



Letter of Notification (LON)

Policy A1.0 New Academic Programs: Approval Process

Institution:	Tennessee Technological University
Proposed Academic Program:	Child Life, Master of Science (MS)
Proposed Implementation Date:	Fall 2025
CIP Code and Title:	19.0799 (Human Development, Family Studies, and Related Services, Other.)
CIP Code Definition:	Any instructional program in human development, family studies, and related services not listed above.
LON Submission Date:	February 9, 2024
Posted Date on THEC Website:	February 12, 2024
Public Comment Period:	February 12 – February 27, 2024

Letter of Notification Checklist

THEC Academic Policy 1.0 (Section 1.0.6A) Letter of Notification Requirements:

- ✓ Letter of Support from the President/Chancellor signifying institutional governing board or system office support for development;
- ✓ Program overview;
- ✓ Background information;
- ✓ Feasibility Study;
- ✓ Enrollment and graduation projections;
- ✓ Projected costs to deliver the proposed program;
- ✓ Projected revenues for the proposed program;
- ✓ Letters of support.

Tennessee Tech Internal Cover Form for Letters of Notification

Please refer to the TTU Office of the Provost website for New Programs and Program Modifications before developing a proposal. <https://www.tnitech.edu/provost/new-programs>.

Name of New Academic Program and Degree Designation:

MS in Child Life

Proposed Implementation Date: Fall 2025

Information Contact: Melinda Anderson / 931.372.3378
Printed Name Telephone

APPROVED: Melinda Anderson / 11-6-23
Department Chairperson's Signature Date

APPROVED: [Signature] / 11/6/23
College Dean's Signature Date

APPROVED: [Signature] / Feb 7, 2024
Provost's Signature Date

Tennessee Tech Board of Trustees Approval: N/A
Date



Office of the President

TENNESSEE TECH

February 9, 2024

Steven Gentile
Executive Director
Tennessee Higher Education Commission
312 Rosa Parks Ave, 9th Floor
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Executive Director Gentile:

In accordance with THEC policy A 1.0 New Academic programs: Approval Process, Tennessee Tech University (TTU) submits a letter of notification (LON) for a new program, Master of Science in Child Life, in the School of Human Ecology in the College of Agriculture & Human Ecology. This master's degree is a practitioner's program designed to provide advanced content knowledge in child life clinical practice, psychosocial care of children and families, and evidence-based practice to different groups.

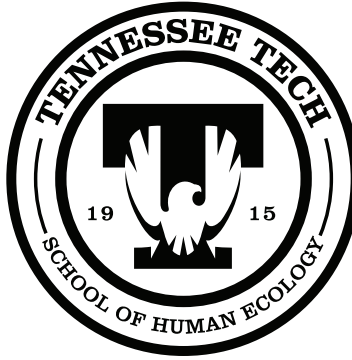
One primary group includes credentialed CCLS professionals seeking a graduate degree for employment enhancement. Another set of individuals comprises those with bachelor's preparation seeking academic training for child life professional certification eligibility. Additionally, undergraduate human development and family science students seeking academic preparation for professional child life certification eligibility form another distinct group.

The need for and feasibility of this proposed program are evident from recent literature on the profession, expressed interest from current and past students, support from existing child life programs across the U.S., and multiple enthusiastic letters of support from child life leaders. The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) state supply and demand report identified health sciences and human services as in-demand occupations and aligned academic programs. The proposed Master of Science in Child Life will create opportunities for Tennessee Tech to meet workforce demand by educating students to care for the psychosocial needs of children, adults, and their families in healthcare.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Philip B. Oldham
President



Letter of Notification (LON)

Overview

Program Information

Academic Institution:	Tennessee Technological University School of Human Ecology
Academic Program Name:	Child Life
Degree Designation:	Master of Science
Proposed CIP Code, Title, and Definition:	19.0799 Human Development, Family Studies, and Related Services, Other Any instructional program in human development, family studies, and related services not listed above.
Academic Program Liaison:	Dr. Melinda Anderson, RDN, LDN Director, School of Human Ecology manderson@tntech.edu (931) 372- 3378
Proposed Implementation Date:	Fall 2025
Estimated Timeline:	February 9, 2024 LON submitted NAPP submission - April 2024 External review- June-July 2024 THEC Action-January 2025 Enroll students fall semester August 2025

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Tennessee Technological University School of Human Ecology
Child Life Master's Degree Letter of Notification

Section II: Background

Background Concerning Academic Program Development

The proposal for an online master's degree program in Child Life has been a goal and topic of discussion for the School of Human Ecology faculty for some time. Current circumstances at Tennessee Technological University (TN Tech) indicate this is the optimal time to initiate a Master of Science Degree in Child Life. TN Tech is focused on developing academic programs in the health and human sciences disciplines and growing the university's online academic program presence. The Master of Science in Child Life aligns with and will accomplish these goals for Tennessee Tech.

Certified Child Life Specialists (CCLS), typically employed in pediatric healthcare, provide psychosocial interventions to prevent harmful impacts from stress and promote optimal development of children and families ([Romito, et al., 2021](#)). The child life profession adds value to pediatric healthcare environments positively contributing to patient experiences ([Boles et al., 2020](#)). Child life, a growing profession, attracts students interested in working with children and families in healthcare settings. However, COVID-19 disrupted the student-to-professional pathway eliminating students' clinical experiences including child life practicums and internships for a time. Thus, currently there is a CCLS staffing crisis with child life positions going unfilled ([Heering, 2022](#)). Recent research indicated that in 2020 clinical internships were offered to graduate students significantly more than undergraduate students, which contrasted with 2015 and 2017 when undergraduates were significantly more likely to be offered internship positions over graduate students ([Sisk et al., 2023](#)). This signals that it is time to initiate a master's degree to remain relevant in the changing Child Life profession and best prepare students for the workforce.

Healthcare professions are highly competitive with much demand from students pursuing healthcare careers including child life. Education of medical team and allied health professionals have established the precedented requirement for graduate degrees for multidisciplinary healthcare team members including Licensed Clinical Social Workers, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Speech Pathologists, Dietitians, Nurse Practitioners, Physician Assistants, and Medical Doctors. Students seeking to become Certified Child Life Specialists should hold an equivalent graduate degree to fellow multidisciplinary healthcare team members to be seen as credible peers. Tennessee Tech's School of Human Ecology Child Life faculty seek to provide the most current, relevant educational opportunities for students' success.

Purpose and Nature of Academic Program

Tennessee Tech has been a leader in the state for its undergraduate Child Life program, which was the first in the state when initiated in 2011 and the inclusion of a full-time CCLS faculty member continues to be a uniqueness. The undergraduate program was also one of the first five undergraduate Child Life programs to receive Association of Child Life Professionals' (ACLP) Academic Program Endorsement in 2019. Tennessee Tech's commitment to Child Life through a

master's degree in Child Life will continue this legacy of leadership, which contributes to the psychosocial well-being of children and their families in the state and beyond.

Description. The Master of Science in Child Life degree program is designed for candidates pursuing careers applying evidence-based research knowledge to clinical child life practice for positive patient outcomes and patient experiences. This master's degree is a practitioner's degree to provide advanced content knowledge in child life clinical practice, psychosocial care of children and families, and evidence-based practice to credentialed CCLS professionals seeking a graduate degree for employment enhancement, bachelor's prepared individuals seeking child life academic preparation for child life professional certification eligibility, and undergraduate human development and family science students seeking child life academic preparation for professional child life certification eligibility. The program is grounded in developmental theory, family science, and stress and coping for in-depth understanding of children and families. The master's degree initiation for this program is reasonable, appropriate, fiscally responsible, and justifiable. The curriculum emphasizes students' mastery of theoretical frameworks and practical application of knowledge to clinical child life practice for the benefit of children and families facing challenging healthcare experiences.

Being fully online, this graduate program will utilize Tennessee Tech's leading instructional technologies while offering students best practices of academic support, faculty advising and mentoring to foster student success. Ideally, full-time students will progress through the program in cohorts with most courses taken together, yet being mindful of various student needs, opportunities will be made for students to adjust graduation timelines to facilitate school/work/life balance as they pursue a graduate degree. Learning opportunities in courses will provide students the ability to develop rapport and promote relationship building for peer connection and potential social support. Collaborative and team-based learning opportunities will be incorporated among students to simulate healthcare multidisciplinary teamwork required in the child life profession.

The degree will contain a total of 36 credit hours of graduate courses. The coursework will be based upon Child Life Certification Commission's Certification Eligibility Coursework Requirements and incorporate the the [Child Life Competencies](#). Benchmark data regarding credit hours were collected from the Association of Child Life Professionals Endorsed Graduate Child Life Academic Programs with master's degree credit hour requirements ranging from 31 to 50 credit hours. The curriculum will be purposefully sequenced to scaffold student learning, and the online program will typically take two years to complete when enrolled full-time.

Target Audience. The target audience is both practicing Certified Child Life Specialists looking to remain competitive in their profession by further developing their clinical knowledge and skills including research application to practice, as well as other professionals and undergraduate students wanting to pursue the Certified Child Life Specialist credential by earning a graduate degree.

There are three target audiences for the online Child Life master's degree:

- School of Human Ecology Human Development and Family Science undergraduates seeking child life academic preparation for Child Life Professional Certification Eligibility.
- Bachelor's prepared individuals seeking child life academic preparation for Child Life Professional Certification Eligibility.
- Bachelor's prepared Certified Child Life Specialists seeking to advance their academic education to enhance their professional clinical practice.

Part of the rationale for initiating the Child Life MS Degree stems from indications in the child life market that graduate students are becoming preferred in the competitive healthcare internship, which indicates it is in students' best interests to pursue a graduate child life degree. TN Tech's School of Human Ecology offers the Human Development and Family Science concentration, which will provide undergraduate students interested in child life the ability to gain a foundational undergraduate degree. This will provide solid academic preparation for students interested in pursuing the healthcare specialization of Child Life in the Master's Degree.

In looking at the email inquiries received regarding the child life concentration, it is anticipated that this program will receive applicants possessing a variety of undergraduate degrees. Individuals with degrees in education, psychology, child/human development, and health sciences could build on their undergraduate education to specialize in Child Life as students in this master's program.

Certified Child Life Specialists desiring a graduate degree will expand their knowledge to include research and evidence-based practice and further understand theoretical frameworks of psychosocial care. In healthcare institutions, a master's degree is often required for employees seeking to move into leadership positions. By virtue of enrolling in this master's program, students are investing in their future career possibilities as leaders.

Delivery Method. The Child Life master's degree coursework will be delivered via a 100% online format to provide students in Tennessee, the region, and beyond a high-quality graduate program conveniently through online courses.

Alignment with State Master Plan and Institutional Mission

State Master Plan. The Tennessee Higher Education Master Plan 2015-2025 (2020 update) includes a framework with three components: student success, prosperity for Tennessee's families, and the state's workforce. The outcomes desired from this framework are positive economic and societal impacts. The narrative will include discussion of each component related to the proposed Master of Science in Child Life.

Student Success.

Academic Readiness. The admission process for this proposed program would include evidence of a relevant bachelor's degree to provide foundational knowledge that can be

expanded upon with a graduate degree and an undergraduate GPA of 3.0 minimum is required on a 4.0 scale. A personal statement essay application requirement will provide information regarding the applicant's professional goals, motivation for pursuing a master's degree, current skill set, and preparation for a graduate program. A graduate committee interview via an online platform will provide further information regarding the applicant's readiness. These responses and interactions should provide the information necessary to assess a student's readiness for the graduate program.

Access to Higher Education. Being a 100% online program provides access to the proposed master's degree for those seeking to advance their education. This includes providing access to students living in the 15 distressed counties and access to students who live beyond the Upper Cumberland region.

Completion. There are several efforts to assist master's degree program students reach their goal of earning a graduate degree. Completion of the degree will include intrusive advising with the CCLS faculty member directing the graduate program serving as the academic advisor to all enrolled students. This relationship will begin upon admission to develop rapport and support. Responsibilities in this academic advising role will include course schedule and planning, as well as assessment of students' academic progress, workload management, and overall student well-being. Cohorting will be implemented to allow students to begin relationship building with each other for peer support, which helps them learn and engage with each other. Prescribed scheduling will primarily be used each semester when students are full-time, they will progress through courses as cohorts with peers. Targeted interventions of mandatory semester advisement meetings, peer discussion assignments and collaborative learning projects will facilitate students' connections with each other. Opportunities for faculty and peer mentoring will also be provided as needed.

Family Prosperity.

Affordability. [Tennessee Tech Rankings](#). Tennessee Tech is identified by MONEY Magazine as the number one public university in Tennessee in "Best Colleges for Your Money" and ranks number three overall among private and public universities. News and World Report ranked the university as number 153 in Social Mobility and found that graduates leave with the least debt of all public universities in Tennessee. PayScale found that TN Tech provides student with the highest return on investment for any public university in the state. TN Tech graduates have the highest early career salary of any public university in Tennessee. SmartAsset ranked TN Tech as in its top public best value universities in Tennessee. Students pursuing the proposed graduate degree will have access to financial aid.

Transparency. Upon approval of this proposed program, various data will be collected regarding student and program outcomes including enrollment and completion. Data reporting will be disseminated at various levels.

Outreach to Adults. The proposed master's degree being a 100% online graduate program provides the greatest outreach to adults within the state, region, and even nationally. Graduating with a master's degree provides access to more job opportunities and increased salaries. The [U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics](#) reports that the higher educational attainment equates to higher wages and lower rates of unemployment.

The Future Workforce.

Future of Work. [TN Higher Education Commission's \(THEC\) State Supply and Demand Report](#) identified Health Sciences and Human Services as In-demand Occupations and Aligned Academic Programs. The Health Science cluster indicates that "healthcare and life sciences is a TNECD target industry. Investment in our universities and world-class research facilities associated with this sector will compliment and enable the development of a capable workforce." (p. 46). The Master of Science Degree in Child Life fits well within these clusters and provides students research education to promote critical inquiry in their professions.

[THEC Workforce Investment Premium \(2020\)](#) was created to impact the outcomes-based funding formula and provides greater outcome points for high-needs fields that "creates a very real alignment between workforce demand, academic supply, and Tennessee higher education funding" (p. 51). The Master of Science in Child Life creates opportunities for Tennessee Tech to meet workforce demand by educating students to care for the psychosocial needs of children and their families in healthcare. Healthcare encounters are stressful experiences for children and adults, this is an important area for graduates with the Master of Science in Child Life to make a significant impact on positive patient outcomes and patient experiences in healthcare and fill an unmet need. The Master of Science graduate program will equip students to meet the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional well-being of children and families in stressful healthcare experiences.

CTE and Work-Based Learning. While the proposed Masters Degree in Child Life coursework is 100% online, students will have an optional Experiential Learning track they may complete during the summers if they choose, which will provide students the ability to determine appropriate field experiences to inform their learning as either a pre-internship experience or practicum summer year one and a child life clinical internship if received after applying to available child life clinical programs via the competitive external process.

Academic Program Approval. This LON is the initial phase of the process for reviewing and approving new academic programs in the state of Tennessee. This program coincides with the State Master Plan's goal to encourage alignment among academic programs and industries for complimentary collaborations to benefit Tennessee's economy. This master's program is focused on providing the academic coursework and degree requirements for students to become Child Life Certification Eligible.

Tennessee Tech's Institutional Mission.

[Tennessee Tech University's Mission](#) is to create, advance, and apply knowledge to expand opportunity and economic competitiveness while delivering enduring education, impactful research, and collaborative service. The proposed Master of Science Degree in Child Life aligns with the university's mission to create knowledge for students in the graduate program and help them apply this knowledge to improving the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities. Earning a graduate degree expands the students' opportunities to be successful in the competitive healthcare industry of Child Life and allows graduates improved economic competitiveness. The Master of Science Degree in Child Life will provide students an education that will endure throughout their career, provide them with research knowledge to rely on evidence-based practice consistent within healthcare roles, and provide collaborative opportunities focused on children and families in healthcare.

[Tennessee Tech University's Vision](#) is to achieve national prominence and impact through engaged students, dedicated faculty, and career-ready graduates known for their creativity, tenacity, and analytical approach to problem solving. The Master of Science Degree in Child Life aligns with the university's vision to achieve national prominence. The proposed program will be the first of its kind within Tennessee's state universities since the only other master's in child life is offered on campus at Vanderbilt University, a private university with [tuition in 2023 at \\$2169.00 per credit hour](#) totaling \$19,521 per 9 credit hour semester. [Tennessee Tech's graduate tuition](#) for a 9 credit hour semester totals \$5688 for TN residents, which translates to a total of \$22,752 for a 36-hour master's degree. In addition to being financially accessible, the proposed master's degree will provide access to students across the state, region, and beyond being 100% online.

The Master of Science in Child Life supports the university's mission of providing dedicated faculty to engage students in their graduate studies. The School of Human Ecology faculty who will be teaching courses in the graduate program have dedicated themselves to pursuing terminal degrees in their respective disciplines holding Doctor of Philosophy degrees focused on research. These dedicated faculty have taught full-time in the School of Human Ecology for more than 10 years demonstrating a high level of competence in their respective disciplines (Child Life, Dr. Sisk & Trauma Informed Care, Dr. Ramsey).

Engaging students is common practice among the School of Human Ecology faculty who will teach courses in the proposed Master of Science Degree in Child Life. The faculty implement various pedagogically sound teaching methods in both on campus and online learning environments. Student engagement is an important key to student success, which impacts student retention. The School of Human Ecology has an undergraduate student retention rate of 81.8% (2022 data) and the new MS Degree in Community Health and Nutrition's student retention rate is 95% with graduation rate of 100% for the first cohort (May 2023). Expectations

for student engagement, retention, and graduation are high for current programs in the School of Human Ecology and will be evident in the proposed master's degree as well.

The Master of Science in Child Life program is focused on developing graduates known for their creativity, tenacity, and analytical approach to problem solving. Careers in healthcare demand professionals including those in child life to be creative in providing excellent patient care to support patients and contribute to positive patient experiences a metric healthcare institutions are rated by using the [Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems](#). This focus on positively impacting the patients' and families' healthcare experiences is a priority for graduates to be career ready in healthcare. Helping students develop tenacity skills for their work in healthcare will be a common thread throughout the graduate program curricula, because healthcare work is challenging. Students will build confidence in their academic knowledge that will then be applied in their clinical practice to build their competence creating credible professionals. Graduates of the program will be encouraged to self-reflect upon their professional resilience, assess, and find resources to address their mental health needs so they can persist in long-term healthcare careers. Healthcare is a quickly changing industry, which will require graduates of the master's program to flex and adapt with ease. This will require teaching students to develop various analytical skills to approach problems to maximize feasible, evidence-based solutions. The proposed Master's of Science Degree in Child Life will successfully prepare graduates who will positively impact patients' healthcare experiences.

Institutional Capacity to Deliver the Proposed Academic Program

The School of Human Ecology will utilize existing and new campus resources to develop, launch, and support the Master of Science in Child Life. Existing resources include the Volpe Library and Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning. The program will be offered 100% online, and the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning as well as Information Technology Services already support other programs offering online courses.

Recruiting efforts will utilize current resources of enrichment funds located in the School of Human Ecology until the degree becomes financially self-supported. Existing office space is already assigned to the Child Life faculty member.

It is not anticipated that the Master of Science in Child Life would cause lost enrollment to other majors/programs on the TN Tech campus. The School of Human Ecology and the Whitson-Hester School of Nursing currently collaborate on simulations and case study events with child life and nursing undergraduate students. It is expected that these collaborations will continue with the child life graduate degree allowing for expanded opportunities for transdisciplinary healthcare team collaborations.

Anticipated revenue from tuition and fees calculated at in state tuition rates and adjusted for tuition increases are found in the Financial Projections spreadsheet located in Appendix B.

Existing Programs Offered at Public and Private Tennessee Institutions

Program Distinction. The proposed Master of Science Degree in Child Life is distinctive from programs offered by other academic institutions in Tennessee in relation to being the first undergraduate program, employing a full-time Certified Child Life Specialist faculty member to direct the program, and current Association of Child Life Professionals Academic Program Endorsement status. Tennessee Tech, a leader in the state for its undergraduate child life program, was the first state university initiating a child life program of study. The inclusion of a full-time CCLS faculty member continues to be a uniqueness unmatched by other state public academic programs. The undergraduate program being one of the first five undergraduate child life programs to receive Association of Child Life Professional's Academic Program Endorsement in 2019 represents not only leadership in excellence at the state level, but nationally. Tennessee Tech's commitment to child life through the initiation of a Child Life Master's Degree continues the university's leadership to benefit the psychosocial well-being of children and families in the state and beyond.

The Association of Child Life Professional's Academic Directory lists 3 Child Life Academic Programs in Tennessee. https://online.childlife.org/clcssa/rflssareferral.result_page

1. Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, TN
2. University of Memphis, Memphis, TN
3. Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN

Internet search results show these child life academic programs in Tennessee (Table 1).

- All offer on-campus course delivery, none are online.
- Only one, a private institution, offers a master's degree.
- Only Tennessee Tech University and Vanderbilt University employ a full-time faculty member with the Certified Child Life Specialist credential.

Table 1. Child Life Academic Programs in Tennessee

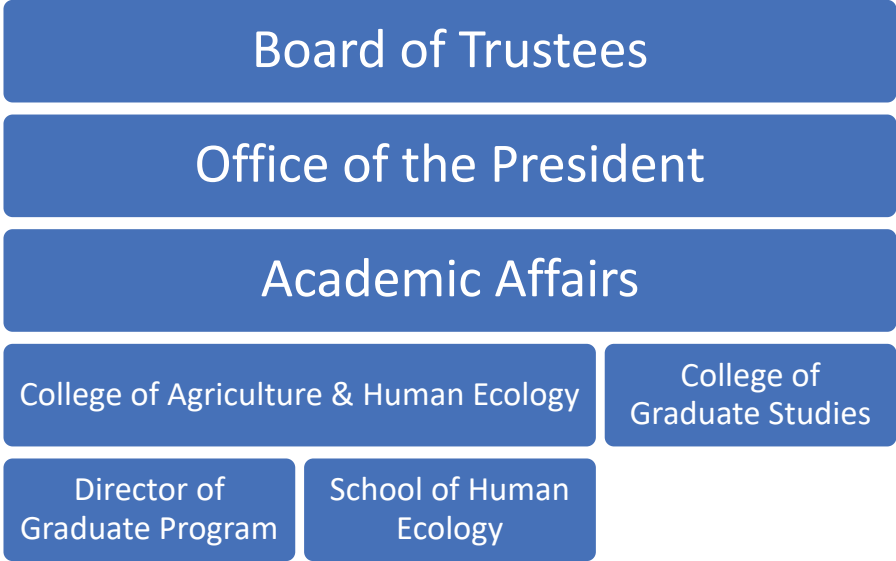
Institution	Public or Private	Degree	Program	CIP	Course Delivery	Certified Child Life Specialist Faculty Full-time	Degrees Awarded		
							2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
East TN State University	Public	Bachelor of Science	Human Services	44.0000	On-campus	None	64	36	46
East TN State University	Public	Bachelor of Science	Child Life		On-campus	None	0	0	0
University of Memphis	Public	Bachelor of Science	Child Development and Family Studies	24.0102	On-campus	None	32	33	37
University of Memphis	Public	Bachelor of Science	Professional Studies, Child Life Specialist		On-campus	None	0	1	0
Lipscomb University	Private	Bachelor of Arts or Science	Family Science, Child Life Specialist Track	unknown	On-campus	None	0	0	3
TN Tech University	Public	Bachelor of Science	Human Ecology	19.0101	On-campus	1 Full-time CCLS Faculty	67	53	52
			Child Life		On-campus		2	4	7
Note: Tech counts of Human Ecology program awards includes those reported in Child Life concentration									
Vanderbilt University	Private	Master of Education	Child Studies, Applied Professional Track	unknown	On-campus	1 Full-time CCLS Faculty	5	16	18
			Child Life		On-campus		3	8	11
Note: Results for Vanderbilt Master's of Education in Child Studies, applied track only									

Accreditation

Tennessee Tech’s child life undergraduate program was one of the first five undergraduate child life programs in the nation to receive Association of Child Life Professional’s Academic Program Endorsement in 2019. There are 12 endorsed child life master’s programs across the nation and one in Canada. A top priority goal for Tennessee Tech’s child life master’s degree program will be to apply for Graduate Academic Endorsement or the current iteration of accreditation from the Association of Child Life Professionals once the program is established.

Administrative Structure

The Child Life Program’s Certified Child Life Specialist faculty member will serve as the program director in collaboration with the Director of the School of Human Ecology who serves as the administrative director of the school.



Section III: Feasibility Study

Feasibility Study: M.S. in Child Life Tennessee Technical University

Introduction

Child life is an emerging academic discipline and growing clinical profession. Academic preparation for those interested in working as child life specialists is varied, but many students and professionals are seeking master's level education. While a master's program with a child life focus exists in the state of Tennessee, it does not offer online instruction. Location of academic institutions is a barrier for many who wish to pursue master's degrees, as is flexibility in schedule for those who are already working in clinical roles. The undergraduate child life program at Tennessee Technological University (TTU) is endorsed by the Association of Child Life Professionals (ACLP), demonstrating the high quality and rigor of the curriculum and pedagogy offered at this institution.

Child life academic programs are important for the ongoing growth of the child life profession. Support from faculty who have the Certified Child Life Specialist (CCLS) credential is crucial for navigating entry to the profession and for professional development. This feasibility study examined multiple sources of data to explore the potential impact of the proposed online master's degree program in the School of Human Ecology at TTU.

Student interest

Survey overview

A survey was distributed to current students and alumni of the child life undergraduate program at TTU. The purpose of this survey was to determine potential interest in an online master's program in child life at TTU. The results from the survey demonstrate the program's potential among a sample of students familiar with TTU.

Survey methods

Two electronic surveys were created using Qualtrics. The first survey targeted current undergraduate child life students, and the second survey targeted recent graduates (i.e., graduated within the past 5 years) of the undergraduate child life program. An email was sent to these groups on September 8, 2023 with distinct links to each survey by student status. Responses for both surveys were collected through September 15, 2023.

Both surveys included questions regarding potential interest in an online master's program in child life at TTU. Current students were asked questions regarding their motivation to enroll at TTU, their feelings about obtaining child life clinical internships, and their perceptions on the role of master's level education for reaching child life career goals. Alumni were also asked questions regarding their motivation to enroll at TTU, their current professional affiliations, and their perceptions on the role of master's level education for reaching child life career goals. Both surveys provided opportunities for respondents to include comments to elaborate on their answers.

Sample

The undergraduate child life program is in the School of Human Ecology at TTU. Current and former students of the program were recruited to participate in the current study. Of the

29 current undergraduate students in child life at TTU, 11 responded to the survey (37.9% response rate). A representative sample of 11 recent alumni from the undergrad child life program at TTU were contacted, and 7 responded to the survey (63.6% response rate).

Results

Current students. Eleven current students in the undergraduate child life program at TTU participated in this study. The total sample included representation from all undergraduate classifications, ranging from freshmen to seniors. A majority of the sample chose to attend TTU due to the availability of a degree program in child life. When asked whether they would be interested in an online master's degree program in child life at TTU, most participants (72.7%) reported being either potentially or definitely interested. See Table 1 for more information.

The current students who participated in the study offered more insights through open-ended feedback. For instance, when asked about their motivation to enroll at TTU, students commonly reported that the ACLP endorsement of the program at TTU and the location of the program were important to them. When commenting on the potential availability of an online master's degree program at TTU, one respondent said, "it would be much more convenient to the academic process of anyone pursuing a child life degree." The online emphasis stood out to other interested participants as well, with another student noting that the program would, "give me the flexibility to work and pursue a MS" simultaneously.

Most current students are very or extremely concerned about not obtaining a child life clinical internship prior to graduation from the undergraduate child life program. However, some students report that they would find a master's degree in child life helpful to achieving their career goals. As one student said, it would "advance my knowledge on the subject of child life and make me more qualified." Another student echoed this sentiment by sharing that, "it would set me above others and provide more opportunities." Master's level educational opportunities are important to child life emerging professionals.

Alumni. Seven alumni who recently graduated from the undergraduate child life program between 2020 and 2023 responded to the survey. Majority of alumni (71.4%) reported that their reason for enrolling at TTU was because the university offered a child life program. While most respondents (71.4%) reported not currently practicing as child life specialists, majority still reported potential or definite interest in an online master's degree in child life at TTU (57.2%). See Table 2 for more information.

Two alumni reported that they are currently working as child life specialist. One additional participant noted that, while they are not currently working as a child life specialist, they are still pursuing the profession and aim to take the child life certification exam soon. Of the alumni that reported not currently working in the child life profession, some still reported that their current careers aligned with the child life curriculum offered at TTU.

Alumni who were interested in the availability of an online master's program in child life at TTU demonstrated understanding of the value of higher education. For instance, one person said, "I am passionate about furthering the profession and education of child life, and believe this [degree] would be another tool to achieve that." Among the students not personally interested in pursuing a master's degree in child life, they still expressed interest in the program

being available at TTU. More specifically, one respondent said they know firsthand that, “the education would be exemplary and would help people achieve their career goals.”

Local and regional need/demand

The child life profession is relatively young compared to other healthcare occupations in the United States. Although rooted in the early 20th century, the profession did not see rapid growth until the 1980s. When the first Child Life Council (CLC) was formed in 1983 there were only about 235 professional members (Sisk & Daniels, 2021). The child life profession established and published its mission, values, vision, and operating procedures in 1997 and by the early 2000s reported having around 3,000 professional members with over 470 documented clinical programs (Sisk & Daniels, 2021). Now, the child life profession has over 6,000 members. Child life research is a burgeoning area of the profession and while publications have grown significantly over the past decade, historical data remains limited. Therefore, this analysis will include information regarding the healthcare industry as a whole supported by recent research findings available on this specific profession.

As in past years, the healthcare industry is currently experiencing shortages in a variety of occupations both locally and nationally. According to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (2023), healthcare occupations in the state of Tennessee constitutes eleven of the top fifteen occupations experiencing the greatest supply gaps in 2023. This factor was based on “the numbers of job openings exceeding resumes for occupations requiring postsecondary education” (p. 44). These statewide employment shortages have increased the demand for individuals with post-secondary education and training in health-related fields. “Program completers in the health sciences have some of the highest employment rates of any career cluster. Healthcare and life sciences is a TNECD target industry. Investment in our universities and world-class research facilities with this sector will complement and enable the development of a capable workforce” (p. 44).

Tennessee institutions of higher education offer a variety of academic programs in the health sciences that will provide graduates with both general and specialized training needed to fulfill these in-demand occupations. According to a database search of CollegeforTN.org, there are over fifty colleges and universities across the state that offer health related academic programs. However, only three of them offer programs specifically for child life specialists: the University of Memphis, Vanderbilt University, and Tennessee Technological University. Of these programs, Vanderbilt University is the only institution that offers graduate level child life training, but it is not an ACLP endorsed program nor is it offered online. Currently there are only ten ACLP endorsed graduate level child life programs in the U.S. Of those programs, only one is located in the southeast region, University of Georgia, and it is not available online. Of the non-ACLP endorsed graduate child life programs, there are ten available across the U.S. that offer online classes, but none of them are located in the southeast region.

There is a clear gap in the state and region for available child life training programs that are ACLP-endorsed and offered online at the graduate level. Therefore, this proposed online ACLP-endorsed graduate child life training program will be the first of its kind in the southeast region and among very few others available across the U.S. This will not only meet the needs of students from the state of Tennessee, but will also serve students across the southeast region,

and will attract students from across the nation who are looking for the flexibility afforded by an online master's program.

Employer need/demand

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022), the U.S. economy is projected to add 8.3 million jobs between 2021 and 2031 with a 0.5 percent annual growth rate in employment opportunities. Of these jobs, the healthcare and social assistance sector is projected to create the most jobs, which will increase the demand for various healthcare professionals. Nationally, employment opportunities across healthcare professions are expected to grow thirteen percent over the next decade with similar forecasts projected in the state of Tennessee. Most of Tennessee's highest employment needs will be in local healthcare services industries, such as hospitals and clinical settings (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2023).

Certified Child Life Specialists (CCLS) have employment opportunities in numerous settings that focus on pediatric healthcare and support. Potential employers include children's hospitals, pediatric units within general hospitals, pediatric outpatient clinics, pediatric hospice and palliative care facilities, pediatric oncology centers, pediatric mental health centers, pediatric rehabilitation centers, private practice healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and nonprofit or community organizations. Job opportunities and employment outlook varies by geographic location and clinical setting. According to the 2021 ACLP Salary Survey, child life professionals across southern states in the U.S. earned an average salary of \$49,000- \$53,000 per year. Higher salaries were reported for those with graduate degrees, more experience in the profession, and those working in leadership roles. Although there has been an increase in the number of CCLS in the U.S. (ACLP, 2022), there remains a staffing shortage across the profession. In a 2022 report, Lindsey Heering, ACLP Board of Directors President, stated that clinical child life programs were experiencing a staffing crisis with multiple positions left unfilled (Heering, 2022). This could be due in part to the inadequate number of qualified CCLS credentialed professionals needed to fill open child life positions (Sisk et al., 2023).

Healthcare occupations are expected to see the highest employment growth in the next decade and typically require a degree, certificate, and license to practice. Educational standards have increased across the healthcare industry due to factors such as advancements in medical knowledge, patient safety concerns, quality of care, and the need for more specialized healthcare training (World Health Organization, 2013). The World Health Organization (WHO) stated that across the globe, shortages in healthcare workers are accompanied by an imbalance of skill. "More professional health workers are needed, but it has become clear that efforts to scale up health professionals' education must not only increase the quantity of health workers, but also address issues of quality and relevance in order to address population health needs" (2013, p. 5). Furthermore, the WHO claimed that "scaling up education and training is a critical component of the strategies to strengthen the health workforce" (2013, p. 21). George Thibault, Professor of Medicine and Medical Education at Harvard University, echoed this sentiment by stating, "I have witnessed in the past decade a significant openness and willingness to change health professions education with notable experimentation in both prelicensure (undergraduate) and post-licensure (graduate) education. These changes are heartening, but

much more needs to be done to keep pace with this rapidly changing health-care world and changing societal demographics and expectations” (2020, p. 686).

According to the ACLP, the minimum requirements to become a CCLS are a bachelor’s degree with either (1) graduation from an ACLP-endorsed child life academic program or (2) completing a list of acceptable courses, and the completion of at least 600 clinical hours under the supervision of a CCLS. Although a bachelor’s degree is the current minimum requirement for CCLS licensure, a recent study by Sisk, Cantrell, and Wittenberg Camp (2023) found that master’s prepared applicants are more likely to receive an internship position and therefore are better prepared for a career in the child life profession. The ACLP recognizes that the clinical internship has become a barrier for many candidates due to limited availability of clinical placements. Not only will this proposed master’s degree provide candidates an advantage when applying for highly competitive clinical internships, it will also provide a higher level of preparation and competency for working in the child life profession. Additionally, the proposed master’s degree program would provide child life professionals that are already currently working with a path for continued professional development.

External Research/Community and Industry Partnerships

Child life professional employer survey

A survey was created to gather more information on the current state of child life staffing at clinical sites. The purpose of the survey was to better understand the availability of internship opportunities and the prevalence of job openings at different types of clinical settings across the United States and Canada. Additionally, the survey aimed to explore the role of master’s level education in preparing candidates for clinical experiences and job placement.

Methods

An electronic survey was developed on SurveyMonkey and targeted responses from clinical sites in the United States and in Canada. A flyer was developed including survey information and a QR code to direct participants to the survey. The flyer was distributed via email to child life program leaders and posted on the Facebook group page titled, *Certified Child Life Specialists*. The Facebook group contains over 2,000 members and is a site frequently used for recruiting participants in surveys. Recruitment began on July 26, 2023 and the survey was closed on September 20, 2023.

The survey included questions regarding program characteristics, including location and size, as well as staffing questions, such as whether or not the program was fully staffed, number of current job openings, and projections of growth for the program in the next 5 years. Questions were also asked regarding number of clinical internship opportunities provided, and whether preference is given to master’s prepared internship and job applicants.

Sample

Clinical child life programs in the United States and Canada were recruited for participation. Participants were instructed to indicate the city and state of their program as well as the name of their institution in order to check for duplicate responses. Programs ranging from 1 child life specialist to 60+ child life specialists were encouraged to respond.

Results

There were 74 child life clinical programs who responded to the survey, majority of which were hospital programs (94.6%) followed by community settings (2.7%) and other settings, such as outpatient programs (2.7%). Most programs were in the United States, and two responses were received from programs in Canada. Figure 1 displays the number of programs from each of the 33 U.S. states that participated in the survey.

Programs ranged in size from employing 1-5 child life specialists to employing 60+ child life specialists. Only 28.4% of child life programs were fully staffed at the time of completing the survey, with 17 programs reporting having 4 or more job openings. Despite such incomplete staffing, most child life clinical programs continue to expect growth at their institutions in the next 5 years. Majority expect at least 1-3 new child life specialist positions to be added to their programs during that time. It is a professional responsibility for child life programs to offer opportunities to emerging professionals, such as clinical internships. Unfortunately, understaffing can lead child life programs unable to offer such experiences, due to a limited number of staff available to offer student supervision while also meeting patient care demands. Fortunately, of the programs that participated in the current survey, majority continue to offer at least 1-2 internship opportunities annually. See Table 3 for more information.

When asked about whether or not master's prepared candidates received preference for clinical internship placement or for job openings, programs varied in their responses. While majority of programs did not indicate giving preference to master's prepared applicants, more programs report preference for master's prepared internship candidates than for job applicants. This finding suggests that master's level education is one way for those interested in obtaining internships to stand out against undergraduate applicants. See Table 4 for more information.

It is important to note that some bias likely exists in self-reporting preferences for candidates. Future investigations should ask programs to report on whether their most recently accepted interns and new hires held master's degrees for a more accurate representation. Nevertheless, it is clear that master's level education prepares those to enter the profession. Another limitation of the current survey is that it did not ask questions regarding currently working child life specialists who wish to return for master's degrees. Obtaining a master's degree after obtaining certification and job placement is common for professionals who wish to extend their knowledge and expertise or to gain more experience with research, teaching, or leadership.

National and regional support

Child life educational programs are supported by several national and regional networks. The ACLP is the professional organization that offers support to child life academic and clinical programs. The ACLP is comprised of several volunteer-based committees and working groups that attend to professional issues. Notably, the ACLP is focused on supporting the emerging academic discipline of child life through ongoing endorsement of academic programs which offer curriculum that best prepare candidates for certification eligibility.

Perhaps more accessible and direct support comes from regional networking. Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi are the states that comprise the Southeastern Association of Child Life Specialists (SEACLP) regional group. SEACLP is organized by a volunteer-led leadership group, and members of SEACLP participate in the nomination and election of the

leadership group. This year, Dr. Cara Sisk of TTU is the chair of SEACLP, which speaks volumes to her impact and community of support in this region.

Each year, the SEACLP leadership team plans and facilitates a think tank and a conference. These events help to bridge the partnerships between academic and clinical sites, ultimately improving student and professional experiences. For instance, just this year a topic at the think tank included a discussion on the pathway from child life academic preparation to clinical profession. From this conversation, clinical sites worked to improve their internship application review processes, and one institution (St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, TN) has even made plans to expand their internship opportunities to offer placement to at least one regional student per internship cycle. This improvement will address a key barrier reported by emerging professionals who need to obtain an internship, which is difficulty securing placement within their local communities (Boles et al., Under Review).

Indeed, the support from both academic and clinical sites is robust, and there is a culture of helping each and every program succeed in their efforts to grow the child life profession. This culture is imperative to ensuring that students not only feel supported throughout their time in academia, but also as they begin to prepare to enter the workforce. See Appendix A for letters of support from national and regional child life leaders.

Conclusion

Similar to other occupations, changes are necessary to continue the advancement of research and development of the child life profession. Paul Thayer (2007) outlined five goals for growing this emerging evidence-based profession into a broader field of inquiry. One of those goals was the need for graduate level education to foster leadership and expand academic skills. Thayer's proposal for expanding the educational standards within the child life profession is aligned with recommendations offered by the World Health Organization (2013) and George Thibault of Harvard University (2020). This increase in academic preparation will result in a pool of graduates who are better prepared to compete for limited clinical internships, who have a deeper skillset to better serve their patients, and a larger community of child life professionals who can contribute back to the field through advanced research.

The need for and viability of this proposed program is evident from the body of recent literature on the profession, expressed interest from current and past students, support from existing child life programs across the U.S., and multiple enthusiastic letters of support from child life leaders. This program is sustainable and the need for it will extend far beyond the first cohort of student graduates.

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Feasibility Study Tables and Figures

<i>Table 1. Current student interest (n = 11)</i>			
Classification		Count	Percentage
	Freshman	3	27.3%
	Sophomore	3	27.3%
	Junior	2	18.2%
	Senior	3	27.3%
Child life program reason for enrolling at TTU			
	Yes	8	72.7%
	No	3	27.3%
Would be interested in an online master's degree in child life at TTU			
	Yes	2	18.2%
	No	3	27.3%
	Maybe	6	54.5%

<i>Table 2. Alumni student interest (n = 7)</i>			
Graduation year		Count	Percentage
	2020	2	28.6%
	2021	1	14.3%
	2022	2	28.6%
	2023	2	28.6%
Child life program reason for enrolling at TTU			
	Yes	5	71.4%
	No	2	28.6%
Would be interested in an online master's degree in child life at TTU			
	Yes	2	28.6%
	No	3	42.9%
	Maybe	2	28.6%
Currently practicing as a child life specialist			
	Yes	2	28.6%
	No	5	71.4%

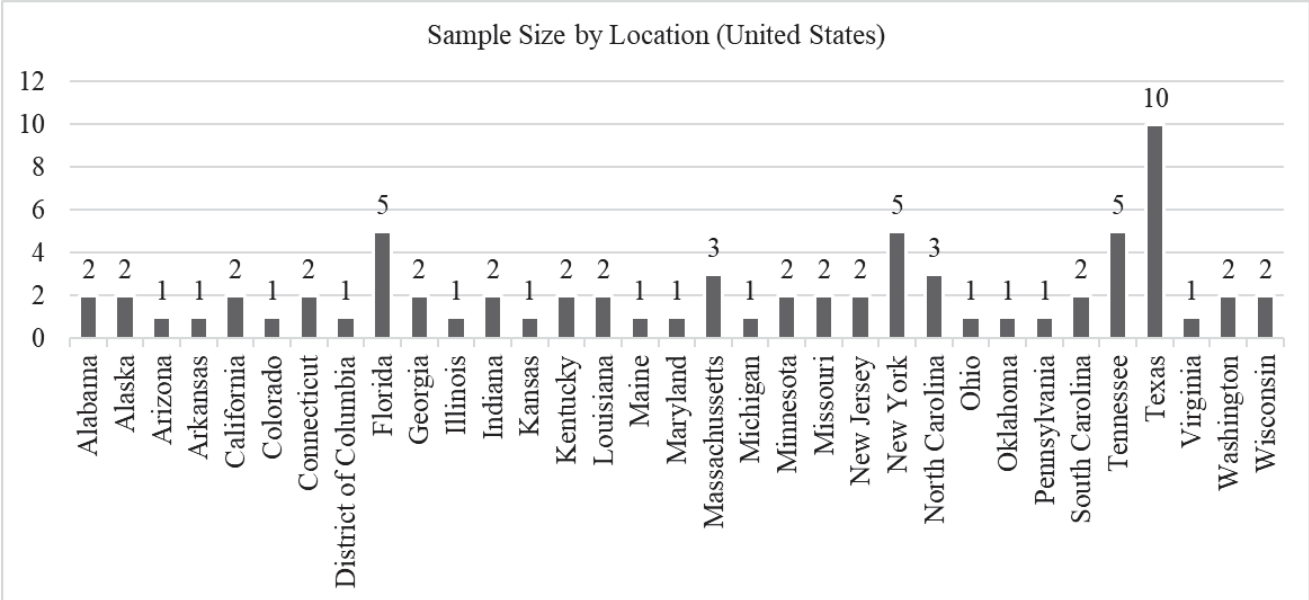


Figure 1. Sample size by location (United States)

<i>Table 3. Child life professional employer survey</i>			
Characteristic	Item	Count	Percentage
Type of clinical setting			
	Hospital	70	94.6%
	Community Setting	2	2.7%
	Other	2	2.7%
Program size (Number of part- and full-time child life positions)			
	1-5	21	28.4%
	6-10	12	16.2%
	11-20	15	20.3%
	21-30	11	14.9%
	31-40	7	9.5%
	41-50	3	4.1%
	51-60	0	0.0%
	60 or more	5	6.8%
Program fully staffed			
	Yes	21	28.4%
	No	53	71.6%
Number of job openings			
	0	19	25.7%
	1	12	16.2%
	2	14	18.9%
	3	12	16.2%
	4 or more	17	23.0%
Anticipation of growth in child life program (next 5 years)			
	Yes	43	58.1%
	No	9	12.2%
	Unsure	22	29.7%
Anticipated number of new child life positions (next 5 years)			
	0	10	13.5%
	1-3	49	66.2%
	4-6	11	14.9%
	7 or more	4	5.4%
Annual internship positions offered			
	0	22	29.7%
	1-2	28	37.8%
	3-4	18	24.3%

	5 or more	6	8.1%
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<i>Table 4. Program preference for master's prepared candidates</i>			
	Item	Count	Percentage
	Program gives preference to master's prepared students for clinical internship positions		
	Yes	10	13.5%
	No	46	62.2%
	Unsure	18	24.3%
	Program gives preference to master's prepared job applicants		
	Yes	16	21.6%
	No	38	51.4%
	Unsure	20	27.0%

Section IV: Enrollment and Graduation Projections

It is estimated to enroll students in a cohort-based format for this graduate program. Based on undergraduate enrollment, the number of inquiries we have received in recent years about offering a graduate program, and the fact that no other such graduate program exists in TN at a public institution – the estimate of 5 students enrolling fall semester to begin the degree seems reasonable. An attrition rate of 10% is assumed for each year. Based on the resources available for online graduate programs at TN Tech related to instructional technology it is estimated students will be supported throughout the degree resulting in an appropriate number of graduates each year from the program.

Table 2 – Projected Enrollments and Graduates*

Cohorts	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029	2029-2030
Cohort 1 begins	5				
Cohort 2 begins; cohort 1 graduates		5 Start 2 Graduate**			
Cohort 3 begins, Cohort 2 graduates			6 Start 3 Graduate**		
Cohort 4 begins; Cohort 3 graduates				6 Start 4 Graduate**	
Cohort 5 begins; Cohort 4 graduates					6 Start 5 Graduate**
Total # enrolled	5 +1 PT***	9 +1 PT	10+1 PT	11+ 1 PT	11+ 1 PT

*This table shows the anticipated number of students who will enroll in the graduate degree.

** An attrition rate of 10% for each year was assumed.

*** One part time student is assumed each year for purposes of tuition.

Section V: Projected Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program

Faculty and instructional staff-Currently the School of Human Ecology employs a full-time faculty member, Dr. Cara Sisk who is a Certified Child Life Specialist and will become the Master's Degree Program Director. Dr. Sisk has been employed at TN Tech since 2011 when she was hired to start the undergraduate Child Life concentration within the BS in Human Ecology. She has successfully grown the undergraduate program from zero enrollment in 2011 to a consistent enrollment of 30+ students each year. Dr. Sisk will move from the undergraduate concentration to the graduate program director. A full-time, 12 month, lecturer position is being requested to teach undergraduate child life courses and focus on preparing graduate students for nationally competitive child life clinical practicums/pre-internship experiences and child life internships. This position will not be needed until 2025 when the degree starts.

Non-instructional staff- The School of Human Ecology employs a full-time Administrative Associate who will provide administrative support for the graduate degree program within the regular duties of the position.

Graduate assistants- No Graduate Assistantships are planned for the first year, but we do plan to offer a graduate assistantship. See Year 2 in the THEC Financial Projection Form for the addition of the graduate assistantship, which will require the student to be on campus. A tuition increase of 4% each year is assumed for the cost of the assistantship position.

Accreditation- the Association of Child Life Professionals does not offer accreditation to education programs. Instead, academic endorsement is available. A one-time endorsement application fee of \$1750 is included on the Financial Projections form as well as the annual maintenance fee of \$250; existing funds will be used to pay these fees.

Consultants- The School of Human Ecology contracted two consultants to prepare the feasibility study; each received a \$2000 stipend which was paid for by the School of Human Ecology.

Equipment- Each faculty member who will teach in this new graduate degree has a laptop and printer in their office with camera and scanning capability. The Lecturer position will require a laptop and a printer, but no other equipment is identified as being needed to deliver this degree.

Information technology- TN Tech has an office of Information Technology Services (ITS) which provides computer resources, technical services, and support for instruction to all TN Tech faculty. Related to learning resources and support, TN Tech as the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning which provides workshops, trainings and consultations to faculty related to online teaching and learning. iLearn, powered by Brightspace D2L, is the online learning management platform provided by TN Tech to all students and faculty. All content for the MS in Child Life will be housed within this learning platform. The College of Agriculture and Human Ecology has a dedicated ITS Support Staff member who provides technical support to faculty related to computer and software needs. TN Tech provides a professional Teams account to each faculty member. Professional Zoom accounts are requested for all child life graduate faculty to ensure virtual communications with all online students.

Library resources- The Volpe Library provides a variety of resources to students and faculty including online journal databases, Interlibrary loan, RefWorks, and Research Poster Design. Additionally, Reference Library faculty members are available to work one on one with

faculty to secure resources from other locations and to provide support. Numerous online databases are available to support this graduate degree:

Applied Science and Technology, Full text

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

BioMed Central (BMC)

CINAHL Complete

Consumer Health Database

Health and Medicine

Medline Plus

PubMed and PubMed Central

PsycInfo

Social Sciences Full Text

Science.Gov

Health and Medical Collection

Health Source – Consumer Edition

Public Health Database

Public Library of Science (PLOS)

Marketing- this new degree program will be marketed through print, online and in person methods. A draft website page will be created when appropriate to begin to spread the word about this new graduate degree. The School of Human Ecology pays a monthly service fee to the Office of Communications and Marketing to receive a certain number of hours each month for website maintenance. Print brochures and post cards will be designed with assistance from the Office of Communications and Marketing. The School of Human Ecology will pay for all associated marketing costs related to the new degree program.

Facilities- Space is already in place to support this new degree program. Dr. Sisk has specific office space within Oakley Hall and she is supported by the School of Human Ecology administrative associate whose office is in proximity. The Lecturer position will require office space, which the School of Human Ecology has available. Faculty already have access to a work room which houses offices supplies and a copier; as well as a conference room shared by the Dean's office.

Travel- The School of Human Ecology already provides each faculty member with \$1000 in travel funds each year; to be used for professional development and travel to conferences. Dr. Sisk is supported to attend the ACLP Annual Conference, Southeastern Association of Child Life Conference, and Child Life Academic Society meetings annually.

Other resources- the College of Graduate Studies provides support to graduate faculty and graduate students. TN Tech currently offers graduate degrees out of every college including Eds, PhD, and DNP degrees.

Section VI: Projected Revenues for the Proposed Program

Tuition- In projecting revenues, the tuition component includes both tuition and fees, such as online fees. The estimates for tuition and fees are based on projected enrollments and graduates outlined in Table 2, with students take 9 credit hours in both fall and spring semesters. Revenue from summer courses is not included since they are considered optional.

For Years 2-5, a 4% increase in tuition is assumed. Table 3 provides a breakdown of projected tuition and fees from Year 1 to Year 5.

Grants-it is not estimated that any grant funding will be used

Other- no other funding source is identified.

Table 3. Projected Revenue

Projected Revenue						
Category	Planning	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Tuition & Fees		\$77,556	\$134,504	\$152,962	\$172,546	\$178,304
Grants		\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Other		\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

Appendix A
Letters of Support

Cara Sisk, PhD, CCLS
Child Life Program Director
School of Human Ecology
Tennessee Technological University
Box 5035
Cookeville, TN 38505

Dear Dr. Sisk:

On behalf of the Association of Child Life Professionals (ACLP), please accept this letter of support for the Bachelor of Science degree in Human Ecology with a concentration in Child Life at Tennessee Tech University.

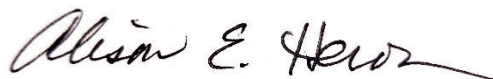
Since your endorsement by ACLP in October 2020, the program has continued to maintain excellence in academic preparation of students who aspire to become child life specialists. The ACLP defines endorsement of academic programs in child life as an assurance that an academic program meets the standards and requirements set forth in the Standards for Academic and Clinical Preparation Programs. This achievement promotes the interests of students by elevating the quality of teaching, learning, and professional practice.

Offering this degree at Tennessee Tech University provides students with excellent preparation and opportunities to develop an important skillset within healthcare and community-based settings which supports children and families experiencing stress and crisis. Knowledge and skills obtained by child life students in this program will contribute to the child life workforce as well as the growing number of esteemed professionals with the Certified Child Life Specialist credential.

Sincerely,



Alisha Saavedra, MA, CCLS
Board of Directors, President



Alison E. Heron, MBA, CAE
Chief Executive Officer



Jessika Boles, PhD, CCLS
Assistant Professor of the Practice
Department of Psychology and Human Development
Vanderbilt University
230 Appleton Place, Hobbs 108
Nashville, TN 37232

September 4, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

I am happy to write this letter of support for the creation of a Master of Science in Child Life graduate program at Tennessee Tech University. As the Child Life Academic Coordinator of the only currently existing graduate program preparing Certified Child Life Specialists in the State of Tennessee, I believe this to be a much-needed resource that will increase accessibility for our field, while also creating more opportunities for collaboration across our respective institutions.

I have known Dr. Sisk for nearly fifteen years – she was my first mentor as a fledgling child life specialist at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee. Her ability to teach, create, and coordinate is well documented at Tennessee Technological University as well as in the annals of the history of the child life profession. I am certain her name alone will draw significant interest in this prospective program; for those who may not know her by name, once they see the rigor of the program, its alignment with ACLP and CLCC expectations, and experience the kindness of the TTU community, they will be sold on completing this next step in their academic journey in your program.

As the current leader of the ACLP’s prestigious research fellows, and as a former member and active participant and leader across committees in both the ACLP, the CLCC, and our regional child life organization, SEACLP, I can see how this program will only strengthen our regional and national professional infrastructure. Child life has become an incredibly competitive field, and although not currently required, most internship sites (our affiliated children’s hospital included), have moved to prioritizing master’s level candidates for clinical training placements. Organically, clinical programs have begun to recognize the depth of knowledge and strength of skills that graduate prepared candidates possess, and according to data I recently compiled, almost 70% of new entrants into the field are master’s prepared.

In the state of Tennessee, we are losing many promising candidates to online programs hosted in Texas, California, and Florida because of the lack of opportunities available here. Sadly, these online programs are admitting large numbers of students, but few of those students are successful in obtaining a clinical internship or their certification as a child life specialist. Other universities are making money on our students without delivering the outcomes promised. Our program at Vanderbilt is only equipped to admit 10 graduate child life students per year, yet there are easily twice as many clinical positions currently vacant in our state and neighboring states. We turn away about 60 applicants each year that we don’t have the means to support – which means the time is ripe for us to be able to point them to another option in our state. Not only does our state offer some affordable living costs compared to other major metro areas but is also rich with world-renowned healthcare centers that boast child life teams who are leading the profession both in what they do and how they contribute to the larger profession. Establishing a Master of Science program in Child Life is well-timed, desperately needed, and ideally suited at Tennessee Technological University, and we at Vanderbilt University are so happy to extend our support to Cara and her team. Please let me know if there is any more information that I can provide to be helpful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jessika Boles', written over a white background.

Jessika Boles, PhD, CCLS

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY
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Nashville, Tennessee 37203

www.vanderbilt.edu
tel 615.322.8141
fax 615.343.9494



College of
Human Environmental Sciences
Human Development & Family Studies

September 7, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Dr. Sherwood Burns-Nader, and I am the coordinator of the graduate and undergraduate child life programs at the University of Alabama. In addition, I am a leader within the Association of Child Life Professionals (member of the Internship Readiness Working Group, Co-Chair of the Academic Excellence Task Force), as well as the Child Life Certification Commission (previous Chair of CLCC, chair-elect of Ethics Committee). These roles and leaderships have helped me to become very informed of the needs regarding the pathway to the child life profession, including academic training. I am excited to hear that Tennessee Tech University is pursuing transitioning to master's program, as I see such a transition as a potential benefit for our profession. For one, a look at the strategic plan of the Association of Child Life Professionals highlights emphasis on expanding the research of child life. Master's programs are the best supports for such an initiative as the foundations of research are offered at the graduate level (i.e., research methods and statistics requirements, thesis opportunities). Across the United States, there are less than 50 academic programs that offer a focus in child life and significantly less that do so at the master's level. Therefore, one of my perceived benefits of this transition is that it increases accessibility to graduate level training in child life while also increasing the available options for training in research. Such training can help further develop the field of child life. Furthermore, as a program that offers a graduate program in child life, I am aware of the benefits that such programs offer students. Graduate programs tend to include smaller course sizes and close engagement with professors. Such opportunities provide the mentorship and evidence based instruction that is needed at the academic level to prepare students for the clinical training of the internship. Finally, a large number of those interested in child life are those who find the profession later (later in their undergraduate program or as a second career). Master's programs provide access to the profession for individuals who find out about child life a little later and need high quality coursework and academic training beyond a previously earned bachelor's degree. In summary, I see many benefits of Tennessee Tech University shifting their child life program to the master's level. Thank you for considering my comments, and please feel free to contact me at sburns@ches.ua.edu.

Sincerely,

SBNader

Sherwood Burns-Nader, PhD, CCLS
Associate Professor

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA®

Cara Sisk, PhD, CCLS
Child Life Program Director
School of Human Ecology
Tennessee Technological University
Box 5035
Cookeville, TN 38505

Dear Dr. Sisk:

I am pleased to provide this letter of support for the proposed Master of Science degree in Child Life within the School of Human Ecology at Tennessee Tech University.

Providing this degree at TN Tech will increase the hiring pool of students who have preparation in graduate level child life specific education. The Master's Degree in Child Life will build the knowledge and skills of child life students entering the workforce as well as professionals with the Certified Child Life Specialist credential who desire to earn a master's degree to enhance their clinical practice.

Please contact me if I can provide additional information.

Sincerely,



Shawn Brasher, MS, CCLS
Director-Child Life
St. Jude Children's Research Hospital
262 Danny Thomas
Memphis, Tn. 38105
Shawn.brasher@stjude.org



To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Sara Ridenour, and I am writing with excitement to help encourage the growth of a new Master's Degree program at Tennessee Tech University. I have been able to see firsthand the need for more students to be advised and supported through Master's Degree programs in order to be successful in the field of child life. I am a part of the internship interview process at a large hospital, teach fully remote courses for a Master's Degree program, and am part of the Association of Child Life Professionals committee that talks specifically about internships. I strongly believe that we need to have more opportunities for students to learn and engage more through higher education in order to be set up for success as a child life specialist in our evolving field.

Currently, I am spearheading the child life internship interview process at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, where we have consistently had over 200 applicants in the last two rounds of internship interviews. I have been able to create a rubric in order to determine applicants that are going to be successful in our specific child life internship program, in which most of the applicants that are having success are those that are currently enrolled in a Master's Degree program. I have noticed that students that are currently enrolled in Master's Degree programs have more experience, can speak to their child development knowledge, and are more aware of the different responsibilities that we look for in internship candidates for our field. With over 260 applicants in this last round of internship applications, there is a clear need for additional support and guidance for students wanting to enter the field of child life.

In addition to my involvement in the internship interview program, I am also an adjunct professor for Southeastern Louisiana University, where I have taught five courses over three years. All of the courses that I have been able to teach have been 100% remote, and I have seen a lot of success with students that are willing to go the extra mile and ask appropriate questions and try to get to know more about what it takes to have success in obtaining a child life internship. I have been able to see how important it is to set up students for success in our field by being able to connect, educate, and provide appropriate resources through remote Master's Degree classes. As an adjunct professor, I have been able to push the students that are pursuing a Master's Degree and have been able to help them understand the different skillsets and developmental assessments that are crucial for success in our field. I have been able to see the importance of providing additional education to those who want to enter the field, and for Certified Child Life Specialists who are wanting to further their education and have more knowledge to bring into our very specific field of work. I have thoroughly enjoyed having professionals who are already certified in my courses chime in during conversation to bring additional insight, depth, and conversation to topics pertaining to child life.

Finally, I am part of the IAOC (Internship Accreditation Oversight Committee) through the Association of Child Life Professionals. Even though the concept of having a Master's Degree is no longer going to be an expectation in our field, there is a high need to be supporting students in the classroom and help guide students in our profession to be set up for successful internship and job placements. I believe that having additional programs, especially remote programs, would be quite beneficial for the growth and success of our field as Certified Child Life Specialists.

If you have any questions or concerns about this support, I invite you to contact me through email or telephone with the contact information below.

Best,
Sara Ridenour
901-595-4318
Sara.ridenour@stjude.org

Friday, September 8, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

I am sharing my support for the development of a Master of Science Degree in Child Life at Tennessee Tech University. I have worked as a certified child life specialist for over 20 years. I received my graduate degree from The University of Alabama, specifically in child life. I found great value in the coursework that better prepared me for my initial work experiences. I have had extensive involvement with students through the years by serving as an internship supervisor, developing internship curriculum, implementing educational opportunities, and creating organized learning experiences. I devote a lot of time connecting with students that are looking for guidance in their professional journey, i.e., questions regarding coursework, internship planning, experience or programming support. I am involved in our regional child life group and value the connection and collaboration between clinical organizations and academics. I am an adjunct faculty teacher at The University of Memphis and see the value in providing child life specific education for students preparing for their role in the child life profession. I am currently the child life student coordinator at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and supporting students clinically and academically is a large part of my role as a child life specialist and manager. I highly support the development of this academic program.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Smith Tagg, MS, CCLS, CIMI
Lead Child Life Specialist
Child Life Student Coordinator
St. Jude Children's Research Hospital
901-595-2788
Jennifer.smith@stjude.org

Katy Hoskins, CCLS
8022 163rd Street Ct E
Puyallup, WA. 98375
Katyhoskins16@gmail.com
615-598-8695

October 2, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my strong support of the proposal for a master's degree in Child Life at Tennessee Technological University. As a graduate from the School of Human Ecology at Tennessee Tech (2015), I entered the profession of child life with the foundational knowledge and skillset that has projected an eight-year career of clinical experience at nationally ranked children's hospitals across the country, as well as professional development endeavors such as co-authorship and research in creating the child life value proposition statement for hospital administrators.

While my undergraduate education was well above the standard, I have personally wanted to seek higher education within the field to gain more research-specific skills and dive deeper into lifespan development to further inform my clinical practice within pediatric healthcare. Topics such as advanced child development, family theory, infant mental health, death and dying, therapeutic interventions, trauma-informed care, grant writing, leadership, and research-specific courses are a few that would accomplish this goal. A Child Life graduate program would not only open doors to graduate students seeking child life certification, but also compliment those who already hold certification and seek further academic instruction and research opportunities within the child life profession.

Furthermore, if this degree is accessible to students across the country on an online platform, I have no doubt it would be highly sought out. Dr. Cara Sisk's undergraduate child life curriculum at Tennessee Tech has produced highly qualified professionals over the last decade. Her students bring a high level of skill and professionalism to their practicum and internship experiences, thus making the School of Human Ecology's child life program held in the highest regard across the Southeast. I have not yet pursued a master's degree, but I plan to and would consider earning it at Tennessee Tech University should this program be approved.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to reach out if I can provide additional information.

Respectfully,

Katy Hoskins, BS, CCLS
Certified Child Life Specialist

September 13, 2023

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to you in support of The School of Human Ecology at Tennessee Tech University offering an online Master's Degree in Child Life.

As a former child life undergraduate student at Tennessee Tech University, I graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Child Life in 2018. I am honored to have obtained my educational background under Dr. Cara Sisk, the Child Life Program Director and Assistant Professor for Tennessee Tech's Child Life Program Department. Her incredible hard work and passion for her students does not go unnoticed. Her diligence behind the educational child life related courses taught me as a child life student which led me to a successful career as a Certified Child Life Specialist now. As her student at the time, I admired her desire to grow with her own personal education advancement so that she could further advance the child life program. Her achievements inspired me to want to personally gain more similar child life experiences. After I graduated, through her connections with another child life director, I was contracted with Siriraj Hospital in Bangkok to mentor and work with the Thai child life specialists. That experience allowed me to obtain my career here at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital Vanderbilt at Williamson in Franklin, TN. With utmost thanks to her as a professor, I am proud to have been her student.

As of currently there is no state university that provides an online Master's Degree in Child Life in the state of Tennessee. I find this a necessary and significant need for child life specialists who seek professional growth and educational advancement. By offering an online Master's program in Child Life here in Tennessee, not only does this allow the benefit of having one close to those who reside in the state but opens windows of opportunity for clinical advancement for neighboring states as well. Most children's hospitals require a master's degree for all child life professionals interested in furthering their clinical and professional advancement. For example, transitioning from a Certified Child Life Specialist II to a Certified Child Life Specialist III. This benefits the individual to gain clinical advancement and potential monetary promotion to one's career, especially when it comes to an opportunity for leadership and administration for their child life department at the hospital. The impact of having an online child life graduate program available at Tennessee Tech University sets the precedence even higher with educational opportunities for students and professionals. It also gives me personal excitement to potentially share with my future intern students giving them more opportunity for career goals and advancement.

Respectfully,

Nancy Caldwell Davis, CCLS

Certified Child Life Specialist

Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital Vanderbilt at Williamson Medical Center

4321 Carothers Pkwy

Franklin, TN 37067

ncaldwell@wmed.org

423-240-3419

November 2, 2023

Michele L. Austin
797 S Wheeling Street
Aurora, CO 80012

Cara Sisk
Box 5035
Cookeville, TN 38505

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in support of Tennessee Tech University's candidacy in obtaining an online Master's Degree in Child Life. Tennessee Tech is an exceptional candidate for this program due to the competitiveness and preparedness that the current undergraduate child life program offers to all students who enroll. The child life program at Tennessee Tech is endorsed by the Association of Child Life Professionals which is a sound foundation in teaching psychosocial care for many settings to their students.

When preparing for the child life profession an individual has a few things to consider: their knowledge and their competitiveness. As being a former graduate of Tennessee Tech and now being a Certified Child Life Specialist I believe that having an opportunity to further an individual's education in the field will provide so many opportunities for those coming to Tennessee Tech and for the Child Life profession.

I have considered obtaining my Master's degree; however, it would be an honor to have the opportunity to continue being a Golden Eagle throughout such a process. Tennessee Tech would be able to provide an opportunity that would assist individuals on the child life path to grow in knowledge, conduct empowering interventions and making lasting changes among professions of this nature. Having a master's degree At Tennessee Tech would encourage and empower students to not only bring growth to the child life profession but growth to the child life program At Tennessee Tech.

Lastly, Cara Sisk, Ph.D., CCLS, is a phenomenal individual who truly believes in her students and is willing to help them meet goals that will prepare them for success. I truly believe that she would be a complete asset to a successful Master's degree program at Tennessee Tech University.

Sincerely,

Michele Austin, BS, CCLS

Appendix B

THEC Financial Projection Form



Financial Projections Form

Institution	Tennessee Tech University
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Program Name	MS in Child Life
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Projected One-Time Expenditures						
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Category	Planning	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Faculty & Instructional Staff	2,000.00					
Consultants	\$4,000					
Equipment		\$2,500				
Information Technology						
Library resources						
Marketing		\$1,000	\$500			
<i>Total One-Time Expenditures</i>	<i>\$4,000</i>	<i>\$3,500</i>	<i>\$500</i>	<i>\$0</i>	<i>\$0</i>	<i>\$0</i>

Projected Recurring Expenditures						
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Category	Planning	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Faculty & Instructional Staff						
Lecturer (new)		\$62,500	\$65,000	\$67,600	\$70,304	\$73,116
Non-Instructional Staff						
Graduate Assistants			\$25,000	\$26,000	\$26,040	\$26,041
Accreditation		\$1,750	\$250	\$250	\$250	\$250
Travel		\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000
Other						
<i>Total Recurring Expenditures</i>	<i>\$0</i>	<i>\$65,250</i>	<i>\$91,250</i>	<i>\$94,850</i>	<i>\$97,594</i>	<i>\$100,407</i>
Grand Total (One-Time and Recurring)	\$4,000	\$68,750	\$91,750	\$94,850	\$97,594	\$100,407

Projected Revenue						
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Category	Planning	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Tuition & Fees		\$77,556	\$134,504	\$152,962	\$172,546	\$178,304
Grants		\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Other		\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Revenues	\$0	\$77,556	\$134,504	\$152,962	\$172,546	\$178,304

**Years 6 and 7 should only be included for doctoral programs*