



TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM: I.H.

MEETING DATE: May 15, 2025

SUBJECT: New Academic Program
University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Communication and Information, Bachelor of Science (BS)

ITEM TYPE: Action

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Title and Designation	Communication and Information, Bachelor of Science (BS)
Concentrations / Certifications	No concentrations are proposed.
Accreditation	No programmatic accreditation applicable.
CIP Code and Description	09.9999 (communication, Journalism, and Related Programs, Other) Any instructional program in communication, journalism, and related fields not listed above.
SOC Code and Title	Proposed SOC Code(s): 27-3041 (Editors) 27-3043 (Writers and Authors) 27-3099 (Media and Communication Workers, All Other) 11-2011 (Advertising and Promotions Managers) 11-2032 (Public Relations Manager) 27-3030 (Public Relations Specialists) 27-3043 (Writers and Authors) 27-3099 (Media and Communication Workers, All Other)
Credit Hours	120
Implementation Date	August 1, 2025
Modality and Delivery Site	Fully Online
Department/College	College of Communication and Information
Governing Board Approval Date	February 27-28, 2025

ALIGNMENT WITH STATE MASTER PLAN AND INSTITUTIONAL MISSION/STRATEGIC PLAN

Over 900,000 Tennesseans have earned some college credit but do not have a degree, and the College of Communication and Information (CCI) at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) proposes an online, asynchronous Bachelor of Science (BS) in Communication and Information program designed to appeal to transfer students that will advance Tennessee's higher education completion goals and to meet workforce needs in an occupation expected to grow 6% by 2031

according to Bureau of Labor Statistic data. The proposed Communication and Information, BS will provide comprehensive and representative knowledge and skills from faculty across the college, preparing students for a range of rapidly growing career paths in communications and information systems. UTK's College of Communication and Information currently offers a number of undergraduate programs in four communication disciplines: advertising and public relations, communication studies, information sciences, and journalism and electronic media. The proposed program would offer courses from all four communication disciplines, thereby providing broad skill sets to students that are applicable in many careers and is designed facilitate seamless transfer from all current Tennessee Transfer Pathways (TTPs).

The proposed program aligns with the THEC State Master Plan for Higher Education's goals of student access and completion, family prosperity (affordability and outreach to adults), and the future of work. The proposed program promotes completion by reducing barriers and offering an affordable distance education degree. The program is intended to serve non-traditional and transfer students, and to make attaining a four-year degree more attainable via distance education. Finally, the proposed program will also increase enrollment in a major leading to high-demand jobs. Communication and communicating data are two skills already in wide demand by employers according to the New Foundation Skills of the Digital Economy, a report produced by workforce data firm, Lightcast. Furthermore, the proposed program aligns with the mission of the University of Tennessee System to serve the people of Tennessee "through discover, communication and application of knowledge." The proposed program will prepare students for various communication careers to meet current and future workforce demands.

Additionally, the proposed program addresses the first goal of the UTK vision: Cultivating the Volunteer Experience. The Communication and Information, BS seeks to provide "high-quality educational opportunities for people at every stage of life, whenever and wherever they seek to learn," by offering a flexible, online degree for returning students that is "collaborative, inquiry-based, experiential, affordable, and relevant." The proposed program intends to be "responsive to the needs of learners," and offers "curricular innovations that align with 21st-century workforce needs" while ensuring access "to communities across Tennessee and beyond." The proposed program also aligns with emphasis on deepening and extending the university's ability to connect with Tennesseans as outlined in the fifth goal of the vision: "Embodying the Modern R1, Land Grant University" by offering an accessible online degree program and identifying community needs and activating university resources to meet those needs.

PROGRAM DUPLICATION

Undergraduate programs in communication and adjacent fields are offered at nine public institutions in Tennessee (Austin Peay State University, East Tennessee State University, Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee State University, Tennessee Technological University, University of Memphis, University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, UTK, and University of Tennessee, Martin). However, none of these programs integrate communication studies theory; advertising and public relations; journalism and media; and information sciences in a single program, as these are typically organized as discrete degree programs, making the proposed program distinct from current offerings.

WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT

The Summer 2022 Tennessee Business Leaders Survey found that seven of ten respondents reported an insufficient supply of appropriately trained workers. Lightcast data on the

communication sector indicates that employers are seeking qualified candidates with skills in journalism, marketing, social media strategy and creation, copywriting, and proofreading. The proposed program intends to create graduates with these skills, and to meet the completion goals among students with some college but no degree. Students who complete the proposed degree would be suited for roles such as communication directors, content creators, marketing managers, and social media managers.

Communication and communicating data are two skills in wide demand by employers according to the “New Foundation Skills of the Digital Economy,” as well as a recent LinkedIn report. Additionally, the State of Tennessee created a list of regional in-demand occupations mapped to skill sets required according to employers. Of the Top 30 jobs identified that require a bachelor’s degree, all 30 required moderate to advanced interpersonal skills, service orientation, and persuasive skills, all of which will be honed by the proposed program. Providing students with communication and digital skills allows for greater adaptability in their careers, and the interdisciplinary nature of the program will provide a wide range of skills. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, media and communication positions are expected to grow by 4% through 2032, with openings around 114,300 each year due to growth and other factors (leaving profession, retirement). Some communication roles, particularly those in marketing, will likely experience faster-than-average job growth.

CURRICULUM

The proposed program is designed for transfer students who have completed an Associate of Science, Associate of Arts, Associate of Fine Arts, or Associate of Science in Teaching from a public Tennessee community college and will require an additional 60 credit hours from UTK. Of the 60 required credit hours at UTK, 48 credit hours will be communication and information coursework and 12 credit hours of general electives will be required. Students who enroll without an associate’s degree will be responsible for completing courses to reach 120 credit hours in alignment with the requirements stipulated by UTK’s general education program, the Volunteer Core. Students in the proposed program will receive assistance in securing an internship from the college’s Director of Career Development as well as the Vol Remote Internship program, which matches students interested in remote work with non-profits in need of additional communication, content creation, and social media strategy development assistance.

The proposed program was developed based on current curriculum in the College of Communication and Information with a focus on adapting these courses to fit an online program. The shift to an online, asynchronous degree will also be enhanced by UTK’s partnership with Arizona State University, which has allowed for an expansion of online course offerings across campus. The College has experience with offering online education and has offered an online master’s degree with a concentration in Strategic and Digital Communication since 2020.

PROJECTED ENROLLMENT AND GRADUATION

	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
Enrollment	25	58	86	104	127
Graduates	0	20	41	66	79

STUDENT INTEREST AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

A feasibility study was conducted in Summer 2023 among transfer students to the College of Communication and Information (n=179) between Fall 2020 and Summer 2023. Students were asked if an online degree program in communication and information would have appealed to them. Of the twenty respondents, 88% (N=18) indicated that they would have considered an online asynchronous degree in communication and information.

The College of Communication and Information has an Alumni Board of Visitors to advise on the proposed program. Additionally, the college has established relationships with internship providers, such as Discovery Communications, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and TV and media outlets. Current industry partners include Axle Logistics, WBIR, the Tombras Group, and Insight Global, and the college will continue to leverage these relationships to provide experiential learning opportunities—virtual and in person—to students who enroll in the proposed program. Letters of industry support were provided by: SKDK (a public affairs and political consulting firm), the College of Communication and Information Board of Visitors, Pellissippi State Community College, the Pilot Company, and tnAchieves.

EXTERNAL JUDGMENT

A virtual external review of the proposed program was conducted on November 13, 2024, by Dr. Jennifer Greer, Dean of the College of Communication and Information at the University of Kentucky. The site visit included meetings with campus administrators, support staff, and faculty from UTK, as well as current and potential UTK students and industry partners. Dr. Greer strongly recommended approval of the proposed program, adding, “I see this interdisciplinary online asynchronous degree option as a valuable addition to the strategic goals of all parties to serve the career-readiness needs of Tennesseans.” Furthermore, Dr. Greer assessed that the program “will serve virtually every organization and industry in the state, as CCI graduates are well-prepared and vitally needed to work in roles across myriad fields.” Dr. Greer commended the leadership and faculty for their commitment to the “mission of this degree” that is “a truly interdisciplinary program that will be unique not only in Tennessee, but nationwide.”

PROGRAM COSTS AND REVENUES

The proposed one-time and recurring expenditures as well as revenues for the Bachelor of Science in Communication and Information program are listed in Table 1. The bulk of costs for the proposed program are in faculty and staff resources, including four professor of practice positions over the first five years and an advisor to be hired in Year 2 as the program grows. The program projects being revenue positive in Year 2.

Table 1: Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program

Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program						
One-Time Expenditures						
Category	Planning	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Faculty & Instructional Staff	\$1,000	\$12,000	\$17,000	\$10,000	\$5,000	\$5,000
Non-Instructional Staff						

Graduate Assistants						
Accreditation						
Consultants	\$3,000					
Equipment		\$10,500		\$10,500		
Information Tech						
Library						
Marketing		\$5,000				
Facilities						
Travel						
Other						
<i>Total One-Time Expenditures</i>	<i>\$4,000</i>	<i>\$27,500</i>	<i>\$17,000</i>	<i>\$20,500</i>	<i>\$5,000</i>	<i>\$5,000</i>
Recurring Expenditures						
Category	Planning	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Faculty & Instructional Staff		\$150,000	\$152,250	\$300,000	\$304,500	\$309,067
Non-Instructional Staff			\$62,500	\$63,437	\$64,388	\$65,353
Graduate Assistants						
Accreditation						
Consultants						
Equipment						
Information Tech						
Library						
Marketing			\$12,000	\$12,000	\$12,000	\$12,000
Facilities						
Travel		\$7,500	\$7,500	\$7,500	\$5,000	\$2,500
Other						
<i>Total Recurring Expenditures</i>	<i>\$0</i>	<i>\$157,500</i>	<i>\$234,250</i>	<i>\$382,937</i>	<i>\$385,888</i>	<i>\$391,920</i>
Grand Total (One-Time and Recurring)	\$4,000	\$185,000	\$251,250	\$403,437	\$390,888	\$388,920
Projected Revenues						
Category	Planning	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Tuition		\$280,382	\$640,175	\$962,493	\$1,241,404	\$1,502,002

Grants						
Other						
Total Revenues	\$0	\$280,382	\$640,175	\$962,493	\$1,241,404	\$1,502,002