sidney A. McPhee  
President

CC: Dr. Julie Roberts, THEC Chief Academic Officer  
Dr. Mark Byrnes, MTSU Provost

## **Section I: Overview**

### **Program Information**

Institution:	Middle Tennessee State University
Academic Program:	Digital Media
Concentrations:	NA
Degree Designation:	Master of Science
Proposed CIP Code:	09.0102
CIP Code Title:	Mass Communication/Media Studies

CIP Code Definition: A program that focuses on the analysis and criticism of media institutions and media texts, how people experience and understand media content, and the roles of media in producing and transforming culture. Includes instruction in communications regulation, law, and policy; media history; media aesthetics, interpretation, and criticism; the social and cultural effects of mass media; cultural studies; the economics of media industries; visual and media literacy; and the psychology and behavioral aspects of media messages, interpretation, and utilization.

### **Academic Program Liaison Name and Contact Information**

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### **Proposed Implementation Date**

May 2024

## **Section II: Background**

### **Background concerning academic program development**

Understanding how to analyze, navigate and create digital media is no longer valuable solely within media industries. The growth of social media, remote work, and digital commerce means that professionals in a growing range of fields need to expand their expertise in communication technologies. This proposed online master's degree will attract students from across the workforce who want to gain a competitive edge in the job market by elevating their knowledge of digital media.

This proposed M.S. in Digital Media will provide students with a broad range of digital media expertise, including social media best practices, digital data collection and analysis, search engine optimization, website creation and management, audience metrics, mobile-optimized media, and more, including the theoretical and methodological foundations for such expertise. The program will attract students interested in public relations, advertising, journalism, and related fields, as well as professionals working in other disciplines that utilize digital media for workflow, promotion, and/or training. Furthermore, by offering this 30-hour degree fully online, the program will attract current working professionals who want to expand their skills while also needing the flexibility of online courses.

Hanover Research identified mass communication and media studies - particularly digital media - as a "high growth" area in Tennessee, given the area's above-average growth in student demand. EAB further listed media and communication as having a high and growing labor market with few regional competitors for Middle Tennessee State University. Researchers have also found employers who previously have not needed workers with digital expertise are now seeking applicants familiar with technology.<sup>1</sup>

As part of the School of Journalism and Strategic Media, this proposed M.S. in Digital Media will be taught by award-winning journalism, advertising, and public relations professors, while also incorporating the School's partnerships with media practitioners and companies to supplement career development of students. This new degree will provide students with a comprehensive understanding of digital media practices and prepare graduates for positions in an ever-changing, digital-focused workforce.

### **Purpose and nature of academic program**

Description of Academic Program	This master's program will allow students to update and expand their expertise in social media, digital analytics, communication
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<sup>1</sup> Hecker, I. and Loprest, P. (2019). Foundational Digital Skills for Career Progress. Urban Institute. [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/100843/foundational\\_digital\\_skills\\_for\\_career\\_progress\\_2.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/100843/foundational_digital_skills_for_career_progress_2.pdf)

	technologies, data journalism, media theory, and applied research methods.
Total Credit Hours	This will be a 30-hour program.
Target Audience	This program will attract people interested in public relations, advertising, journalism and related fields who need the flexibility of online coursework.
Purpose	There are two primary purposes for the M.S. Digital Media. The first is to allow students who are already working in a media related field to learn new and cutting-edge approaches to assist in the advancement of their careers. The second purpose is to allow students who have degrees in other fields become more familiar with digital media practices, considering there are few professions that do not include some form of digital media management, such as social media or website creation or administration.
Program Outcomes	<p>This program will prepare students to work in various fields that rely on digital media expertise. This includes, but is not limited to, public relations, advertising, and journalism.</p> <p>Students will graduate prepared to fill in-demand areas of digital media work including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Social media best practices</li> <li>● Digital data collection and analysis</li> <li>● Search engine optimization (SEO)</li> <li>● Website creation and management</li> <li>● Audience metrics</li> <li>● Mobile-optimized content creation</li> </ul>
Delivery Method	This program will be delivered fully online.
Any Other Pertinent Information	The program will be part of MTSU's School of Journalism and Strategic Media and offered alongside the school's in-person M.S. in Media Communication.

### **Alignment with state master plan and institutional mission**

This proposed master's degree aligns with and supports both the state master plan and MTSU's institutional mission, as well as MTSU's Quest 2025 initiative and Academic Master Plan. As the [state master plan](#) notes, "emerging technologies have created a pace of change faster than at any time in history" (pg. 3). This degree directly prepares students to engage with and master new technologies, while also building critical thinking skills that will allow graduates to adapt to the next generation of innovation. This degree will prepare students for high-demand jobs across an array of industries, given the use of digital media across so many sectors of the workforce. This program will prepare students to transition into the professional world and

create opportunities for working professionals to advance their career, which are key goals of [MTSU's Quest 2025](#).

Furthermore, as this master's degree will be delivered fully online, it will support Tennessee's Drive to 55 initiative. This degree will be accessible to a diverse group of students, including working professionals who cannot take time off or people who live too far away for in-person courses. As noted in the state's master plan, increasing access to education will lead to "increased job opportunities, and a greater likelihood of earning a livable wage" (pg. 30). The delivery method also supports [MTSU's mission statement](#), which includes "enhancing access through unique programs, distance learning, and advising to meet the needs of a diverse student population." Promoting engagement of a diverse student population further supports [MTSU's Academic Master Plan](#), which aims to "enhance academic quality" and "foster student-centered learning."

### **Institutional capacity to deliver the proposed academic program**

The M.S. in Digital Media will have a positive impact on enrollment. This program will not be in competition with the School of Journalism and Strategic Media's current master's program, as it is designed to attract a different type of student. The fully online approach to this degree will make it possible for more non-traditional students and working professionals to enroll. Furthermore, current partnerships and collaborative agreements that already exist within the School of Journalism and Strategic Media, including those with media companies that provide internships and opportunities for students, will extend to this new degree, which will only strengthen the program, the school, the college, and the university.

This new program will further benefit from the existing resources used to support the current, in-person master's program. This includes the School of Journalism and Strategic Media's faculty – who have extensive industry experience and routinely publish in peer-reviewed research journals and juried creative exhibitions. Other resources include the James E. Walker Library's comprehensive media and communication collection, a stocked equipment room, and access to software including the Adobe Creative Suite and Brandwatch.

### **Existing programs offered at public and private Tennessee institutions**

Ten higher-education institutions in Tennessee, including MTSU, offer degrees under the 09.0102 Federal CIP code. Combined, they awarded 1,384 degrees between 2019 and 2021, although only 258, or about 19%, were awarded at the graduate level. Fully 93% of the degrees - and all of the graduate-level degrees - were awarded by the state's public universities. The proposed degree would be the state's only graduate-level Digital Media master's degree to be offered both entirely online and on an accelerated schedule that would allow students to complete the program in a single calendar year.

Presently, Austin Peay offers the state's only fully online Mass Communication/Media Studies master's degree. Its four available concentrations - corporate communication, general communication, marketing communication, and media management - differ substantively from the proposed program's digital media emphasis. Meanwhile, East Tennessee State University



offers an M.F.A. in digital media. But its fine-arts focus, two-year timetable, and on-ground delivery attract fundamentally different students than the ones the proposed program anticipates serving.

All other masters-level Mass Communication/Media Studies programs available at Tennessee higher education institutions at traditional, in-person, two-year degrees. The following table lists yearly counts, by institution, of CIP 09.0102 degrees conferred in Tennessee.

**“Mass Communication/Media Studies” undergraduate and graduate degrees conferred by Tennessee higher education institutions, 2019 - 2021**

Institution	2020	2019	2021	Grand Total
Middle Tennessee State University	110	150	77	337
Austin Peay State University	114	105	102	321
East Tennessee State University	111	96	110	317
University of Memphis	83	70	79	232
The University of Tennessee-Knoxville	28	21	30	79
Lane College	17	11	10	38
Johnson University	7	13	3	23
Belmont University	10	7	3	20
Trevecca Nazarene University	7	3	7	17
Carson-Newman University	0	0	0	0
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>476</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>1,384</b>

### Accreditation

Like the School of Journalism and Strategic Media’s in-person master’s program in Media and Communication, this proposed master’s degree will not be eligible for accreditation under the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC), the organization that accredits the undergraduate program in MTSU’s School of Journalism and Strategic Media. ACEJMC will accredit only a “professionally oriented” master’s program, which ACEJMC’s [Policies of Accreditation](#) define as a master’s program that requires more than half of its courses to be of a professional nature and requires students to complete a professionally-oriented thesis, project or comprehensive examination. While the proposed program will help students acquire and refine valuable professional skills, most courses will emphasize academically oriented theory and methodology. Furthermore, the proposed program will not require a thesis, project, or comprehensive exam.

However, this proposed master’s degree will undergo external program review under the [THEC and Tennessee Conference of Graduate Schools guidelines](#), just as the in-person master’s

program in Media and Communication currently does. This review, which happens every seven years, includes a self-study and an assessment of 32 criteria grouped into six categories: learning outcomes, curriculum, student experience, faculty, learning resources, and support. The program anticipates applying for accreditation during the program's fourth year. Furthermore, the development of this proposed degree will also be completed in accordance with all Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) policies.

### **Administrative structure**

This program will be housed in the School of Journalism and Strategic Media (SoJSM) in the College of Media and Entertainment at MTSU, and the program director who currently oversees the Media and Communication master's degree will administer it. The following figure depicts the organizational chart.



## **Section III: Feasibility Study**

### **Student interest**

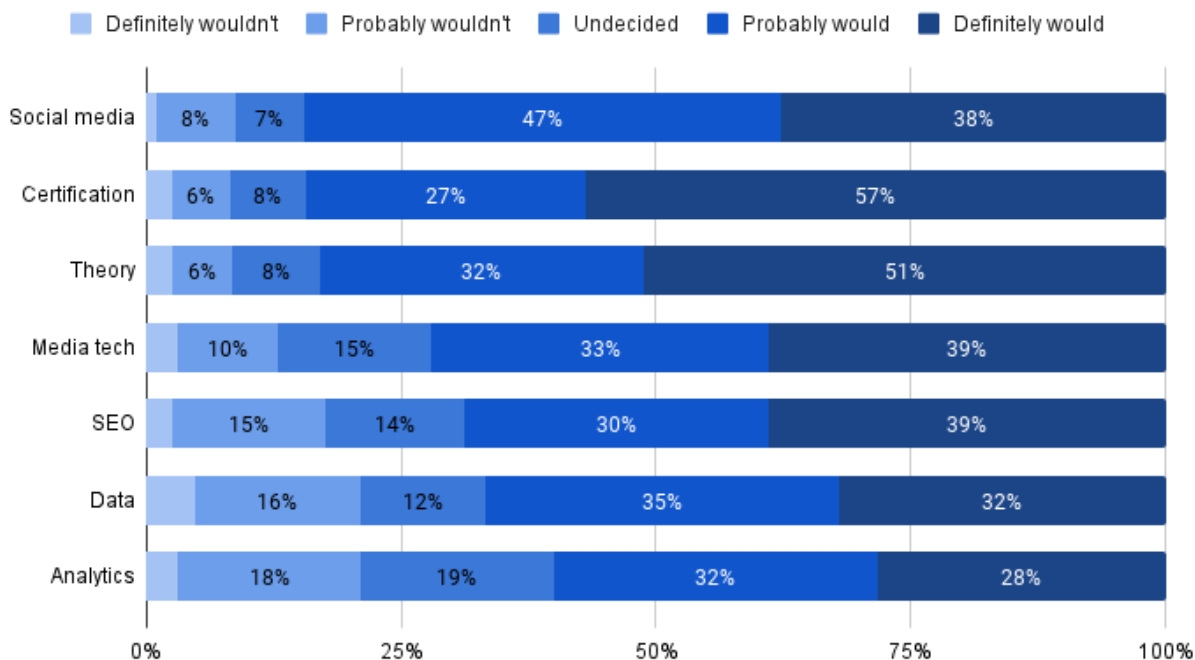
Strong majorities of the 317 School of Journalism and Strategic Media alumni and current students who responded to a questionnaire about the program said its proposed courses “probably” or “definitely” would attract them to the program.

Conducted March 15 through April 20, 2023, the online survey gathered responses from a convenience sample of students enrolled in the School's courses during the Spring 2023 semester and alumni contacted via email by MTSU's Alumni Association. Of the 317 respondents, 230 (72%) were current students, and 88 (28%) were alumni. Their ages averaged to 27 years and ranged from 17 to 65. The standard deviation of 12 years reflected the distribution's long right tail.

Most respondents reported living in the Nashville/Murfreesboro area (69%), the Chattanooga area (5%), the Knoxville area (4%), the Memphis area (3%), or elsewhere in Tennessee (8%). Another 10% said they lived elsewhere in the U.S., and 1% said they lived outside the U.S.

## Program attractiveness, by type of course

"Please indicate how much each kind of course listed below would, or would not, attract you to the program."



Online survey of current students and recent alumni. N = 317. Data collected March 15 - April 20, 2023.

With the "attractiveness" of each type of course re-expressed as a 0-4 continuous variable, summed across the course types, and converted to a percentage of the maximum possible value (28), the respondents expressed an average "attractiveness" score of 78%, with a range from 0% to 100% and a standard deviation of 23 percentage points. While "attractiveness" averaged high both among current students ( $M = 76\%$ ,  $SD = 23$ ) and among alumni ( $M = 84\%$ ,  $SD = 22$ ), the alumni average was significantly greater than the current student average  $t(164) = 2.83$ ,  $p = .01$ .

The interest assessment did not include a question asking respondents whether they would enroll in the program once the program has launched. As illustrated by persistent discrepancies between proportions of U.S. adults who say they will vote and who actually do,<sup>2</sup> survey-based predictions of future behavior are notoriously unreliable. Accordingly, the analysis focused on assessing the program's attractiveness among the School of Journalism and Strategic Media's current students and recent alumni.

<sup>2</sup> Rentsch, A., Schaffner, B. F., & Gross, J. H. (2019). The elusive likely voter: Improving electoral predictions with more informed vote-propensity models. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 83(4), 782-804.

### **Local and regional demand**

The proposed program will appeal directly to workers in each of three media-related occupations designated as “in-demand” for the Northern Middle Tennessee region in the latest (2002) Academic Supply for Occupational Demand Report<sup>3</sup> produced jointly by THEC and three other Tennessee state agencies.

All three occupations have Standard Occupational Codes in the 27-0000 “Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations” range. They are Graphic Designers (27-1024), with 186 projected annual openings; Producers and Directors (27-2012), with 176 projected annual openings; and Editors (27-3041), with 129 projected annual openings. All three projections are for Northern Middle Tennessee through 2028. Additionally, the Graphic Designers occupation is listed as in-demand in the Southern Middle Tennessee region, with a projected 15 annual openings through 2023. The Northern Middle Tennessee projections came to 13 percent of total annual employment for Editors, 15 percent for Producers and Directors, and 17 percent for Graphic Designers - all within a standard deviation of the 16 percent average for the region’s in-demand occupations.

As of 2020, the Northern Middle Tennessee region’s employment concentration figure for Producers and Directors, 1.28, exceeded the national average of 1, as did the 1.49 concentration figure for Editors. The employment concentration figure for Graphic Designers in the region, .80, came close, falling well within a standard deviation of the region’s average. Employment concentration for Graphic Designers in Southern Middle Tennessee was lower, at .48, but still within the considerably wider standard deviation for the region’s average. Collectively, the evidence indicates considerable demand in the region for professionals with the expertise the proposed program will provide.

Regional projections are unavailable for other media-related occupations in the 27-0000 range, such as News Analysts, Reporters, and Journalists, Public Relations Specialists, Technical Writers, and Writers and Authors. But the proposed program will serve professionals in these areas, too. A master’s degree is generally not required for any of the occupations in the 27-000 range. However, obtaining a master’s can substantially enhance one’s chances of finding employment in the field, advancing faster, and commanding higher pay.

Middle Tennessee residents who want advanced credentials for working in these occupations have limited options. In addition to Middle Tennessee State University, three higher-education institutions in the Middle Tennessee region offer degrees in Mass Communication / Media Studies (CIP Code 9.0102). The three are: Austin Peay State University, in Clarksville; and Trevecca Nazarene University and Belmont University, both in Nashville. According to IPEDS data for 2019 to 2021<sup>4</sup>, the four institutions awarded 476 Mass Communication / Media Studies degrees in 2019, 487 in 2020, and 421 in 2021. Master’s degrees accounted for only 69 of

<sup>3</sup> Academic Supply for Occupational Demand Report 2022, <https://www.tn.gov/content/tn/thec/research/supply-and-demand.html>.

<sup>4</sup> IPEDS Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data>.

these awards in 2019, 81 in 2020, and 73 in 2021. By themselves, the three in-demand media occupations described above will generate a projected 506 openings annually in the region, more than the annual number of undergraduate CIP Code 9.0201 degrees the region's higher-education institutions are producing, and far more than the number of such degrees at the master's level.

Clearly, the region's higher education market has room for this degree, a conclusion supported in a March 2022 analysis by Hanover Research<sup>5</sup> that considered master's degree offerings not only at MTSU and its three competing regional media programs but also at East Tennessee State University, Lipscomb University, Tennessee State University, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, University of Louisville, and Vanderbilt University. The analysis identified mass communication and media studies as one of Tennessee's 16 "high growth" areas of graduate education, characterized by a combination of above-average growth in student demand and above-average volume of degrees awarded.

### **Employer demand**

Statewide, the latest data from the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development projects<sup>6</sup> an average of 2,122 job openings per year through 2030 in media-related occupations that the proposed master's degree would serve. Five of these occupations - graphic designers, writers and authors, PR specialists, producers and directors, and editors - are expected to produce annual openings above the statewide median for all jobs that typically require a four-year college degree.

Meanwhile, the latest national employment data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics<sup>7</sup> predict 155,600 openings per year through 2031 in occupations that the proposed degree will serve. Seven of them - PR specialists, graphic designers, producers and directors, writers and authors, fundraisers, and web developers - rank above the national median for annual openings in occupations that require college-level credentials.

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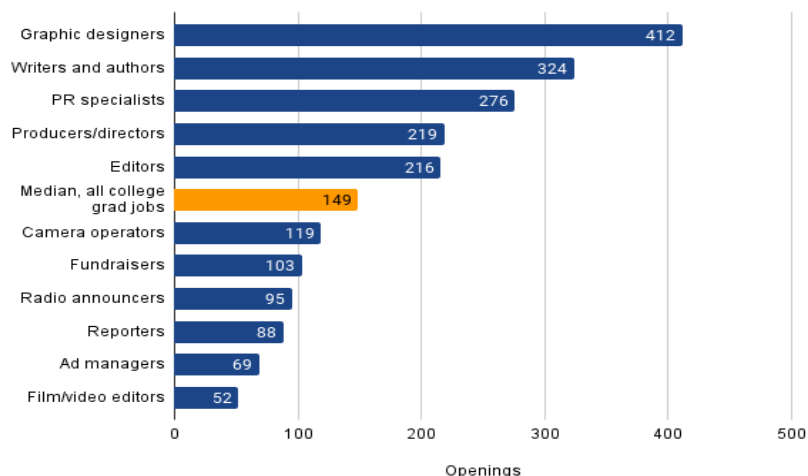
<sup>5</sup> Hanover Research (2022) *Interdisciplinary Program Opportunities*.

<sup>6</sup> Jobs4TN.gov, <https://www.jobs4tn.gov/vosnet/Default.aspx>.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections, Occupational Projections Data, <https://data.bls.gov/projections/occupationProj>.

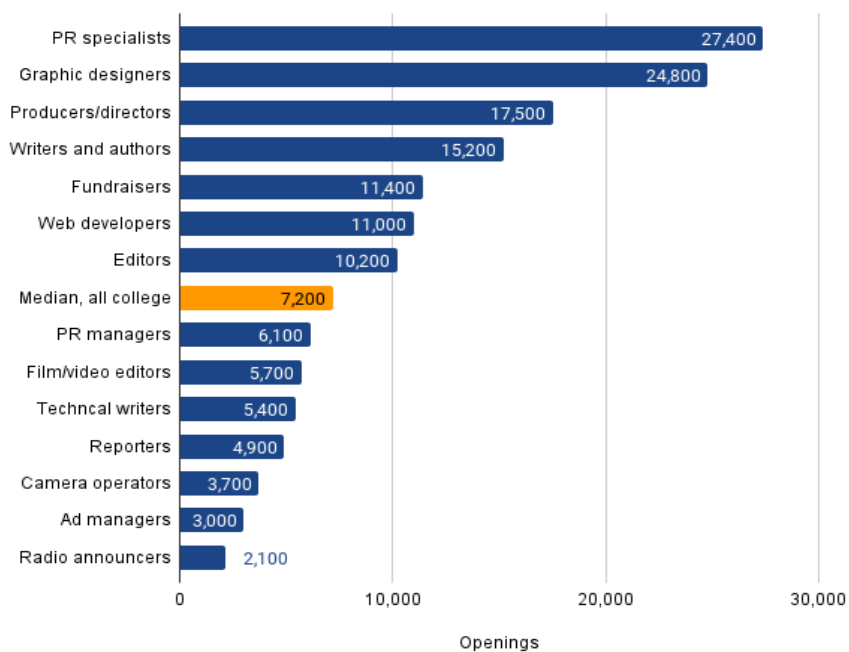
### Annual Tenn. job openings for selected media careers, 2020-2030

Data source: Tennessee Dept. of Labor & Workforce Development, <https://bit.ly/3j8TIQG>



### Annual U.S. job openings for selected media careers, 2021-2031

Data source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://bit.ly/3j8TIQG>



### Community and industry partnerships

The response from local, regional, national, and international companies and organizations indicates strong support for the proposed Digital Media master's degree. Letters written by executives and leaders from news organizations, marketing and design firms, as well as non-profits and school systems demonstrate the wide-ranging employment opportunities available for graduates of this program.

In regard to employer demand for the degree, Joel Christopher, Executive Editor of Knox News and the Knoxville News Sentinel wrote:

“As you consider a master’s degree program in digital media at Middle Tennessee State University, you can be confident that graduates of a program that builds these skills would be highly sought, especially by the newsrooms in my company’s network, which owns newsrooms in three of Tennessee’s Big Four metros.”

Courtney Chauvenne, Associate Director of Social Media at redpepper, a marketing agency that has worked with companies such as Verizon, Slack, and Cracker Barrel, demonstrated the importance of the skills students will learn in this degree, writing:

“I’ve had to rely on on-the-job training and self-study to learn the skills needed to succeed in this constantly evolving industry. In addition, I have witnessed significant changes in digital media since the early days of social networking websites like Myspace to the current social media phenomenon TikTok. This program will provide present-day students with a structured and comprehensive education—one that I wish was available to me when I started in this field. Therefore, I am delighted that MTSU students have the opportunity to benefit from this program’s comprehensive curriculum.”

The letters further establish a willingness for organizations to mentor and work with the proposed program’s students before and after graduation. Ronald Roberts the Managing Partner for Finn Partners, which is the fourth largest independent marketing communications agency in the world and has its third-largest office in Nashville, wrote:

“Finn is a huge proponent of working with universities to provide internship opportunities for students. We believe everyone benefits from internships – the students, the university and Finn. We have hired many MTSU students as interns and plan to continue doing so. A student with a master’s degree in digital media would be a great fit. I know that other companies/agencies in the Middle Tennessee area (as well as outside the area) look to local universities for employees. We also have members of our agency, including myself, that serve as mentors for students.”

Appendix A includes letters of support from the following local, regional, national, and international businesses and organizations:

- Ronald Roberts, Managing Partner, Finn Partners
- Jaron Jackson, Design Director, Digital Product Design at Nike
- Jessica Nerad, People Team Director, redpepper
- James Evans, Communications Director, Rutherford County Schools
- D'Anelle Desire, Communications Director, Tennessee Justice Center

- Kristen Swann, Vice President of Collective Impact and Strategic Initiatives, United Way of Rutherford and Cannon Counties
- Emily Brown, Managing Editor, Audience and Platforms, USA Today

#### **Section IV: Enrollment and Graduation Projections**

MTSU's recent adoption of 7-week course scheduling will allow the proposed M.S. in Digital Media to structure the proposed 30-credit-hour program so that students can complete it in a single calendar year. Each fall and spring semester, each student will be encouraged to enroll in 12 hours' worth of coursework, most likely two seven-week A1-term courses, and two more seven-week A2-term courses. Students will then be asked to finish their course work by enrolling in six hours of summer coursework. All courses will be three-credit-hour courses, regardless of the term in which they are offered. Thus, students who follow the schedule will complete 12 credit hours in their first regular-term semester, 12 hours in their second regular-term semester, and six hours during a summer semester. Unlike the 36-hour M.S. in Media Communication, the proposed program will not require a thesis or a professional project.

Given this accelerated schedule, each academic year's number of graduates will equal its number of incoming students, minus any students who continue their studies into the next academic year or discontinue their enrollment in the program. The program projects eight incoming students for the first year, which is 60 percent of the average number of new students who have enrolled in the M.S. Media Communication each year during the past 9 years. Enrollment is expected to climb at a rate of one additional student per year through the 2028-2029 academic year, and we expect one student per year to require at least some of the following academic year in order to graduate.

Given these assumptions, the projected numbers of incoming, continuing, enrolled, and graduating students for each of the program's first five years are as follows:

<b>Projected Enrollments and Graduates</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Projected Total Fall Enrollment</b>	<b>Projected Attrition</b>	<b>Projected Graduates</b>
1	2024-2025	8 new	1	7
2	2025-2026	9 new (1 cont)	1	9
3	2026-2027	10 new (1 cont)	1	10
4	2027-2028	11 new (1 cont)	1	11
5	2028-2029	12 new (1 cont)	1	12

#### **Section V: Projected Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program**

Expected projected costs necessary to deliver the proposed program (one-time and recurring expenditures) are discussed below. These costs are reflected in the [THEC Financial Projections Form](#) in Appendix B.



**Faculty & Instructional Staff**

The program would require no new faculty lines to administer the courses needed to serve the number of projected students. However, enrollments greater than those projected would require decisions about whether to cap enrollment at manageable levels or add one or more lines for tenure-track faculty capable of meeting graduate faculty teaching requirements.

**Non-Instructional Staff**

We are requesting no additional non-instructional staff. The administrative assistant for the in-person M.S. in Media and Communication will also help administer this program.

**Graduate Assistants**

Given the fully online nature of this program, and the likelihood that most of its students will already be working at least part-time, we anticipate hiring no graduate teaching assistants.

**Accreditation**

Although this program will not be accredited, it will undergo an external program review under the [THEC and Tennessee Conference of Graduate Schools guidelines](#) every seven years, beginning in Year 4 of this program. Costs associated with this review are limited to approximately \$1,300 to cover the travel, lodging, per diem, and an honorarium. It is anticipated that the first review will happen in year four.

**Consultants**

No costs associated with consultants.

**Equipment**

No new equipment needs to be purchased for this program. The School of Journalism and Strategic media already supplies all equipment needed to facilitate online instruction and learning.

**Information technology**

There are no new information technology costs associated with this program. Everything needed for the program, including D2L and media-related software, are already covered under MTSU licenses.

**Library resources**

This program will require no new spending on library resources. The James E. Walker Library currently provides the scholarly resources, along with the expertise of the librarians and staff, necessary to support the proposed Digital Media master's degree. The library provides access to the top 10 communication journals ranked by Google Scholar's h5-index, a standard used by academics to assess journal quality.

Furthermore, the Walker Library collection has extensive resources available online with remote access. This includes 54,188 electronically available journals, 223,351 online government documents, and 1,303,718 e-books. The library also offers 121,437 streaming videos and 2,070 audio files. Students have access to more than 525 online databases.

### Marketing

Marketing costs associated with the program will be \$10,000 in the first year of the program, and \$1,000 each additional year. As this Digital Media master's program will provide an in-demand degree, delivered online, a wider-ranging marketing campaign will attract students beyond the Middle Tennessee area. The feasibility study conducted for this proposed degree demonstrated interest in this degree outside of the Middle Tennessee region. Among respondents to the student and alumni questionnaire, interest averaged slightly higher (80 out of 100) among people living outside of Middle Tennessee than among people living inside of Middle Tennessee (77 out of 100). The difference was not statistically significant, but that merely means that interest in the proposed degree was high both in Middle Tennessee and elsewhere. This marketing budget will allow for the degree program to advertise to a wider audience through local and regional search engine optimization (SEO), Google ads, targeted social media advertising, and email marketing.

### Facilities

No new facilities will be required for this master's degree. Faculty and administration are already supported in existing buildings, and students will be online.

### Travel

No new travel expenses are expected for this program. Faculty-related travel is already covered through current funding.

### Other resources

None.

## Section VI: Projected Revenues for the Proposed Program

### Tuition

Using the 2022/2023 Academic Year figures for in-state graduate tuition and program service fees<sup>8</sup> as a guide, we estimate the program's eight initial enrollees will produce \$128,997 in revenue during its first year.

With an incoming class that grows by one each year and one continuing student who takes one three-hour course, the program should generate steadily rising revenues, as detailed below.

Projected Enrollment Revenue by Academic Year					
Year	AY 24/25	AY 25/26	AY 26/27	AY 27/28	AY 28/29
<b>Incoming</b>	\$ 128,997	\$ 145,347	\$ 161,697	\$ 178,047	\$ 194,397
<b>Continuing (1 student/3 hours)</b>	\$ -	\$ 1,803	\$ 1,803	\$ 1,803	\$ 1,803
<b>Total</b>	\$ 128,997	\$ 147,150	\$ 163,500	\$ 179,850	\$ 196,200

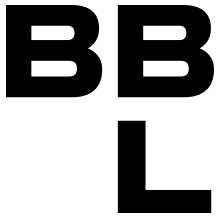
<sup>8</sup> *Graduate Registration and Other Fees*. Downloaded 25 April 2023 from [https://www.mtsu.edu/tuition/forms/22-23\\_Graduate.pdf](https://www.mtsu.edu/tuition/forms/22-23_Graduate.pdf).

**Grants**

We anticipate no revenue from grants.

**Other**

We anticipate no other revenue sources.



**BIG BLACK LETTERS**  
3802 CROUCH DRIVE  
NASHVILLE, TN 37207

BRANDING × TYPE DESIGN × DIGITAL PRODUCT DESIGN

**APR 30 2023**

Robert Smith, Interim Executive Director  
TN Higher Education Commission  
312 Rosa Parks Ave, 9th Floor  
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Robert Smith,

I am excited to endorse the proposed fully online Master's of Science in Digital Media program from the School of Journalism and Strategic Media at MTSU. As a Digital Design Director at Nike, I work on our Digital Marketing Platform. Looking back on my career journey, I wish I had the opportunity to participate in a program like this. However, I understand that the industry grew more quickly than educational programs could be developed.

This program would provide communication professionals with valuable and relevant knowledge in social media, digital analytics, communication technologies, data journalism, media theory, and applied research methods. It helps meet the growing needs of employers in the Middle Tennessee, statewide, and national higher education markets.

Digital Media jobs now have more remote and hybrid opportunities, allowing professionals have more flexibility to pursue higher education. Careers in digital media not only require on-the-job experience but also benefit from the rigor of master's programs, which improve professionals' problem-solving skills and ability to think ahead.

I am confident that many of my colleagues who have worked in advertising agencies would be excited about the flexibility and comprehensiveness of this program, making it the perfect choice for anyone looking to expand their knowledge and skills in the field of digital media.

While I cannot make any promises in terms of internship or job opportunities on behalf of my current company/role, I am open to reviewing course content as well as providing relevant job openings that I come across. I am excited to see the ways in which this program will benefit the communication industry as a whole.

Sincerely,

Jaron Jackson



PARTNERS

April 27, 2023

Robert Smith  
Interim Executive Director  
TN Higher Education Commission

Mr. Smith:

Hello. I am Ronald Roberts, Managing Partner for Finn Partners – the fourth largest independent marketing communications agency in the world. Finn’s headquarters are in New York, and I lead our Nashville Office (the third largest office in the agency). This letter is regarding approval of the fully online Master of Science in Digital Media program being proposed by the School of Journalism and Strategic Media at Middle Tennessee State University.

I have been in the communications industry for almost 40 years and have seen a lot of change. One of the most recent and impactful is the growth of digital media across the communications landscape. Digital media is not just a “specialty” or “niche” skill. Digital media expertise is a necessity in developing comprehensive and successful communications programs.

Our office provides PR, advertising, integrated marketing (digital and creative), and media (placement and buying) support for our clients – clients that include Bridgestone, Jack Daniel’s Vanderbilt University Medical Center, and Mazda. Our integrated marketing division is our fastest growing. More and more clients recognize the need and the challenge of either remaining relevant, building their brand, or generating awareness. We are constantly looking for talented practitioners in the digital field that are ready to hit the ground running. From a hiring standpoint, our biggest challenge is finding people with those skills. This proposed program will be beneficial to our agencies and others looking for talent.

Finn is a huge proponent of working with universities to provide internship opportunities for students. We believe everyone benefits from internships – the students, the university and Finn. We have hired many MTSU students as interns and plan to continue doing so. A student with a master’s degree in digital media would be a great fit. I know that other companies/agencies in the Middle Tennessee area (as well as outside the area) look to local universities for employees.

We also have members of our agency, including myself, that serve as mentors for students. The combination of faculty expertise and industry knowledge provides students with a great foundation as they prepare for their careers.

I fully support the School of Journalism and Strategic Media proposal and hope you do the same. Please let me know if you have any questions or need any additional information.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ronald Roberts".

Ronald Roberts  
Managing Partner, Finn Partners



Emily Brown  
Managing Editor, Audience and Platforms  
USA TODAY

April 21, 2023

Dear Robert Smith, Interim Executive Director  
TN Higher Education Commission,

I'm writing in support of a master's degree program for Digital Media at MTSU. In my career as a journalist, and specifically now as Managing Editor for Audience and Platforms at USA TODAY, I can testify to the importance of understanding social media best practices, search engine optimization, audience metrics, digital data collection and analysis, website creation and management and mobile-optimized content creation. Paired with the fundamentals of strong journalism, these skills will make for a well-rounded and exciting job candidate.

The media industry has changed dramatically in the last 20 years and will only continue to evolve. A master's degree in Digital Media from MTSU can fill in the knowledge gaps in this fast-moving industry. We need smart thinkers studying and bringing attention to the problems and solutions that can keep media and journalism thriving and safe from the harm of disinformation. Higher education and the program designed for MTSU is a perfect incubator for those solutions.

A job candidate with the skills outlined in the MTSU program would be incredibly attractive to me as a hiring manager. Often, these skills are learned on the job, which takes an incredible amount of time while also managing other responsibilities. A job candidate walking in with this level of knowledge would benefit my team and should land them opportunities for advancement and higher salary.

Sincerely,

Emily Brown  
Managing Editor, Audience and Platforms



Robert Smith, Interim Executive Director  
TN Higher Education Commission  
Nashville, TN 37243

May 5, 2023

Executive Director Robert Smith,

As someone who is responsible for hiring the future of this industry, I couldn't resist sharing my excitement for the proposed master's degree in Digital Media at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU). This degree is a game-changer for aspiring professionals in the advertising industry, and I'm here to spill the tea on why it's a must-have for our industry.

The digital landscape is evolving fast. To navigate this wild ride, we need experts in Digital Media now. MTSU's master's degree program could do just that, equipping students with practical skills and hands-on experience that will impress any Talent or HR team. This degree would unlock the mysteries of digital marketing strategies, content creation, data analysis, and all things tech-tastic. It will prepare graduates to be armed for these very sought roles.

This degree isn't just about individuals; it's about boosting the entire industry. The advertising/marketing world is craving digital media mavens. MTSU's program will supply the industry with a fresh batch of individuals who can keep up with the ever-changing digital dance, on which some ad agencies have their eyes expressly set. These graduates will swoop in, armed with specialized knowledge, practical experience, and the power to make strategy dreams come true.

To wrap this up with a pretty little bow, the proposed master's degree in Digital Media from MTSU is a golden ticket. It's an opportunity for a digital wonderland where dreams come true, and success is just a click away. As the HR Director, I wholeheartedly endorse this degree and urge you to seize this chance. Thank you for your time.

Cheers!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica Nerad".

Jessica Nerad, PHR  
People Team Director



**Dr. James Sullivan**  
Director of Schools

## **Rutherford County Board of Education**

2240 Southpark Drive, Murfreesboro, TN 37128 Phone: 615.893.5812 [www.rcschools.net](http://www.rcschools.net)

*April 21, 2023*

Robert Smith, Interim Executive Director  
Tennessee Higher Education Commission  
312 Rosa Parks Avenue, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Mr. Smith,

About 18 months ago, we were searching for a communications specialist to serve in my department at Rutherford County Schools.

We interviewed several fine applicants, and while many of them had pieces of the skills needed for the job, no one contained all of them. Fortunately, we were eventually able to find a great candidate, but the situation illustrated the desperate need for a new type of advanced media training in education.

So when Dr. Ken Blake with the School of Journalism and Strategic Media at Middle Tennessee State University solicited a letter of support from me for the proposed Master's of Science in Digital Media, I enthusiastically agreed to do so.

This type of advanced degree will help merge the skills of those with a background in public relations, advertising, journalism, marketing, social media and other related fields. Modern journalists must wield skills from all of these professions in order to operate in a society where multiple online and digital mediums are used to absorb, communicate, and interact with information.

As the communications director for Rutherford County Schools — the fourth largest school district in Tennessee — I would be very interested in interviewing graduates of such a program, and I would love to serve in an advisory capacity to review course content and methodology.

If I can help provide any additional information or assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



James Evans, Communications Director  
Rutherford County Schools

***"Investing in Our Students for Tomorrow's Possibilities"***





P.O. Box 100187, Nashville, TN 37224

Phone: (615)255-0331 Fax: (615)255-0354

e-mail: [info@tnjustice.org](mailto:info@tnjustice.org) website: [www.tnjustice.org](http://www.tnjustice.org)

May 3, 2023

To Whom It May Concern,

As the Communications Director at TJC, I am writing to express my full support of the new Master's Degree in Digital Media at Middle Tennessee State University. With my position and knowledge of the industry, I understand the importance and value of a this program, especially in today's digital age.

As technology continues to rapidly advance, the need for well-educated digital media professionals is on the rise. I believe that this new degree program at MTSU can help to fill that gap by providing students with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in the industry. I understand this digital media program to be a deeper dive into specialized areas like social media marketing, video production, web design, and more. With that, I believe that MTSU will produce graduates who are ready to make an immediate and valuable contribution to the media industry.

At TJC, we are always interested in hiring talented individuals with advanced degrees in Digital Media and a master's degree in this field would provide candidates with a competitive edge in the job market. We are confident that graduates of MTSU's Master's in Digital Media program will have the expertise we are looking for in our team members.

I fully support the new Master's Degree in Digital Media at MTSU and would encourage individuals interested in pursuing a career in digital media to consider this program.

Sincerely,

D'Anelle Desire

Communications Director

Tennessee Justice Center

Robert Smith, Interim Executive Director  
TN Higher Education Commission  
312 Rosa Parks Ave, 9th Floor  
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Mr. Smith,

I am writing in support of the fully online Master's in Digital Media at the MTSU School of Journalism and Strategic Media.

Tentatively planned for a Fall 2024 launch, the 30-hour, fully online master's program would allow students to update and expand their expertise in social media, digital analytics, communication technologies, data journalism, media theory, applied research methods, and more. Offered alongside the in-person Master of Science in Media Communication, the proposed program would attract people interested in public relations, advertising, journalism and related fields and who need the flexibility of online coursework.

As a graduate of MTSU's Master of Science in Media Communication, I fully support this proposed program as a valuable opportunity for any communication professional.

United Way of Rutherford and Cannon Counties is willing to offer internship and mentor opportunities to students, pass along job opportunities in our organization and our vast network of local nonprofits, and review course content and suggest improvements when needed.

We are happy to support this new program in any way that we can, and look forward to MTSU offering valuable education opportunities in our community.

Sincerely,



Kristen Swann  
Vice President of Collective Impact and Strategic Initiatives  
United Way of Rutherford and Cannon Counties



**United Way of Rutherford  
& Cannon Counties**

**P.O. Box 330056  
Murfreesboro, TN 37133**

**P: 615-893-7303  
F: 615-849-5909**

**[yourlocaluw.org](http://yourlocaluw.org)**

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## Financial Projections Form

**Institution** \_\_\_\_\_

**Program Name** \_\_\_\_\_

### Projected One-Time Expenditures

Category	Planning	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Faculty & Instructional						
Non-Instructional Staff						
Graduate Assistants						
Accreditation						
Consultants						
Equipment						
Information Technology						
Library resources						
Marketing		\$10,000				
Facilities						
Travel						
Other						
<b>Total One-Time</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>

### Projected Recurring Expenditures

Category	Planning	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Faculty & Instructional						
Non-Instructional Staff						
Graduate Assistants						
Accreditation					\$1,300	
Consultants						
Equipment						
Information Technology						
Library						
Marketing		\$10,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000
Facilities						
Travel						
Other						
<b>Total Recurring</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$1,000</b>	<b>\$1,000</b>	<b>\$2,300</b>	<b>\$1,000</b>
<b>Grand Total (One-Time</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>	<b>\$1,000</b>	<b>\$1,000</b>	<b>\$2,300</b>	<b>\$1,000</b>

### Projected Revenue

Category	Planning	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Tuition		\$128,997	\$147,150	\$163,500	\$179,850	\$196,200
Grants		\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Other		\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$128,997</b>	<b>\$147,150</b>	<b>\$163,500</b>	<b>\$179,850</b>	<b>\$196,200</b>