

**DATE:** May 15, 2020

**SUBJECT:** New Academic Program  
University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
Master of Legal Studies  
(CIP 22.9999 – Legal Professions and Studies, Other)

**ACTION RECOMMENDED:** Approval

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**PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville proposes a Master of Legal Studies (MLS) academic program to add to its existing three-year Juris Doctor (JD) program. The MLS is a newly emerging degree offered by law schools as an alternative to the typical three-year JD. Over 63 American Bar Association accredited law schools have established such programs, including several of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville’s peer and aspirational schools. After taking two required introductory courses designed to help them understand the structure of the American legal system and basic legal analysis, MLS students will take existing law courses alongside current JD students.

Individuals who already hold an undergraduate degree and whose career interests intersect with the law will be the primary target audience for the proposed MLS program. Examples of such individuals include paralegals, healthcare compliance officers, human resources professionals, and social workers, as well as those working in careers pertaining to intellectual property, data privacy, business, real estate, wealth management, and estate planning.

**INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNING BOARD APPROVAL**

The proposed Master of Legal Studies program was approved by the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees on February 19, 2020.

**PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

Summer 2021

**RELEVANCE TO INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND STRATEGIC PLAN**

The primary mission of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville is “to move forward the frontiers of human knowledge and enrich and elevate the citizens of the state of Tennessee, the nation, and the world.” In line with the University’s primary mission, the proposed MLS program will provide the knowledge and skills necessary for individuals whose careers intersect with the law to advance their careers while serving their clients more efficiently.

Consistent with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission’s 2015-2025 State Master Plan, the proposed MLS program will further the goal of addressing the state’s economic development and workforce development needs. The proposed MLS program will benefit the growing field of paralegals, human resource officers, and social workers in Tennessee whose positions intersect with the law.

**CURRICULUM**

The proposed Master of Legal Studies program will require 30 credit hours including 11 credit hours of core classes, 18 credit hours of electives and one credit hour devoted to a written project. The curriculum is designed to provide non-lawyers with the practical and theoretical grounding they will need to understand the legal system. The core courses are designed to provide the foundation of the legal system while the elective courses will allow students to pursue particular areas of interest aligned with their career interests. By fall 2021, the College of Law will offer the core courses and 25 elective courses online.

**PROGRAM PRODUCTIVITY**

Enrollment projections are based on other peer and aspirational law schools that have MLS programs with average enrollments ranging from 19 to 73 students. Originally, UTK’s College of Law projected a conservative enrollment of 10 students beginning in the program. Projected enrollment and graduation rates for the first two years were revised to reflect a possible reduction based on uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Appendix A outlines UTK’s response to the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the proposed MLS program.

	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>
<b>Enrollment</b>	5	6	15	17	17
<b>Graduates</b>	--	3	15	15	15

**PROGRAM DUPLICATION**

The proposed Master of Legal Studies will be the first such program in the State of Tennessee. The MLS is a newly emerging degree program that is being offered by law schools across the United States. Currently, 63 of the 201 law schools accredited by the American Bar Association have established such programs.

**EXTERNAL JUDGEMENT**

An external review of the proposed program was conducted during an institutional site visit on November 3-4, 2019. Clinical Professor of Law Emerita, Deborah McGregor who also was the Founding Director of the Master of Jurisprudence program at Indiana University served as the external reviewer. The site visit included meetings with campus administrators, faculty, prospective students and community partners.

Professor McGregor made a recommendation for the approval of the proposed program and stated “ Non-JD master programs are exploding around the country, which supports adding one for the citizens of Tennessee. Since the College of Law would be implementing the first and only MLS degree in the State, it is needed. Professionals in Tennessee who are

working in those fields where knowledge of the law is relevant to their careers should have the option to gain that knowledge in Tennessee, making them better professionals in their present jobs and more marketable if looking to advance in their chosen fields.”

### **STUDENT DEMAND**

A student interest survey was distributed to current students and working professionals along with a focus group to gauge interest in the proposed Master of Legal Studies program. Fifty-five percent of respondents indicated that they would be interested in completing a MLS degree. Respondents were generally evenly divided on the issue of when (daytime or evening) or how (live or online) they would prefer to pursue the proposed Master of Legal Studies. Additionally, a focus group of members of the Smoky Mountain Paralegal Association were gauged on their interest of an MLS program. The participants unanimously agreed that they and other members of the paralegal association would be interested in the proposed program.

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRAM GRADUATES**

The program is designed to appeal to professionals in non-legal fields whose jobs intersect with the law and would benefit from training from an MLS program but are not interested in pursuing a JD. According to U.S. Department of Labor data, the projected growth rates in fields that would benefit from the proposed program are growing at rates from 5 percent to 15 percent or higher. These job openings include social workers, compliance managers, arbitrators, information security analysts and paralegal/legal assistants. Letters of support are included from Baker, Donelson, Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC and Gentry, Tipton & McLemore.

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

The proposed program will have minimal impact on the College of Law at UTK because most of the courses are already offered through the established JD program. Furthermore, there is excess capacity in current course offerings allowing for MLS students to fill those seats. Several new courses will need to be developed to provide a foundational basis in law for students in the proposed program. Few costs are projected for the proposed MLS program and include adjunct faculty and part-time allocation of a program director. Appendix B outlines the 5-year financial projections for the proposed MLS program which reflects minimal expenditures and revised revenues based on the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

An annual performance review of the proposed program will be conducted for the first five years following program approval. The review will be based on benchmarks established in the approved proposal. At the end of this period, the campus, institutional governing board, and 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 Commission staff. If benchmarks are not met during the monitoring period, the Commission may recommend that the institutional governing board terminate the program. If additional time is needed and requested by the institutional governing board, the Commission may choose to extend the monitoring period.



In light of the current Coronavirus pandemic, THEC is requesting additional information for new academic programs that are slated for the May 15, 2020 Commission meeting agenda. Please submit your response to the questions listed below by April 24, 2020. Any changes to expenditures and/or revenues will require a revised THEC Financial Projections Form.

**Institution:** University of Tennessee, Knoxville

**Academic Program, Degree Designation:** Master of Legal Studies

**Proposed Implementation Date:** Summer 2021

### Questions: Coronavirus Impact on New Academic Programs

#### Overall Program Need

- Is this academic program as relevant as before the pandemic?  
*Yes. If anything, the need for people who understand the legal system is greater than before the pandemic because businesses and individuals will be dealing with the legal ramifications of the pandemic for the foreseeable future.*
- Does this remain the most needed utilization of institutional resources in light of the pandemic?  
*At present, we do not foresee the pandemic adversely impacting institutional resources in a way that would substantially affect the program. The proposed program builds primarily on existing courses and does not impact the plan to offer more online courses.*

#### Implementation Date, Admissions, and Enrollment

- Any projected change in the proposed implementation date for the program?  
*No. The program will be implemented in Summer 2021. The University's Director of Online Learning Programs will continue working with College of Law faculty to develop online content.*
- Will there be any adjustments needed in admission standards? *No.*
- Have enrollment projections shifted for the proposed program? If so, please provide an updated enrollment and graduation table and include an updated financial projections form.  
*Originally, we projected 10 new students in the first year of the program and 12 in the second. Based on the concerns identified, we have cut our projected enrollments by half for each of the first two years. The revised financial estimate form reflects these amended projections. However, it is difficult to predict how the current situation will progress in the coming months. Currently, UT Knoxville has not made any decisions regarding the delivery of online courses in the fall. There will undoubtedly be individuals and companies who may be unable to afford new educational expenditures. The program is not scheduled to be implemented until the summer of 2021, by which time there may be a vaccine available. Additionally, in times of economic recession, student applications to law school and professional programs tend to increase. Although the degree remains highly practical, the most likely reason for any reduced enrollment is the possibility that some employers may be less inclined to pay for employees' educational expenses.*

**Program Delivery**

- What is the current delivery mode of the proposed academic program?  
*Online and in-person. The two introductory courses will be offered online. Some electives available to law students will also be available online. And students may also attend electives in person.*
- Are there plans to change the delivery mode for this program in light of the pandemic?  
*The program will not begin until Summer 2021. At this time, no changes are foreseen.*
- What percentage of the curriculum is devoted to online delivery?  
*While there is a live option, students will have a total or almost-total distance learning option.*

**Staffing and Placements**

- What faculty and staff searches are planned prior to implementing the proposed program? *None.*
- Are any faculty and staff searches currently being advertised? If so, what is the anticipated hire date for these positions? Any challenges in hiring for these positions? *No. N/A*
- If applicable, are there any special considerations that will need to be made for student placements in clinical and/or internship settings? *N/A*

**Accreditation**

- Are there any accreditation considerations in light of the pandemic for the proposed program?  
*No.*

**Fiscal**

- If applicable, are there any renovation and/or equipment purchases that have been affected by the pandemic? *No.*
- How equipped is the proposed program to endure any significant institutional budget cuts?  
*Because the proposed program largely builds on existing resources, there are no special budgetary concerns regarding this program. In light of health and budgetary concerns, the University is currently encouraging units to limit travel in the coming months. Therefore, we have amended the original financial estimate form to reflect a decrease from \$4,000 in travel expenses to \$1,000 for the first two years of the program, which is reflected in the marketing/advertising costs.*

**Other**

- Are there any additional changes/considerations for the proposed academic program due to the pandemic?  
*None anticipated*

**Appendix B**  
**THEC Financial Projections**  
**University of Tennessee, Knoxville: Master of Legal Studies**

	Planning Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
<b>I. Expenditures</b>						
<b>A. One-time Expenditures</b>						
New/Renovated Space <sup>1</sup>	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-
Library	-	-	-	-	-	-
Consultants	1,500	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Sub-Total One-time</b>	\$ 1,500	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>B. Recurring Expenditures</b>						
<b>Personnel</b>						
<b>Administration</b>						
Salary		\$ 5,000	\$ 5,100	\$ 5,202	\$ 5,306	\$ 5,412
Benefits	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Sub-Total Administration</b>	\$ -	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,100.00	\$ 5,202.00	\$ 5,306.00	\$ 5,412.00
<b>Faculty</b>						
Salary		\$ -	\$ 7,500	\$ 7,500	\$ 7,500	\$ 7,500
Benefits	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Sub-Total Faculty</b>	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 7,500	\$ 7,500	\$ 7,500	\$ 7,500
<b>Support Staff</b>						
Salary	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Benefits	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Sub-Total Support Staff</b>	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Graduate Assistants</b>						
Salary	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Benefits	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tuition and Fees* (See Below)	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Sub-Total Graduate Assistants</b>	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Operating</b>						
Travel	\$ -	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 4,161	\$ 4,244	\$ 4,328
Printing	-	2,500	2,550	2,601	2,653	2,706
Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other (Advertising)	-	5,000	5,100	5,202	5,306	5,412
<b>Sub-Total Operating</b>	\$ -	\$ 8,500	\$ 8,650	\$ 11,964	\$ 12,203	\$ 12,446
<b>Total Recurring</b>	\$ -	\$ 13,500	\$ 21,250	\$ 24,666	\$ 25,009	\$ 25,358
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES (A + B)</b>	\$ 1,500	\$ 13,500	\$ 21,250	\$ 24,666	\$ 25,009	\$ 25,358
<b>II. Revenue</b>						
Tuition and Fees <sup>2</sup>		46,950	58,950	152,325	179,520	186,660
Institutional Reallocations <sup>3</sup>	1,500	(33,450)	(37,700)	(127,659)	(154,511)	(161,302)
Federal Grants <sup>4</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	-
Private Grants or Gifts <sup>5</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other <sup>6</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>BALANCED BUDGET LINE</b>	\$ 1,500	\$ 13,500	\$ 21,250	\$ 24,666	\$ 25,009	\$ 25,358