

DATE: April 23, 2015**SUBJECT:** Middle Tennessee State University, Master of Arts – Liberal Arts**ACTION RECOMMENDED:** Approval

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: Middle Tennessee State University proposes to offer a Master of Arts degree in Liberal Arts (MALA) that is an interdisciplinary program that will be located in the College of Liberal Arts. The program will draw from the nine departments and the School of Music and will offer a wide-ranging curriculum that will include cultural, historical, philosophical, geographical, linguistic, artistic, social and political perspectives. As a graduate program centered on interdisciplinary work, the MALA will build on this foundation through the variety of disciplines, skills and broadly-based learning opportunities offered to students in the program. The Liberal Arts MA program will be especially attractive to nontraditional, adult learners who have or have had careers, seek personal and/or professional development and who have an interest in liberal arts.

PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION DATE: Fall 2015

1.1.20A MISSION: The proposed program supports Middle Tennessee State University’s mission to “generate, preserve, and disseminate knowledge and innovation, and especially its efforts to foster life-long learning, personal development, and success.” As a graduate program aimed for the most part at adult learners who have or have had careers, who seek personal and/or professional development, and who have an interest in liberal arts studies, the proposed Liberal Arts MA program aligns with the mission. The proposed program also contributes to the four key areas of the Tennessee Board of Regents’ strategic plan (access, student success, quality, and resourcefulness).

The proposed degree also supports the state’s efforts, as detailed in the THEC 2010-15 Public Agenda for Higher Education, to reach out “to populations previously underserved by Tennessee higher education, particularly adults.” The proposed Liberal Arts MA program will be especially attractive to nontraditional, adult students who are not necessarily focused on gaining specific job skills but rather seek to increase the broad intellectual and social competencies that are at the heart of a liberal arts education.

1.1.20B CURRICULUM: The interdisciplinary degree program will require completion of 30 semester credit hours, including a 15-hour major field core, 12 hours in electives and a 3-hour capstone project or thesis option. Instruction for the MALA proposed program will be delivered on-ground, primarily in a seminar setting, which is ideal for bringing students together with the intent to discuss, question, analyze and learn from course materials.

1.1.20C ACADEMIC STANDARDS: Program admission requires the following: bachelor’s degree, a minimum 2.75 overall undergraduate GPA, and satisfactory test scores. Additionally, students must submit a current resume and a statement of purpose outlining academic interests and goals. Admission decisions are made after a holistic review of all admission materials and are based on the program’s judgment of the applicant’s capacity, suitability and preparation for graduate study. The Admissions Committee reserves the right to request references and/or an interview. Students must meet progression and graduation standards as published annually in the MTSU Graduate Studies catalog.

Projected Program Enrollment and Productivity

Enrollment projections are conservative with the majority of students regularly enrolling on a part-time basis. Full-time students are projected to enroll in nine credits per semester, and part-time students will average 4.5 credits per semester. Graduation rates are based on both full-time and part-time students with full-time students graduating at a faster pace.

Year	Full-Time Enrollment	Part-Time Enrollment	Total Headcount	Graduates
2015	1	6	7	--
2016	2	10	12	1
2017	2	14	16	6
2018	3	20	23	8
2019	4	22	26	12

1.1.20D FACULTY: The proposed program will be supported by graduate faculty in the College of Liberal Arts. Currently, 149 faculty members in the College of Liberal Arts hold graduate faculty status and could be instructors in the proposed program. Initially, close to 20 faculty will be involved in the beginning years of the proposed program. All faculty members represent each of the nine departments and the School of Music housed in the College of Liberal Arts.

1.1.20E LIBRARY RESOURCES: The University has significant library holdings for the proposed Liberal Arts MA program. Additionally, existing departmental budgets within the College of Liberal Arts are adequate to supplement any needed titles. The Walker Library move towards digital humanities will support the proposed interdisciplinary graduate degree program.

1.1.20F ADMINISTRATION/ORGANIZATION: This program will be offered through the College of Liberal Arts, Office of the Dean. A faculty member from the College of Liberal Arts will receive course reassignment to serve as the graduate program director for the proposed Liberal Arts MA program. The program director will be assisted by a steering committee comprised of members’ representative of the curricular diversity serving staggered two-year term appointments.

1.1.20G SUPPORT RESOURCES: Students will have access to a wide range of support resources, including advising support from the Graduate Program Director.

1.1.20H FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT: Facilities and instructional equipment are adequate to support the program. All departments within the College of Liberal Arts have access to both master and seminar/conference classrooms. Because most of the courses for the proposed Liberal Arts MA program will be taught in the late afternoon or evening, sufficient classroom space will be available.

1.1.20I NEED AND DEMAND: As a regional comprehensive university, MTSU strives to meet the demands of the citizens and economy of the middle Tennessee region. MTSU conducted a survey with potential MALA students and they indicated an interest in the proposed degree, especially those students who are seeking an economical master's degree to advance their life-long learning.

Unlike most other graduate programs, the proposed MALA is not designed to provide specific skills and knowledge as preparation for a particular workplace position. Yet, its prospective graduates will hold a strong attraction for prospective employers. In addition, the proposed MALA offers the opportunity for interested students not only to acquire a broad range of skills but also to increase their content knowledge of a subject or enhance their personal development. According to the 2010 THEC Supply Demand Study, almost 75 percent of master's degree graduates in Liberal Arts are employed in Tennessee soon after completing the degree.

1.1.20J NO UNNECESSARY DUPLICATION: Results of a survey with potential MALA students indicate a broad interest in pursuing graduate studies in the Liberal Arts, especially for students who are place-bound and looking for a master's degree to advance their life-long learning.

Graduate programs in liberal arts are offered by the University of Memphis, East Tennessee State University, and Vanderbilt University. The proposed Liberal Arts MA program will provide both affordability as well as academic opportunity for prospective students. Both East Tennessee State University and the University of Memphis have offered programs similar to this currently proposed MALA program since the late 1990s. While these programs began with modest enrollments, over the years their enrollments and degrees have increased.

1.1.20K COOPERATING INSTITUTIONS: N/A

1.120L DIVERSITY AND ACCESS: The proposed degree's flexibility in scheduling and a wide variety of course offerings will appeal to a diverse range of students with varied interests. The proposed Liberal Arts MA degree broadens the opportunity for traditionally under-represented groups to earn a graduate degree.

1.1.20M ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION: The Liberal Arts MA program will be evaluated on student success indicators such as their capstone presentations and theses, course and faculty evaluations. Additionally, the program will be evaluated externally every seven years in accordance with the Quality Assurance Funding Program. Assessment results from both internal and external evaluations will be used for program improvements.

1.1.200 EXTERNAL JUDGMENT: External review of the proposed program was conducted during an institution site visit on November 6, 2014. Dr. Stuart Charme',

Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Rutgers University (Camden) served as the external reviewer. He stated that the proposed program represented a “positive and welcome addition to MTSU’s graduate programs.” Dr. Charme’ recommended approval of the proposed Liberal Arts MA program for the following reasons: “anticipate sufficient regional interest and enrollment in the program to warrant this new degree, as well as the necessary faculty and administrative buy-in to support and maintain it. Overall, the proposed model is well-designed and consistent with comparable programs at peer institutions.”

1.1.20P COST/BENEFIT: The proposed Master’s program will be funded through additional tuition revenue generated by the program and no institutional reallocation of funds is necessary for program implementation.

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