



TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM: I.C.

MEETING DATE: February 7, 2025

SUBJECT: New Academic Program
Middle Tennessee State University
Legal Studies, Master of Science (MS)

ITEM TYPE: Action

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Title and Designation	Legal Studies, Master of Science (MS)
Concentrations	Anti-Money Laundering, Fraud and Compliance Business Law Entertainment
Accreditation	The institution will seek SACSCOC approval for the proposed program. The college will seek programmatic accreditation through the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB).
CIP Code and Description	22.0000 (Legal Studies, General) A program of study that focuses on law and legal issues from the perspective of the social sciences and humanities.
SOC Code and Title	23-2011 (Paralegals and Legal Assistants) 23-2099 (Legal Support Workers, All Other)
Credit Hours	30
Implementation Date	May 19, 2025
Modality and Delivery Site	Majority Online (Hybrid)
Department/College	Department of Accounting, Jones College of Business; Department of Recording Industries, College of Media and Entertainment
Governing Board Approval Date	December 4, 2024

ALIGNMENT WITH STATE MASTER PLAN AND INSTITUTIONAL MISSION/STRATEGIC PLAN

The proposed Master of Science (MS) in Legal Studies at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) was developed in collaboration with the Nashville School of Law (NSL) to address the growing need for professionals who possess a deep understanding of the American legal system without requiring a Juris Doctor (JD) degree. The program builds on MTSU's expertise in teaching business law through the Jones College of Business, covering legal issue topics in the entertainment industry through the College of Media and Entertainment's Department of Recording Industries, and continuing NSL's century-long commitment to providing legal education to working professionals. Through its three concentrations in Anti-Money Laundering, Fraud, and Compliance; Business Law; and Entertainment, the MS in Legal Studies will prepare graduates to navigate legal and regulatory complexities across various industries effectively.

The proposed program aligns with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) State Master Plan for Higher Education by addressing Tennessee's economic development and workforce needs, specifically the growing demand from business and non-profit entities for expertise in regulatory compliance. This alignment is evidenced by strong support from regional industry leaders and business organizations. The proposed MS in Legal Studies also supports the Master Plan's focus on increasing credential attainment and family prosperity by providing an affordable graduate degree that prepares professionals for versatile career paths across multiple sectors, including financial services, entertainment, healthcare, and compliance.

The proposed program also supports MTSU's institutional mission of providing exceptional academic programs that prepare students to thrive in their chosen professions by providing a high-quality, affordable program; increasing access to post-baccalaureate education for adult learners; and developing a sustainable academic partnership with NSL. The program expands upon MTSU's academic expertise through the AACSB-accredited Jones College of Business and the nationally recognized Department of Recording Industry, both of which are responsive to Middle Tennessee's dynamic business landscape. Additionally, the collaboration with NSL creates a unique opportunity that combines the expertise of both institutions to serve working professionals seeking to enhance their understanding of legal concepts.

PROGRAM DUPLICATION

Currently, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and Vanderbilt University are the only postsecondary institutions in Tennessee that offer a Master of Legal Studies. MTSU's proposed MS in Legal Studies would be the only program offering specialized concentrations in Anti-Money Laundering, Fraud and Compliance; Business Law; and Entertainment. The program also stands apart through its unique partnership with NSL, allowing working professionals to benefit from in-person instruction at NSL's Nashville campus while completing other coursework through flexible delivery methods, creating a distinctive hybrid model serving Middle Tennessee's growing business and entertainment sectors.

WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT

The proposed MS in Legal Studies at MTSU addresses critical workforce development needs in Tennessee's rapidly growing business and entertainment sectors. According to the Nashville Chamber of Commerce 2022 Regional Economic Development Guide, the Nashville/Murfreesboro/Franklin region is expected to see 14% growth over the next decade, with

particularly strong demand for professionals who understand legal and regulatory frameworks. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports labor market trends indicating stronger than average employment growth in occupations aligned with MTSU's proposed concentrations, especially in areas like financial examination and compliance, where job growth is projected at 21% through 2033, significantly faster than average. Additionally, a Hanover Research Study conducted in October 2022 noted that degree completions in legal studies master's programs in the southeast showed consistent growth from 2016 to 2020, outpacing the regional average for all master's degree fields. This aligns with American Bar Association data showing steady growth in non-JD enrollments at law schools over the past decade.

MTSU is strategically positioned to serve Middle Tennessee's expanding workforce needs, particularly in Nashville's thriving entertainment industry and growing financial sector. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (2023) shows that over 480 financial examiners are employed in the Nashville/Murfreesboro/Franklin area alone, while Tennessee employs 1,440 purchasing managers with strong demand for legal knowledge. The program will address workforce gaps by preparing graduates for advancement across multiple industries, from entertainment rights management to regulatory compliance. This is particularly relevant in Nashville's healthcare industry, which according to the Nashville Chamber of Commerce, directly employed 167,919 people in 2020 and has seen \$1.6 billion in investment over the past decade, demonstrating the region's need for professionals who can bridge the gap between legal compliance and business operations.

A recent market demand survey conducted in Summer 2024, gathering responses from current students, alumni, working professionals, and employers through MTSU networks and regional Chambers of Commerce (including Nashville, Rutherford County, Marshall County, and Clarksville), further supports this need. The survey (n=55) found that 85% of respondents were based in Middle Tennessee, with 80% of employers rating an MLS degree as valuable for their employees. The entertainment and hospitality sectors showed particular promise, with 56% of regional respondents either working in or planning to enter these industries, while financial (11%) and healthcare (7%) sectors also demonstrated interest in legal education.

CURRICULUM

The proposed MS in Legal Studies is a 30-credit hour, non-thesis program integrating core legal foundations with specialized concentrations. The program aims to develop professionals who can effectively navigate today's legal and regulatory complexities without requiring a JD degree. Students will gain proficiency in researching legal authorities, analyzing legal issues, and communicating findings through professional memoranda and presentations. The curriculum builds from foundational courses in the U.S. legal system, emphasizing legal skills, values, contracts, and ethics, before advancing to specialized coursework in one of three concentrations in Anti-Money Laundering, Fraud, and Compliance; Business Law; or Entertainment. The program concludes with a culminating professional project where students demonstrate mastery through independent research on an industry-specific legal issue. Through a collaborative teaching model, NSL faculty deliver eight credit hours of core courses, while MTSU faculty teach the remaining 22-credit hours. The program offers a flexible hybrid format combining in-person instruction at NSL's Nashville campus with online and hybrid courses at MTSU to accommodate working professionals.

PROJECTED ENROLLMENT AND GRADUATION

	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
Enrollment	10	21	24	26	28
Graduates	0	9	10	12	13

STUDENT INTEREST AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

In 2024, MTSU conducted a survey to gauge student interest in new academic programs within the Jones College of Business. MTSU distributed the survey to 49 students within the college and received 42 responses resulting in an 86% response rate. Among the MTSU students surveyed, Legal Studies ranked among the top three preferred programs, indicating interest in pursuing this type of advanced degree. In addition to surveying local student demand, American Bar Association (ABA) research indicates that in the southeastern United States from 2016-2020, student demand for Master of Legal Studies degrees has grown faster than the regional average for all master's degree fields.

Letters of support were provided by AllianceBernstein, the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Nashville School of Law and spoke to the critical need for professionals with advanced legal knowledge who can navigate complex regulatory environments without requiring a JD degree. Industry partners emphasized the growing demand for these skills across multiple sectors and expressed strong interest in hiring graduates from the proposed program who will be equipped to address compliance challenges and support legal operations in various business settings.

EXTERNAL JUDGMENT

An external review of the proposed program was conducted on November 12 and 13, 2024, by Cynthia Alkon, Professor of Law and Director of the Criminal Law, Justice, and Policy Program at Texas A&M University School of Law. The site visit included tours of MTSU and NSL facilities and meetings with university leadership, faculty, industry partners, and prospective students and alumni. Professor Alkon strongly endorsed the program, stating it was "thoughtfully designed and based on regional needs for training for jobs." She emphasized that the program is "appropriately distinctive" from existing programs in Tennessee, noting it is "the only program of its kind in this part of Tennessee" and, given the region's growing economy, "fills a particular need for employers and prospective students in the area."

The reviewer highlighted the program's institutional capacity, noting that the faculty's qualifications and level of expertise are "qualified and more than adequate," and she commended MTSU's commitment to additional tenure-track faculty hires to support the program. She emphasized the program's alignment with workforce needs, particularly in the region's key sectors, including healthcare, logistics, music/entertainment, hospitality, advanced manufacturing, and information technology. Professor Alkon noted that all three concentrations are "well suited to these business interests and should help to drive enrollments," with support from local employers who indicated they would provide tuition reimbursement for the program. Overall, the reviewer strongly supported program approval, noting that both MTSU and NSL demonstrated the necessary academic expertise, institutional resources, and strategic planning to successfully launch and sustain the program.

PROGRAM COSTS AND REVENUES

The proposed expenditures for the MS in Legal Studies are listed in Table 1 below. Start-up costs are minimal, and most expenditures are for faculty salaries, information technology, and marketing. The Departments of Accounting and Recording Industry plan to hire new faculty lines in Year 2 (2026-27) and will also hire two adjuncts per semester. These faculty hires will serve other existing programs in addition to the proposed Master of Legal Studies, and their full salaries and benefits are included in costs despite the actual service across programming. MTSU plans to transition a current faculty member to serve as the graduate program director, who will receive a course reassignment and a summer stipend that varies based on student enrollment. An executive assistant will be hired in Year 3 when enrollment reaches 25 students. A 3% cost of living increase is factored in for instructional and non-instructional staff. Starting in the second semester, MTSU will pay for room rental at NSL and provide mileage reimbursement for MTSU faculty teaching at NSL facilities.

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						
Non-Instructional Staff						
Graduate Assistants						
Accreditation	\$1,000					
Consultants	\$4,000					
Equipment						
Information Tech			\$5,000			\$5,000
Library						
Marketing	\$5,000					
Facilities						
Travel						
Other						
<i>Total One-Time Expenditures</i>	<i>\$10,000</i>	<i>\$0</i>	<i>\$5,000</i>	<i>\$0</i>	<i>\$0</i>	<i>\$5,000</i>
Recurring Expenditures						
Category	Planning	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Faculty & Instructional Staff		\$4,306	\$281,902	\$290,359	\$299,070	\$308,042
Non-Instructional Staff				\$75,900	\$78,177	\$80,522
Graduate Assistants						
Accreditation						
Consultants						
Equipment						
Information Tech						
Library						
Marketing						
Facilities		\$3,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000
Travel		\$1,809	\$1,809	\$1,809	\$1,809	\$1,809
Other						

<i>Total Recurring Expenditures</i>	\$0	\$9,115	\$289,711	\$374,068	\$385,056	\$396,373
Grand Total (One-Time and Recurring)	\$10,000	\$9,115	\$294,711	\$374,068	\$385,056	\$401,373
Projected Revenues						
Category	Planning	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Tuition		\$26,040	\$136,710	\$153,636	\$158,844	\$164,052
Grants						
Other						
Total Revenues	\$0	\$26,040	\$136,710	\$153,636	\$158,844	\$164,052