

**Worksession Agenda Item:** IV.A.

**DATE:** April 22, 2015

**SUBJECT:** University of Tennessee, Martin, Master of Arts – Strategic Communication

**ACTION RECOMMENDED:** Approval

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** The University of Tennessee, Martin proposes to offer a Master of Arts degree in Strategic Communication (MASC) that will meet the growing need for qualified candidates with strategic planning and advanced communication skills. Strategic communication refers to the purposeful planning and management of communication to achieve organizational goals. The MASC will be a professionally oriented, executive-style degree program designed to prepare communication professionals for communication management, planning, and production in a broad range of career tracks and organizations, including mass media, for-profit corporations, non-profit organizations, government, and advertising/public relations agencies.

The MASC degree will build upon the existing Communications BA/BS degree programs that are fully accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC). This graduate program is expected to be attractive to students who have begun their initial career in communications and will be delivered in online and hybrid methods that provide flexibility for working professionals to complete the program.

**PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION DATE:** Fall 2015

**1.1.20A MISSION:** The University of Tennessee at Martin’s mission is to provide a “quality undergraduate education” and “meet lifelong educational needs by providing graduate programs, distance-learning opportunities, and other creative endeavors.” The proposed MA in Strategic Communication would further the University’s mission by providing a graduate program to prepare individuals for management jobs. The proposed program also contributes to the three system-wide areas of the University of Tennessee’s strategic plan student access and success, research and economic development and outreach and globalization.

Master of Arts degree in Strategic Communication program is in alignment with the goals outlined in the THEC 2010-15 Public Agenda for Higher Education, specifically the focus on strengthening Tennessee’s Knowledge Economy and increasing the number of graduate degrees awarded to the state’s citizens.

**1.1.20B CURRICULUM:** The proposed degree program will require completion of 33 semester credit hours, including a program core (15 hours) and elective courses (18 hours). Students will also be required to complete a capstone project that must demonstrate thorough understanding of relevant theories, sources, research methods and literature. The capstone project may take a

variety of forms – original research, critical case study, or an in-depth analysis of a topic supported by existing literature. Core and elective courses will be offered either completely online, face-to-face, and hybrid delivery as appropriate for the course material.

**1.1.20C ACADEMIC STANDARDS:** Program admission requires the following: bachelor’s degree, a minimum 2.5 overall undergraduate GPA, and satisfactory GRE test scores. Additionally, students must submit a current resume, a statement of purpose outlining career goals, and three letters of recommendations. Students must meet progression and graduation standards as published annually in the UTM Graduate Studies catalog.

**Projected Program Enrollment and Productivity**

Enrollment and productivity projections are based on ratio of approximately 20 percent full-time enrollment and 80 percent part-time enrollment. This ratio is consistent with other graduate programs at UT Martin. Full-time students should generally graduate in three or four semesters, taking 9-12 credit hours per semester. Part-time students should graduate in approximately six semesters, taking an average of six credit hours per semester.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Full-Time Enrollment</b>	<b>Part-Time Enrollment</b>	<b>Total Headcount</b>	<b>Graduates</b>
<b>2015</b>	2	8	10	--
<b>2016</b>	3	12	15	--
<b>2017</b>	4	16	20	5
<b>2018</b>	5	20	25	8
<b>2019</b>	5	20	25	10

**1.1.20D FACULTY:** MA in Strategic Communication program will be supported by the 10 faculty in the Department of Communication. All faculty involved have a wide range of professional expertise and academic backgrounds covering all the competencies recommended by the Commission on Public Relations Education.

The Department of Communication will require one new full-time, tenure-track faculty member to support the proposed program. The MASC Planning Committee conducted an extensive analysis of the impact of the proposed MASC coursework on the current faculty teaching load. The analysis indicated an additional faculty member is needed in order to maintain the department’s strong undergraduate program while developing an equally strong master’s degree program.

**1.1.20E LIBRARY RESOURCES:** Students will have access to the holdings and resources of the Paul Meek Library, which houses numerous books, newspapers and periodicals related to strategic communication. However, the department has allocated \$6,000 annually to purchase the Communication and Mass Media Complete Database. In addition to library resources, students will also have access to the Department of Communication Reading Room. The departmental reading room also houses numerous trade magazines, journals, and newspapers for student research.

**1.1.20F ADMINISTRATION/ORGANIZATION:** This program will be offered through the Department of Communications in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts. A departmental faculty member will receive course reassignment to serve as the graduate program director for the proposed Strategic Communication MA program. The department is requesting one additional administrative assistant to help with the increased clerical load.

**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. In 2013-14, the department acquired and renovated additional space that added classrooms, studio space and faculty offices.

**1.1.20I NEED AND DEMAND:** The University of Tennessee, Martin has been actively seeking opportunities to expand the graduate program offerings and better serve the west Tennessee region. The Department of Communication conducted surveys with students and alumni to gauge their interest in the proposed Strategic Communication MA program. Both groups indicated a very high interest in a professional degree program that focused on job skills development and communications management.

National and regional workforce data indicate an increasing demand for jobs related to marketing communication and strategic communication. The Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated a strong need for public relations professionals in the future. Nationally, the need for public relations managers is expected to increase by 12 percent between 2012 and 2022. Additionally, the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development also project a favorable job outlook for the state for advertising and promotions managers and public relations managers with demand equaling or exceeding the supply of qualified candidates. The THEC Academic Program Supply and Occupational Demand Projections also support the national and state projections of job growth in the public relations industry. The results of the THEC supply and demand analysis indicated that the marketing career pathway, specifically the Public Relations, Advertising and Applied Communication field as a high-need field in Tennessee.

**1.1.20J NO UNNECESSARY DUPLICATION:** The proposed MASC degree at UT Martin is different in curricular focus and course delivery method from the established communication master's degree programs at other public universities in Tennessee. UTM will be the only university in Tennessee with a master's degree program in strategic communication. UT Martin's program would also target a different geographic service area from the other public universities in Tennessee. The primary areas for student recruitment will include the west Tennessee region outside of Memphis, western Kentucky, the southeast region of Missouri and northeastern Arkansas.

**1.1.20K COOPERATING INSTITUTIONS:** N/A

**1.120L DIVERSITY AND ACCESS:** UT Martin will address its diversity goals in recruitment and student support. The hybrid delivery of both online and on-campus opportunities is designed to provide broad access to the proposed MASC program.

**1.1.20M ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION:** MA in Strategic Communication program will be evaluated on student feedback and faculty evaluations to continually improve the program. Additionally, input on curriculum and program effectiveness from the department's Industry Advisory Board will be used to assure that the program is meeting the demands and needs of employers.

Two accreditation options are available for applied graduate programs in strategic communication: Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication or the Public Relations Society of America Certification in Education for Public Relations. The Department of Communications faculty will fully evaluate these options and decide which option is an appropriate fit for the proposed program.

**1.1.200 EXTERNAL JUDGMENT:** External review of the MA in Strategic Communication program was conducted during an institution site visit on July 8, 2014. Dr. Margaret Duffy, Professor, School of Journalism at the University of Missouri served as the external reviewer. Dr. Duffy recommended approval of the program for the following reasons:

“The administration and faculty of the University of Tennessee at Martin have done an excellent job in analyzing the opportunity to develop a Strategic Communication master's degree. The proposal has demonstrated the need for this type of degree program and shown how it fits with the state of Tennessee's workforce development needs, addresses student demand, and responds to growing demand for strategic communications employees in the western Tennessee region and beyond. A regionally focused MA in Strategic Communication is a good option for UT-Martin and its students.”

**1.1.20P COST/BENEFIT:** The proposed Master's program will be funded through additional tuition revenues generated and institutional reallocation of funds to meet new personnel costs. The program is expected to be revenue neutral by the third year of implementation and will generate net revenue thereafter.

**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.