



# Tennessee Higher Education Commission

## AGENDA

### Spring Quarterly Meeting

Nashville Room, William R. Snodgrass Tennessee Tower

May 15, 2026, 9:00 a.m. CDT

#### Call to Order

#### Adoption of Agenda

#### Public Comment

**Approval of Minutes:** February 20, 2026, Winter Quarterly Meeting

#### Chair's Report

#### Executive Director's Report

#### Institution Spotlight – Southern College of Optometry

#### Consent Calendar

- I. Postsecondary State Authorization (*Action Item*)
  - A. Authorization of New Institutions
  - B. Optional Expedited Authorization

#### Regular Calendar

- I. Legislative Update (*Information Item*)
- II. Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation Revenue Update (*Information Item*)
- III. New Academic Programs (*Action Items*)
  - A. University of Tennessee, Knoxville: Bioinformatics, Bachelor of Science (BS)
  - B. University of Tennessee, Knoxville: Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management, Master of Science (MS)
  - C. Austin Peay State University: Athletic Training, Master of Science in Athletic Training (MSAT)
  - D. East Tennessee State University: Hospitality and Tourism Management, Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA)
  - E. East Tennessee State University: Environment, Health, and Disaster Science, Master of Science (MS)
  - F. Middle Tennessee State University: Mechatronic Systems Engineering, Master of Science (MS)
  - G. Tennessee Technological University: Integrative Biology, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

- IV. Tuition and Fee Policy (*Action Item*)
  - A. FY2026-27 Binding Tuition and Fee Policy
  - B. FY2026-27 Separate Tuition and Fee Policy Requests
- V. Focused Baccalaureate Degrees (*Information Item*)
- VI. Other Business



# Tennessee Higher Education Commission

## AGENDA

Access, Academics, and Student Success Committee  
Nashville Room, William R. Snodgrass Tennessee Tower  
May 14, 2026 9:00 a.m. CDT

**Committee Members:** Chairwoman Whitney Allmon, Tre Hargett, Sara Morrison, Will Perry,  
Mike Ragsdale, Tara Scarlett, and Charles Wood

### Call to Order

### Adoption of Agenda

### Public Comment

**Approval of Minutes:** February 19, 2026, Meeting

### Regular Calendar

Binder

Tab

- I. New Academic Programs (*Action Item*)
  - RCIII.A. A. University of Tennessee, Knoxville: Bioinformatics, Bachelor of Science (BS)
  - B. University of Tennessee, Knoxville: Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management, Master of Science (MS)
  - RCIII.B. C. Austin Peay State University: Athletic Training, Master of Science in Athletic Training (MSAT)
  - RCIII.C. D. East Tennessee State University: Hospitality and Tourism Management, Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA)
  - RCIII.D. E. East Tennessee State University: Environment, Health, and Disaster Science, Master of Science (MS)
  - RCIII.E. F. Middle Tennessee State University: Mechatronic Systems Engineering, Master of Science (MS)
  - RCIII.F. G. Tennessee Technological University: Integrative Biology, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
  - RCIII.G.
- II. Postsecondary State Authorization (*Action Item*)
  - CCI.A. A. Authorization of New Institutions
  - CCI.B. B. Optional Expedited Authorization
- III. Other Business

**TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION**

**Access, Academics, and Student Success Committee**

Minutes of the Access, Academics, and Student Success Committee Meeting

Tennessee Board of Regents – Boardroom, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor

1 Bridgestone Park

Nashville, TN

February 19, 2026

Chairwoman Allmon called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m.

| <b>Member</b>   | <b>PRESENT</b> | <b>ABSENT</b> |
|---|----------------|---------------|
| Chairwoman Whitney Allmon                             | <b>X</b>       |               |
| Commissioner Will Perry                               | <b>X</b>       |               |
| Commissioner Mike Ragsdale                            | <b>X</b>       |               |
| Commissioner Tara Scarlett                            |                | <b>X</b>      |
| Commissioner Charles Wood                             | <b>X</b>       |               |
| Secretary Tre Hargett                                 | <b>X</b>       |               |
| Nathan James, Designee for Commissioner Sara Morrison | <b>X</b>       |               |

At the start of the meeting there were six total members and five voting members present.

**Adoption of Agenda**

Commissioner Ragsdale made a motion to adopt the agenda. Chairwoman Allmon seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**Public Comment**

There were no public comments.

**Approval of Minutes: November 12, 2025, Committee Meeting**

Commissioner Ragsdale made a motion to adopt the November 12, 2025, Committee Meeting Minutes. Secretary Hargett seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**AGENDA ITEMS**

**I. Postsecondary State Authorization (*Action Item*)**

Chairwoman Allmon stated that without objection, the Committee would vote on the items as a set. Dr. Stephanie Bellard-Chase, Senior Director of Postsecondary State Authorization, provided an overview of the authorization of new institutions and the optional expedited authorizations.

Commissioner Ragsdale made a motion to approve the Postsecondary State Authorizations. Secretary Hargett seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

## II. **New Academic Programs (*Action Items*)**

Dr. Katherine Brackett, Senior Director of Academic Affairs, provided an overview of the proposed new academic programs and introduced the speakers.

### A. **Middle Tennessee State University, Film and Television, Master of Fine Arts (MFA)**

Dr. Amy Aldridge, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, presented information on the Film and Television Master of Fine Arts program, which prepares students to communicate dramatic information, ideas, moods, and feelings through the creation and production of films and videos.

Committee members asked questions, and a discussion was held. Professor Allie Sultan, Professor of Media Arts and Program Director for the Master of Fine Arts, collaborated with Dr. Aldridge to address the Committee's questions. Chairwoman Allmon made a motion to approve the Film and Television, Master of Fine Arts program. Commissioner Ragsdale seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

### B. **Southwest Tennessee Community College, Artificial Intelligence, Associate of Applied Science (AAS)**

Dr. Jothany Reed, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for the Tennessee Board of Regents, provided an overview of the Artificial Intelligence, Associate of Applied Science program that focuses on symbolic inference, representation, and the simulation of human learning and reasoning by computers and software. Dr. Tracy Hall, President of Southwest Tennessee Community College, gave closing remarks on the program.

Committee members asked questions, and a discussion was held. Dr. Jose E. da Silva, Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs; Dr. Eddie Baker, Interim Associate Vice President for Workforce, Career, and Continuing Education; and Dr. Aaron Jagers, Associate Professor and Department Head, Technologies, together with Dr. Reed and Dr. Hall, addressed the Committee's questions. Secretary Hargett made a motion to approve the Artificial Intelligence, Associate of Applied Science program. Commissioner Ragsdale seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

### C. **Tennessee Technological University, Master of Social Work (MSW)**

Dr. John Liu, Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, provided an overview of the Master of Social Work program that prepares students for the professional practice of social welfare administration.

Committee members asked questions, and a discussion was held. Dr. Steven Seiler, Professor of Sociology and Social Work and Director of the Center for Addiction Prevention and Support, collaborated with Dr. Liu in addressing the Committee's questions. Chairwoman Allmon made a motion to approve the Master of Social Work

program. Commissioner Ragsdale seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**D. University of Memphis, Applied Science, Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS)**

Dr. David Russomanno, Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost, provided an overview of the Applied Science, Bachelor of Applied Science program that prepares students for employment and advancement in high-demand technical fields.

Committee members asked questions, and a discussion was held. Dr. Russell J. Deaton, Executive Director of The Polytechnic at the University of Memphis, collaborated with Dr. Russomanno in addressing the Committee's questions. Chairwoman Allmon made a motion to approve the Applied Science, Bachelor of Applied Science program. Commissioner Ragsdale seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed with four ayes and one abstention from Secretary Hargett.

**III. Quality Assurance Funding (*Action Item*)**

Dr. Julie Roberts, Chief Academic Officer, provided an overview of the Quality Assurance Funding standards. Committee members asked questions, and a discussion was held. Dr. Brackett collaborated with Dr. Roberts in addressing the Committee's questions.

Secretary Hargett emphasized that reports and data should clearly inform decision-making and drive improvements. He further requested a report highlighting at least one survey metric with recommended improvements based on the insights derived from that data.

Chairwoman Allmon made a motion to approve the Quality Assurance Funding. Secretary Hargett seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**IV. Other Business**

There was no other business.

**Next Meeting**

May 2026

---

**Chairwoman Whitney Allmon**



# Tennessee Higher Education Commission

## AGENDA

### Finance and Operations Committee

Nashville Room, William R. Snodgrass Tennessee Tower

May 14, 2026, 1:00 p.m. CDT

**Committee Members:** Chairman David Lillard, Julia Dieter, Jimmy Matlock, Jason Mumpower, John Rader, Robert Smith, and Vernon Stafford

#### Call to Order

#### Adoption of Agenda

#### Public Comment

**Approval of Minutes:** February 19, 2026, Meeting

#### Regular Calendar

Binder

Tab

- I. Tennessee State University Quarterly Update (*Information Item*)
- RCIV.A. II. FY2026-27 Binding Tuition and Fee Policy (*Action Item*)
- III. Other Business

**TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION**

**Finance and Operations Committee**

Minutes of the Finance and Operations Committee Meeting

Tennessee Board of Regents

Boardroom, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor

1 Bridgestone Park

Nashville, TN

February 19, 2026

Treasurer Lillard called the meeting to order at 3:02 p.m.

| <b>Member</b>                     | <b>PRESENT</b> | <b>ABSENT</b> |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Chairman David H. Lillard, Jr.    | X              |               |
| Commissioner Julia Dieter         | X              |               |
| Commissioner Jimmy Matlock        | X              |               |
| Comptroller Jason Mumpower        |                | X             |
| Commissioner John Rader           | X              |               |
| Commissioner Bob Smith            | X              |               |
| Commissioner Vernon Stafford, Jr. | X              |               |

At the start of the meeting, there were six voting members present.

**Adoption of Agenda**

Commissioner Stafford made a motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Smith seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**Public Comment**

There were no public comments.

**Approval of Minutes: November 12, 2025, Meeting**

Commissioner Stafford made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 12, 2025, meeting. Commissioner Smith seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**I. Columbia State Community College Campus Master Plan (*Action Item*)**

Dr. Janet Smith, President of Columbia State Community College, introduced Ms. Lily Berrios from the Sizemore Group. Ms. Berrios presented the Columbia State Community College campus master plan, outlining priorities for each campus location.

Committee members asked questions, and a discussion was held. Commissioner Stafford made a motion to approve the Columbia State Community College campus master plan. Commissioner Smith seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**II. Pellissippi State Community College Campus Master Plan (*Action Item*)**

Mr. Art Lidsky of Dober Lidsky Mathey presented the Pellissippi State Community College campus master plan, highlighting proposed space needs and priorities across multiple campuses.

Committee members asked questions, and a discussion was held. Treasurer Lillard made a motion to approve the Pellissippi State Community College campus master plan. Commissioner Matlock seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**III. Transmission of FY2025-26 Revised Operating Budgets (*Action Item*)**

Mr. Russell VanZomeren, Senior Director of Fiscal Policy, provided an overview of the revised operating budgets for higher education, highlighting efforts to ensure consistency across institutions in all revenue and expenditure categories.

Committee members asked questions, and a discussion was held.

Treasurer Lillard requested that the Committee receive quarterly reports on Tennessee State University's financial status.

Commissioner Matlock made a motion to approve the transmission of FY2025-26 revised operating budgets. Commissioner Stafford seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**IV. Outcomes-Based Funding Formula: Five Year Review Update (*Information Item*)**

Mr. VanZomeren provided an update on the Outcomes-Based Funding formula, noting two key improvements: shifting on-time completion rates from six years to four years and introducing a workforce development premium.

**V. Other Business**

There was no other business discussed.

The meeting adjourned at 4:19 p.m.

**NEXT FINANCE AND OPERATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING:**

May 2026

---

**Chairman David H. Lillard, Jr.**

**TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION**

Minutes of the Winter Quarterly Commission Meeting

Tennessee Board of Regents, Boardroom, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor

1 Bridgestone Park

Nashville, TN

February 20, 2026

Chairwoman Scarlett called the meeting to order at 8:59 a.m. CST.

| <b>Member</b>   | <b>PRESENT</b> | <b>ABSENT</b> |
|---|----------------|---------------|
| Chairwoman Tara Scarlett                              | <b>X</b>       |               |
| Commissioner Whitney Allmon                           | <b>X</b>       |               |
| Commissioner Julia Dieter                             | <b>X</b>       |               |
| Commissioner Jimmy Matlock                            | <b>X</b>       |               |
| Commissioner Will Perry                               | <b>X</b>       |               |
| Commissioner John Rader                               |                | <b>X</b>      |
| Commissioner Mike Ragsdale                            | <b>X</b>       |               |
| Commissioner Robert Smith                             | <b>X</b>       |               |
| Commissioner Vernon Stafford, Jr.                     | <b>X</b>       |               |
| Commissioner Charles Wood                             | <b>X</b>       |               |
| Secretary Tre Hargett                                 | <b>X</b>       |               |
| Treasurer David H. Lillard, Jr.                       | <b>X</b>       |               |
| Nathan James, Designee for Commissioner Sara Morrison | <b>X</b>       |               |
| Comptroller Jason Mumpower                            |                | <b>X</b>      |

At the start of the meeting, there were 11 voting members and 12 total members present.

**Adoption of Agenda**

Commissioner Perry made a motion to adopt the agenda. Secretary Hargett seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**Institution Report - Columbia State Community College**

Dr. Janet Smith, President of Columbia State Community College, accompanied by Dr. Amy Spears Bridges, provided an overview of the institution, including its history, mission, vision, and strategic pillars. Dr. Smith also presented enrollment and population trends, highlighting student progress and retention metrics. Dr. Smith emphasized the institution's partnerships with the Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology and the broader community, noting several recently awarded grants.

Commission members asked questions, and a discussion was held.

**Public Comments**

There were no public comments.

**Approval of Minutes: November 12, 2025, Fall Quarterly Meeting  
January 16, 2026, Special Called Meeting**

Commissioner Wood made a motion to approve the minutes of both the November 12, 2025, Fall Quarterly Meeting and the January 16, 2026, Special Called Meeting. Commissioner Stafford seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**Chair’s Report**

Chairwoman Scarlett opened her remarks by thanking the Tennessee Board of Regents for hosting the Commission and committee meetings. Chairwoman Scarlett stated that the agenda action items are representative of Tennessee’s competitiveness in the higher education and labor market. Chairwoman Scarlett emphasized that lottery funds serve as foundational infrastructure for building a successful workforce and extend beyond their role as financial aid.

**Executive Director’s Report**

Dr. Steven Gentile, Executive Director, provided a legislative update, introduced new staff members, and outlined priorities for the coming year, including institutional-level implementation of the strategic plan. Dr. Gentile discussed the Direct Admissions Pilot Program and briefed the Commission on the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges accreditation regarding new “bachelor” degree programs capped at 90 credit hours, noting that such programs cannot be formally designated as bachelor’s degrees and are not currently offered in Tennessee.

**Consent Calendar**

Chairwoman Scarlett noted that there were two items on the consent calendar and that without objection, the items would be voted on as a slate. Treasurer Lillard made a motion to approve the consent calendar. Commissioner Allmon seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**Regular Calendar**

- I. **New Academic Programs (*Action Item*)**
  - A. **Middle Tennessee State University, Film and Television, Master of Fine Arts (MFA)**
  - B. **Southwest Tennessee Community College, Artificial Intelligence Technology, Associate of Applied Science (AAS)**
  - C. **Tennessee Technological University, Master of Social Work (MSW)**
  - D. **University of Memphis, Applied Science, Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS)**

Chairwoman Scarlett stated that without objection, the Commission could vote on the four new academic programs as a slate. Commissioner Allmon provided an overview of the four new academic programs and the Access, Academics, and Student Success Committee’s recommendation for approval.

Secretary Hargett made a motion to approve the four new academic programs. Commissioner Ragsdale seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

- II. **Columbia State Community College Campus Master Plan (*Action Item*)**

Treasurer Lillard provided an overview of the proposed Columbia State Community College campus master plan and the Finance and Operation Committee’s recommendation for approval.

Treasurer Lillard made a motion to approve the Columbia State Community College campus master plan. Commissioner Stafford seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**III. Pellissippi State Community College Campus Master Plan (*Action Item*)**

Treasurer Lillard provided an overview of the proposed Pellissippi State Community College campus master plan and the committee's recommendation for approval.

Treasurer Lillard made a motion to approve the Pellissippi State Community College campus master plan. Commissioner Ragsdale seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**IV. Transmission of FY2025-26 Revised Operating Budgets (*Action Item*)**

Treasurer Lillard provided an overview of the proposed transmission of FY2025-26 revised operating budgets and the committee's recommendation for approval.

Treasurer Lillard made a motion to approve the transmission of FY2025-26 revised operating budgets. Commissioner Stafford seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**V. Quality Assurance Funding Standards (*Action Item*)**

Commissioner Allmon provided an overview of the Quality Assurance Funding standards and the committee's recommendation for approval. Commission members asked questions, and a discussion was held. Dr. Julie Roberts, Chief Academic Officer, answered questions from Commission members.

Commissioner Smith asked to receive regular reporting on the new formula's implementation and how it is being applied annually at the fall meeting. Commissioner Smith requested a mapping of how the Quality Assurance Funding standards fit within the Master Plan.

Chairwoman Scarlett made a motion to approve the Quality Assurance Funding standards. Commissioner Smith seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**VI. Lottery Program Memorandum Overview (*Information Item*)**

Dr. Gentile provided an overview of lottery funding projections and the budget that is currently under review by the Governor. He noted that the projections are conservative and anticipate a \$1.4 million deficit for the next fiscal year. Dr. Gentile stated that the deficit would be covered with revenue from sports wagering and construction funds, lottery reserves, and the general short fall revenue, while cautioning that use of the general shortfall reserves requires repayment by the agency. Commission members asked questions, and a discussion was held.

Dr. Gentile then introduced Ms. Paige Elliott, Acting Chief Strategy Officer, who presented an overview of the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship Program, consisting of 13 programs. Ms. Elliott provided a high-level review of the five largest programs: HOPE Scholarship, Dual Enrollment Grant, TN Promise, TN Reconnect, and the Wilder-Naifeh Technical Skills Grant. Commission

members asked questions, and a discussion was held.

Treasurer Lillard requested that staff review program effectiveness, including completion rates, alignment with workforce needs, and evaluation of relevant endowment funds.

**VII. Other Business**

There was no other business.

Chairwoman Scarlett adjourned the meeting at 11:06 a.m.

**NEXT THEC COMMISSION MEETING:**

Friday, May 15, 2026

---

**THEC Chairwoman Tara Scarlett**

---

**THEC Secretary Whitney Allmon**



# TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

CONSENT CALENDAR ITEM: I.A.

**MEETING DATE:** May 15, 2026  
**SUBJECT:** Postsecondary State Authorization  
Authorization of New Institutions  
**ITEM TYPE:** Action

---

## BACKGROUND

The Commission, under the Tennessee Higher Education Authorization Act of 2016, as amended, has the “power and duty” to act upon applications for authorization of postsecondary educational institutions. For the institutions listed below, applications have been reviewed, site visits have been performed, and staff has determined that all necessary documentation and bonds have been secured. In accordance with Rule 1540-01-02-.07(2)(d), the Executive Director granted these institutions provisional initial authorization subject to review and ratification by the Commission. These institutions are being recommended for Regular Authorization.

**A. Career Academy** **Memphis, TN**  
3355 Poplar Avenue, Suite 100G, Memphis, Tennessee 38111

**Corporate Structure:** Limited Liability Company (LLC)  
**Accreditation:** None  
**Title IV Funding:** No

### Change of Ownership:

Career Academy is owned by Duane Hutcheson and Tabitha Hutcheson. The institution was purchased from Brenda Woodruff on December 17, 2024. The institution is a Limited Liability Company and has been authorized by THEC since November 18, 2004.

Career Academy is seeking to register one revised program. The program will be offered in a residential format. Instruction will be provided by the faculty from their authorized location in Memphis, Tennessee.

1. **Program:** C.N.A. Training Program (Revised)  
**Credential Awarded:** Certificate of Completion  
**Length of Program:** 120 Contact Hours  
1 Month Full-Time  
1.5 Months Part-Time

**License/Certification Required for Employment:** Certified Nurse Aide

**Licensing Board/Agency:** Tennessee Department of Health/Division of Healthcare Facilities

**B. Cure Advanced Aesthetics Institute** **Cordova, TN**  
46 Timber Creek Drive, Cordova, Tennessee 38018

**Corporate Structure:** S-Corporation  
**Accreditation:** National Accrediting Commission of Career Arts & Sciences (NACCAS)

**Title IV Funding:** Yes

Cure Advanced Aesthetics Institute is seeking to register one new program. The program will be offered in a residential format. Instruction will be provided by the faculty from their authorized location in Cordova, Tennessee.

1. **Program:** Esthetics  
**Credential Awarded:** Certificate  
**Length of Program:** 750 Contact Hours  
6 Months

**License/Certification Required for Employment:** Esthetician

**Licensing Board/Agency:** Tennessee Board of Cosmetology and Barber Examiners



# TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

---

**CONSENT CALENDAR ITEM: I.B.**

**MEETING DATE:** May 15, 2026  
**SUBJECT:** Postsecondary State Authorization  
Authorization of New Institutions  
**ITEM TYPE:** Action

---

## **BACKGROUND**

The Commission, under the Tennessee Higher Education Authorization Act of 2016, as amended, has the “power and duty” to act upon applications for authorization of postsecondary educational institutions. For the institution listed below, the application has been reviewed, and staff has determined that all necessary documentation and bonds have been secured. In accordance with Rule 1540-01-02-.07(2)(d), the Executive Director granted this institution provisional optional expedited authorization subject to review and ratification by the Commission. This institution is being recommended for Optional Expedited Authorization.

## **OPTIONAL EXPEDITED AUTHORIZED LOCATIONS (1)**

1 Chamberlain University

Nashville, TN



# TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

---

**REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM: I.**

**MEETING DATE:** May 15, 2026  
**SUBJECT:** Legislative Update  
**ITEM TYPE:** Information

---

## **PRESENTATION**

Lou Hanemann, Chief of External Relations, and Colleen Ellis, Director of State Government Relations, will present an update on key legislation passed during the 2026 Session of the 114th General Assembly pertinent to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and the statewide higher education enterprise.



# TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

---

**REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM: II.**

**MEETING DATE:** May 15, 2026

**SUBJECT:** Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation Revenue Update

**ITEM TYPE:** Information

---

## **BACKGROUND**

THEC staff will present an overview of the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation's current and projected future revenues.



April 15, 2026

The Honorable Bill Lee  
Governor, State of Tennessee  
State Capitol, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Nashville, Tennessee 37243

Dear Governor Lee:

The Tennessee Education Lottery Corporation is proud to present the transfer amounts for the third quarter of Fiscal Year 2026. With this transfer, the total funding for education related programs in Tennessee, including funds used for scholarships, grants and after-school programs is more than \$8.28 billion.

**Quarter Ending 3/31/2026**

|                                |                     |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Lottery for Education Proceeds | <u>\$93,792,000</u> |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|

**Fiscal Year 2026 - Year to Date**

|                                |               |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| Lottery for Education Proceeds | \$319,991,000 |
|--------------------------------|---------------|

|                               |                      |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| After School Program Proceeds | <u>\$ 12,178,000</u> |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|

|                                |                             |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Total Education Funding</b> | <u><u>\$332,169,000</u></u> |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|

**Inception to Date**

|                                |                 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| Lottery for Education Proceeds | \$7,971,549,000 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|

|                               |                       |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| After School Program Proceeds | <u>\$ 314,845,000</u> |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|

|                                |                               |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Total Education Funding</b> | <u><u>\$8,286,394,000</u></u> |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|

Additional details about the funds generated by the Lottery since inception include:

- \* More than \$33.4 billion in gross ticket revenues
- \* More than \$22.6 billion in prizes won by players
- \* More than \$2.1 billion paid in retailer commissions

Thank you for your ongoing support. With your help, this momentum will continue for years to come.

My best regards,

Rebecca Paul  
President and CEO

Enclosures

Tennessee Education Lottery Corporation

|                                       | Fiscal Year 2026<br>Year to date<br>at<br>March 31, 2026 | First<br>Quarter Ended<br>September 30, 2025 | Second<br>Quarter Ended<br>December 31, 2025 | Third<br>Quarter Ended<br>March 31, 2026 |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| <b>REVENUES</b>                       |  |  |  |  |
| Instant Tickets                       | \$ 1,116,214,000   | \$ 370,297,000                               | \$ 381,978,000                               | \$ 363,939,000                           |
| Cash 3                                | \$ 56,240,000  | \$ 18,856,000                                | \$ 19,371,000                                | \$ 18,013,000                            |
| Cash 4                                | \$ 38,938,000  | \$ 12,978,000                                | \$ 13,541,000                                | \$ 12,419,000                            |
| Tennessee Cash                        | \$ 7,097,000   | \$ 2,784,000                                 | \$ 2,217,000                                 | \$ 2,096,000                             |
| Keno To Go                            | \$ 7,138,000   | \$ 2,391,000                                 | \$ 2,470,000                                 | \$ 2,277,000                             |
| Daily Tennessee Jackpot               | \$ 6,158,000   | \$ 2,036,000                                 | \$ 2,151,000                                 | \$ 1,971,000                             |
| Powerball                             | \$ 119,296,000   | \$ 53,826,000                                | \$ 47,901,000                                | \$ 17,569,000                            |
| Mega Millions                         | \$ 41,598,000  | \$ 12,482,000                                | \$ 17,933,000                                | \$ 11,183,000                            |
| Cash 4 Life                           | \$ 6,573,000   | \$ 2,612,000                                 | \$ 2,544,000                                 | \$ 1,417,000                             |
| Lotto America                         | \$ 8,304,000   | \$ 2,268,000                                 | \$ 2,858,000                                 | \$ 3,178,000                             |
| Millionaire for Life                  | \$ 2,273,000   | \$ -   | \$ -   | \$ 2,273,000                             |
| <b>Total Revenues</b>                 | <b>\$ 1,409,829,000</b>                                  | <b>\$ 480,530,000</b>                        | <b>\$ 492,964,000</b>                        | <b>\$ 436,335,000</b>                    |
| Less: Tickets Provided as Prizes      | \$ (97,982,000)  | \$ (32,634,000)                              | \$ (33,501,000)                              | \$ (31,847,000)                          |
| <b>Net Ticket Revenue</b>             | <b>\$ 1,311,847,000</b>                                  | <b>\$ 447,896,000</b>                        | <b>\$ 459,463,000</b>                        | <b>\$ 404,488,000</b>                    |
| <b>Other Revenue</b>                  | <b>\$ 6,703,000</b>                                      | <b>\$ 2,457,000</b>                          | <b>\$ 2,038,000</b>                          | <b>\$ 2,208,000</b>                      |
| <b>TOTAL LOTTERY PROCEEDS</b>         | <b>\$ 1,318,550,000</b>                                  | <b>\$ 450,353,000</b>                        | <b>\$ 461,501,000</b>                        | <b>\$ 406,696,000</b>                    |
| <b>DIRECT EXPENSES</b>                |  |  |  |  |
| Prize Winnings                        | \$ 854,296,000   | \$ 289,824,000                               | \$ 297,815,000                               | \$ 266,657,000                           |
| Retailer Commissions                  | \$ 91,790,000  | \$ 31,295,000                                | \$ 32,084,000                                | \$ 28,411,000                            |
| Gaming Contractor Fees                | \$ 24,800,000  | \$ 8,362,000                                 | \$ 8,634,000                                 | \$ 7,804,000                             |
| <b>Total Direct Expense</b>           | <b>\$ 970,886,000</b>                                    | <b>\$ 329,481,000</b>                        | <b>\$ 338,533,000</b>                        | <b>\$ 302,872,000</b>                    |
| <b>NON-DIRECT EXPENSE</b>             |  |  |  |  |
| Advertising & Other Gaming            | \$ 10,575,000  | \$ 3,033,000                                 | \$ 3,452,000                                 | \$ 4,090,000                             |
| Operating & Other Expenses            | \$ 17,098,000  | \$ 5,725,000                                 | \$ 5,431,000                                 | \$ 5,942,000                             |
| <b>Non-Direct Expenses</b>            | <b>\$ 27,673,000</b>                                     | <b>\$ 8,758,000</b>                          | <b>\$ 8,883,000</b>                          | <b>\$ 10,032,000</b>                     |
| <b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>                 | <b>\$ 998,559,000</b>                                    | <b>\$ 338,239,000</b>                        | <b>\$ 347,416,000</b>                        | <b>\$ 312,904,000</b>                    |
| <b>Lottery for Education Proceeds</b> | <b>\$ 319,991,000</b>                                    | <b>\$ 112,114,000</b>                        | <b>\$ 114,085,000</b>                        | <b>\$ 93,792,000</b>                     |
| <b>After-School Program Proceeds</b>  | <b>\$ 12,178,000</b>                                     | <b>\$ 1,491,000</b>                          | <b>\$ 4,048,000</b>                          | <b>\$ 6,639,000</b>                      |

|                            | 2022-2023         |               | 2023-2024         |               | 2024-2025         |               | 2025-2026            |               |
|----------------------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------------|---------------|
|                            | Actual Recipients |               | Actual Recipients |               | Actual Recipients |               | Estimated Recipients |               |
|                            | Students          | \$            | Students          | \$            | Students          | \$            | Students             | \$            |
| HOPE*                      | 70,379            | \$339,994,005 | 71,463            | \$346,628,016 | 75,078            | \$367,668,448 | 77,409               | \$376,208,150 |
| Wilder-Naifeh              | 10,924            | \$13,895,569  | 11,522            | \$14,534,300  | 12,288            | \$15,733,032  | 13,924               | \$17,892,726  |
| TCAT Reconnect             | 1,797             | \$2,081,454   | 1,918             | \$2,201,737   | 1,759             | \$2,100,245   | 2,301                | \$2,683,909   |
| TN Reconnect               | 7,804             | \$19,571,125  | 7,828             | \$19,662,950  | 7,160             | \$19,285,383  | 8,553                | \$21,965,285  |
| HOPE Foster Child          | 105               | \$594,933     | 120               | \$733,600     | 186               | \$1,285,585   | 276                  | \$2,110,327   |
| Dual Enrollment Grant      | 41,709            | \$48,423,844  | 50,211            | \$59,090,993  | 58,078            | \$70,655,686  | 69,235               | \$82,250,919  |
| Middle College Scholarship | 481               | \$1,769,848   | 834               | \$3,012,917   | 1,239             | \$4,289,279   | 1,532                | \$5,647,354   |
| Helping Heroes Grant       | 238               | \$357,000     | 222               | \$324,500     | 233               | \$345,500     | 240                  | \$359,000     |
| TN STEP UP                 | 97                | \$375,450     | 101               | \$423,025     | 108               | \$448,450     | 112                  | \$459,726     |
|                            | 133,534           | \$427,063,228 | 144,219           | \$446,612,038 | 156,129           | \$481,811,608 | 173,582              | \$509,577,396 |

\*Includes HOPE, GAMS, Aspire, and Nontrad HOPE



# TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM: III.A.

**MEETING DATE:** May 15, 2026

**SUBJECT:** New Academic Program  
University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
Bioinformatics, Bachelor of Science (BS)

**ITEM TYPE:** Action

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Title and Designation</b>         | Bioinformatics, Bachelor of Science (BS)   |
| <b>Concentrations</b>                | None   |
| <b>Accreditation</b>                 | Not Applicable   |
| <b>CIP Code and Description</b>      | <b>26.1103 (Bioinformatics)</b><br>A program that focuses on the application of computer-based technologies and services to biological, biomedical, and biotechnology research. Includes instruction in algorithms, network architecture, principles of software design, human interface design, usability studies, search strategies, database management and data mining, digital image processing, computer graphics and animation, CAD, computer programming, and applications to experimental design and analysis and to specific quantitative, modeling, and analytical studies in the various biological specializations. |
| <b>SOC Code and Title</b>            | <b>15-1221.00: Computer and Information Research Scientists</b><br><b>15-1299.00: Computer Occupations, All Other</b><br><b>15-2051.00: Data Scientists</b><br><b>19-1029.01: Bioinformatics Scientists</b><br><b>19-1099.01: Bioinformatics Technicians</b><br><b>19-4021.00: Biological Technicians</b>  |
| <b>Credit Hours</b>                  | 120  |
| <b>Implementation Date</b>           | August 1, 2026   |
| <b>Modality and Delivery Site</b>    | Majority On-Ground (Hybrid)  |
| <b>Department/College</b>            | Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology;<br>Herbert College of Agriculture  |
| <b>Governing Board Approval Date</b> | February 26-27, 2026   |

## ACADEMIC PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville proposes a Bachelor of Science (BS) in Bioinformatics to address a critical gap in Tennessee's undergraduate program landscape and prepare a highly

trained workforce capable of applying data science and computational tools to grand challenges in agriculture and environmental sciences. Building on existing graduate-level expertise in bioinformatics, UTK's Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology currently offers both a Master of Science and a Doctor of Philosophy with concentrations in Bioinformatics and Genomics. Consisting of 120 credit hours and delivered primarily in an on-ground, hybrid format, the program will serve first year and transfer students seeking foundational and applied training in bioinformatics with a focus on agriculture and environmental sciences.

The proposed program's curriculum will integrate biological, agricultural, and data science coursework, preparing students for high-demand careers across industries through a strong foundation in bioinformatics, genomics, computational biology, machine learning, data analysis, and environmental and agricultural sciences. Students will complete 30 credit hours of bioinformatics coursework, 12 credit hours of upper-level entomology and plant pathology coursework, and required internship and capstone research experiences to develop professional networks and practical skills alongside potential employers. UTK will leverage existing faculty expertise and industry partnerships to provide students with hands-on learning, research opportunities, and career pathways. The proposed Bioinformatics, BS will also provide students with the flexibility to pursue a 12 credit hour undergraduate certificate in areas such as Applied Artificial Intelligence, Data Science, or Applications of Uncrewed Aerial Systems, as well as a pathway to complete a non-thesis Master of Science degree in as little as one additional calendar year after graduation.

A virtual external review of the proposed program was conducted on January 23, 2026, by Dr. Joseph Spatafora, Professor and Department Head of Botany and Plant Pathology at Oregon State University. The external reviewer expressed enthusiastic support for the program, highlighting its unique combination of domain knowledge in agricultural life sciences with computational and data sciences, noting that this distinguishes it from other programs and "prepares students for careers in a broad spectrum of data science careers and graduate school opportunities." Drawing on his experience launching a comparable program at Oregon State University, Dr. Spatafora affirmed that workforce demand is robust, noting that "Tennessee is poised to grow in this area" and that many bioinformatics positions can be performed remotely, broadening career opportunities for graduates. Dr. Spatafora recommended approval without reservation, stating that he has "absolutely no reservations in recommending the Bioinformatics major developed by the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology for approval."

## **ALIGNMENT WITH STATE MASTER PLAN AND INSTITUTIONAL MISSION/STRATEGIC PLAN**

The proposed Bioinformatics, BS aligns with the 2025-2035 Tennessee State Master Plan for Higher Education by addressing the state's economic development, workforce, and research needs. The state master plan emphasizes preparing a workforce equipped with computer science and data analytics skills to drive Tennessee's economic competitiveness, and the proposed program responds directly by equipping students with foundational and applied expertise in bioinformatics, computational biology, and data science. These skills are directly applicable to Tennessee's agricultural sector, which has an estimated economic impact of \$103 billion and accounts for 11% of the state's economy. The proposed program further advances the state master plan's goal of institutional mission differentiation by offering the only undergraduate bioinformatics program in Tennessee with a specialized focus on agricultural and environmental sciences, filling a gap in the state's program landscape that no other public institution currently addresses. Lastly, the program aligns with the master plan's emphasis on

stackable credentials by providing students with the flexibility to complete a 12 credit hour undergraduate certificate alongside their degree requirements.

The proposed program also aligns with UTK's Strategic Vision and Mission. Housed in the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology within the Herbert College of Agriculture, the program advances the core tenets of the land grant mission by preparing graduates to address grand challenges in food security, crop resilience, and environmental stewardship. Through required internship and capstone research experiences, students are connected directly to Tennessee's agricultural and life sciences workforce pipeline, reinforcing UTK's commitment to applied learning, faculty-student research, and regional economic development. The program's emphasis on experiential learning and industry partnerships further reflects UTK's dedication to producing graduates who are well-prepared to contribute meaningfully to their fields and communities upon graduation.

## **WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

Labor demand for bioinformatics-related positions in Tennessee and the southeastern United States is robust. According to Lightcast job posting data, there were approximately 213,000 unique job postings for bioinformatics-related positions in the Southeast from June 2024 to May 2025, with over 14,000 of those postings located in Tennessee. According to the 2024 Tennessee Labor Market Report, individuals in computer and mathematical occupations had the second-highest median annual wage in the state at \$84,440 in 2024, and these occupations are projected to grow faster than the average for all other fields across Tennessee, the Southeast region, and the nation. Among specific bioinformatics-related occupations, data scientists are projected to experience the fastest growth, with job growth exceeding 36% in Tennessee from 2022 to 2033. Additionally, the global agricultural bioinformatics services market was valued at \$430.6 million in 2024 and is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 13.9% through 2030, with North America serving as the largest revenue-generating market. Entry-level positions such as Bioinformatics Developer, which typically require a bachelor's degree, report average annual salaries of approximately \$65,246, with a range of \$52,000 to \$83,000.

Regional demand for bioinformatics professionals is also strong. East Tennessee is home to Oak Ridge National Laboratory, which employs over 7,000 professionals in the region and is a leader in bioscience-related research. According to a 2024 report on the U.S. bioscience economy, Tennessee saw a 60.2% increase in bioscience-related companies and a 13.4% increase in bioscience-related employment from 2019 to 2023, nearly twice the growth rate observed across all other private sector industries in the state. Metropolitan areas with high bioscience employment concentration relative to the nation include Knoxville and Johnson City, both of which specialize in research, testing, and medical laboratory sectors. The University of Tennessee, Knoxville recently launched the Spark BioHub to support bioscience startups in the region, and graduates of the proposed program will be well positioned to contribute to these expanding research and industry efforts. Notably, bioinformatics scientists have increasing opportunities to work remotely, allowing graduates to work for companies located anywhere while remaining in Tennessee as residents contributing to the state's economic prosperity.

The Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology, the Herbert College of Agriculture, AgResearch, and University of Tennessee Extension maintain active partnerships with international agricultural companies, state and federal agencies, and biotech and data companies. Industry partners that provided letters of support and could serve as potential internship hosts and future employers for program graduates include Bayer Crop Sciences, GreenLight Biosciences, BASF Agricultural Solutions

Seed U.S., Exponent, the Center for Bioenergy Innovation at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and Medicinal Genomics. Oak Ridge National Laboratory is one of the strongest external partners for the program, providing undergraduate internship opportunities through its Science Undergraduate Laboratory Internship Program, which places students in research laboratories for 10 to 16 weeks. Additional letters of support were received from research and teaching collaborators within UTK, including the Division of Biology, the Department of Plant Sciences, the Bredesen Center, and the College of Emerging and Collaborative Studies.

## PROGRAM DUPLICATION

No public institution in Tennessee currently offers a standalone undergraduate program in Bioinformatics. While two public undergraduate programs in the state offer a concentration or certificate in bioinformatics, none offer bioinformatics as an independent major. Existing undergraduate options at public institutions include a concentration in the Computer Science major at Tennessee State University, a concentration in the Data Science major at UTK, and a 12 credit undergraduate certificate at UTK. The proposed program is distinctive from these existing options due to its status as a standalone major, its balanced integration of foundational coursework in both the biological and computational sciences, and its specialized focus on data in agricultural and environmental sciences. Unlike existing concentrations and certificates, the proposed program also requires students to complete an internship and a capstone research experience, ensuring graduates are prepared to enter the workforce or pursue graduate study upon completion.

## PROJECTED ENROLLMENT, GRADUATION, AND STUDENT INTEREST

The enrollment and graduation figures below represent projected total fall enrollment. UTK noted that relatively low enrollment is anticipated in Year 1 due to the short recruitment window between anticipated program approval in May 2026 and implementation in August 2026. Projected attrition and graduation figures were calculated using an attrition rate of 8% for first-year students and a 4-year graduation rate of 67%, consistent with the 2024-2025 institutional averages reported for UTK.

UTK submitted compelling evidence of student interest from multiple sources. A survey of current graduate students in the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology (n=13) found that approximately 70% of respondents use bioinformatics in their research, and approximately 90% of those who were not exposed to bioinformatics as undergraduates indicated they would have been better prepared for graduate school had they completed related coursework prior to graduate study. Additionally, a survey of high school students at L&N STEM Academy (n=15), a Knox County public magnet high school, found that over 80% expressed interest in an undergraduate degree program that integrates computer science skills with biological concepts, and 100% indicated interest in a program that provides internship opportunities in biological research labs, government agencies, or private companies.

|                   | 2026-27 | 2027-28 | 2028-29 | 2029-30 | 2030-31 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <b>Enrollment</b> | 3       | 9       | 19      | 33      | 50      |
| <b>Graduates</b>  | 0       | 0       | 0       | 2       | 6       |

## PROGRAM COSTS AND REVENUES

The proposed one-time and recurring expenditures as well as revenues for the Bioinformatics, BS program are listed in Table 1. The proposed program expects relatively low start-up costs, as it will be launched using existing instructional faculty and resources within the Department of Entomology

and Plant Pathology. One-time costs include an external reviewer stipend of approximately \$1,500. To support growing enrollment, the department plans to hire two graduate teaching assistants on a staggered timeline, with the first hire anticipated in Year 3 and the second in Year 4. The program anticipates being revenue-positive in Year 1.

**Table 1: Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program**

| <b>Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program</b> |                 |                 |                 |                  |                  |                  |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>One-Time Expenditures</b>                           |                 |                 |                 |                  |                  |                  |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b>   | <b>Year 2</b>   | <b>Year 3</b>    | <b>Year 4</b>    | <b>Year 5</b>    |
| <i>Total One-Time Expenditures</i>                     | \$1,500         | \$0             | \$0             | \$0              | \$0              | \$0              |
| <b>Recurring Expenditures</b>                          |                 |                 |                 |                  |                  |                  |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b>   | <b>Year 2</b>   | <b>Year 3</b>    | <b>Year 4</b>    | <b>Year 5</b>    |
| <i>Total Recurring Expenditures</i>                    | \$0             | \$0             | \$0             | \$46,001         | \$95,224         | \$98,938         |
| <b>Grand Total (One-Time and Recurring)</b>            | <b>\$1,500</b>  | <b>\$0</b>      | <b>\$0</b>      | <b>\$46,001</b>  | <b>\$95,224</b>  | <b>\$98,938</b>  |
| <b>Projected Revenues</b>                              |                 |                 |                 |                  |                  |                  |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b>   | <b>Year 2</b>   | <b>Year 3</b>    | <b>Year 4</b>    | <b>Year 5</b>    |
| <b>Total Revenues</b>                                  | <b>\$0</b>      | <b>\$24,912</b> | <b>\$57,298</b> | <b>\$130,373</b> | <b>\$254,102</b> | <b>\$391,118</b> |

**PROGRAM COSTS FOR STUDENTS**

Total instructional costs, including tuition, fees, and course materials, are included in the table below. Course materials are covered through UT Knoxville's Total Access Program, which provides all required course materials for a flat fee of \$249 per term.

| <b>Annual Cost Per Student</b>                          |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Category</b>   | <b>Cost Per Year</b>                         |
| Total Instructional Cost* - Resident                    | \$14,374                                     |
| Total Instructional Cost* - Non-Resident                | \$33,834                                     |
| <b>Total Cost for Program</b>                           |  |
| <b>Category</b>   | <b>Dollar Amount</b>                         |
| Per Student One-Time Required Fees (if applicable)      | \$1,512 (Resident)<br>\$3,990 (Non-Resident) |
| Estimated Post-Graduation Licensure Fee (if applicable) | N/A  |
| <b>Estimated Completion Time</b>                        |  |

|                          |            |
|--------------------------|------------|
| Estimated Time to Degree | Four years |
|--------------------------|------------|

*\* Total Instructional Cost does not include estimates for room and board*



# TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

## REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM: III.B.

**MEETING DATE:** May 15, 2026

**SUBJECT:** New Academic Program  
University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management, Master of Science (MS)

**ITEM TYPE:** Action

### PROGRAM OVERVIEW

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Title and Designation</b>         | Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management, Master of Science (MS)  |
| <b>Concentrations</b>                | None   |
| <b>Accreditation</b>                 | Not Applicable   |
| <b>CIP Code and Description</b>      | <b>52.0901 (Hospitality Administration/Management, General)</b><br>A program that prepares individuals to serve as general managers and directors of hospitality operations on a system-wide basis, including both travel arrangements and promotion and the provision of traveler facilities. Includes instruction in principles of operations in the travel and tourism, hotel and lodging facilities, food services, and recreation facilities industries; hospitality marketing strategies; hospitality planning; management and coordination of franchise and unit operations; business management; accounting and financial management; hospitality transportation and logistics; and hospitality industry policies and regulations. |
| <b>SOC Code and Title</b>            | <b>11-9081 (Lodging Managers)</b><br><b>11-9051 (Food Service Managers)</b><br><b>13-1121 (Meeting, Convention, and Event Planners)</b><br><b>11-2021 (Marketing Managers)</b><br><b>11-2022 (Sales Managers)</b>  |
| <b>Credit Hours</b>                  | 30   |
| <b>Implementation Date</b>           | August 1, 2026   |
| <b>Modality and Delivery Site</b>    | Fully Online   |
| <b>Department/College</b>            | Department of Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management;<br>College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences   |
| <b>Governing Board Approval Date</b> | February 26-27, 2026   |

## **ACADEMIC PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW**

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) proposes an online, asynchronous Master of Science (MS) degree in Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management (RHTM) to complement existing undergraduate and doctoral offerings in the Department of Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management at UTK. The proposed program would be the first asynchronous, online master's program in Tennessee, and the only program at the master's level with a focus on retail. Undergraduate students, alumni, and industry partners have all expressed interest in UTK offering the proposed program, which will seek to provide students with salary advancement, promotion potential, and greater career opportunities in related fields. While entry-level retail, hospitality, and tourism positions do not typically require an advanced degree, progression into higher-level roles increasingly demands deeper analytical, strategic management, and leadership competencies, allowing graduates of the proposed program to advance in their careers more quickly and efficiently.

The proposed Master of Science in Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management will require 30 credit hours and will include a thesis option. The entirety of the program can be completed through seven-week courses aside from the optional thesis, which will be written throughout an entire academic semester. Coursework is divided into three phases of progressive learning: foundations (12 credits), advanced topics (9-12 credits), and applied learning (6-9 credits). All students will complete four core courses in foundations, and at least six credits of applied learning in retail, hospitality, and tourism management through an industry experience, research project, or an international study abroad tour. Students without a background in retail, hospitality, or tourism management will be required to take a three credit prerequisite course, resulting in 33 total credit hours for the program. Twelve new courses are needed to support the proposed program. All have been developed and gone through the necessary campus approvals.

A virtual external review of the proposed program was conducted on November 18, 2024, by Dr. Mary Dawson, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the Conrad N. Hilton College of Global Hospitality Leadership at the University of Houston. The site visit included meetings with campus administrators, support staff, and faculty from UTK, as well as current UTK students and industry partners. Given the "thoroughness of the planning, the innovative curriculum, and the current individuals leading the program," Dr. Dawson "highly recommend[ed] approval." She added, "The program has the potential for exponential growth and to swiftly become a benchmark within the hospitality industry higher education online graduate programs," and also noted the program's "overwhelming support of the [institutional] administration and the hospitality/tourism industry."

## **ALIGNMENT WITH STATE MASTER PLAN AND INSTITUTIONAL MISSION/STRATEGIC PLAN**

The proposed program aligns with the State Master Plan for Higher Education by "addressing the state's economic development, workforce development, and research needs." According to Tennessee's 2022-2023 Economy Report, leisure, retail, and hospitality jobs are anticipated to be the third- and fourth-largest industries in the state—preceded only by healthcare and manufacturing, which translates to 723,636 total jobs and 217,656 new jobs by 2030. Providing high-quality educational programming in retail, hospitality, and tourism management will benefit industry by training well-equipped leaders and entrepreneurs to take on growth and changes in the sector. The proposed program also aligns with the Student Success and Family Prosperity goals of the Master Plan Update by providing flexible, online curriculum for working and returning students interested

in advancing their careers and quality of life. The proposed program will be more affordable than comparable online programs for Tennessee students, as almost all current online asynchronous offerings are out-of-state. An in-state, master's level offering will be less expensive to pursue than out-of-state programming or in-state Master of Business Administration degrees and will allow graduates to build professional networks in their home state and communities. Further, the program aligns with the goal of preparing the future workforce by offering a program with growing need in the state and enhancing student learning through work-based and experiential learning.

The proposed program also aligns with all five goals articulated in UTK's Strategic Vision and Mission. Through curriculum designed to assist with career advancement and equip graduates with skills to excel in the ever-changing entrepreneurial landscape, the proposed program provides "high-quality educational opportunities for people at every stage of life" and embraces "collaboration, agility, and innovation." Further, the proposed program will allow students to complete research relevant to their current and desired careers in concert with hands-on experience, thereby "embodying the modern R1" and "conducting research that improves lives."

## **WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

Research conducted by Tourism Economics on behalf of the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development, tourism generated a record \$28.9 billion in domestic spending in 2022, and Tennessee has been the fastest-growing state in travel spending since 2018, rising from 14<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> in the nation. According to the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development's report of Tennessee visitor profiles, 33% of visitors chose shopping as part of their activities, and offering retail training alongside hospitality and tourism will continue to be valuable.

According to Bureau of Labor Statistics data, the leisure and hospitality industry will generate 113,786 more positions by 2030 statewide, with the Accommodation and Food Services sector as well as the Art, Entertainment, and Recreation sector making up the bulk of those opportunities. The retail sector is also expected to have 317,029 jobs statewide by 2030, and managerial roles associated with retail are projected to grow in Tennessee and in neighboring states. Job outlooks for general and operations managers, market research analysts, buyers and purchasing agents, food service managers, lodging managers, and entertainment and recreation managers all show double-digit growth from 2022-2032. Regional demand in East Tennessee is also expected to grow significantly between 2020 to 2030 by roughly 3.64% translating to 92,732 jobs. While not all retail, hospitality, and tourism management positions require master's-level preparation, data from salary.com demonstrates that master's degree holders are more likely to secure advanced positions such as hotel manager, regional restaurant manager, or marketing director, all of which garner higher salaries. Lightcast job posting data between August 2024 and August 2025 identified median advertised salaries for retail or hospitality jobs requiring or preferring a master's degree at \$154,500.

The advisory board for the Department of Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management includes retail, hospitality, and tourism businesses, such as Belk, Pilot Flying J, Tractor Supply Company, Cracker Barrel Country Store, InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG), McKibbon Hotel Management, and Blackberry Farm. The department also maintains close working relationships with professional organizations such as Tennessee Hospitality and Tourism Association, Greater Knoxville Hospitality Association, Greater Nashville Hospitality Association, Sevier County Hospitality and Tourism Association, and Visit Chattanooga Tourism Authority. Furthermore, the department's collaboration with the Southern Hospitality Internship Program (SHIP) has enabled students to forge meaningful connections with businesses in Sevier County. Six letters of support were received from Aimbridge

Hospitality, Avery Dennison, Connor Concepts, Darden Restaurants, Greater Knoxville Hospitality Association, Hilton, McKibbon Hospitality, Southern Hospitality Internship Program (SHIP), Tractor Supply Company, and VolShop.

## PROGRAM DUPLICATION

Currently, two similar programs are offered in Tennessee at Middle Tennessee State University (Leisure, Sport, and Tourism Management, MS) and at the University of Memphis (Sport and Hospitality Management, MS). However, the proposed program differs from these programs due to its online, asynchronous delivery mode and its focus on retail, as opposed to the existing programs' focus on sport management.

## PROJECTED ENROLLMENT, GRADUATION, AND STUDENT INTEREST

Two surveys were administered in 2024 to evaluate student interest, one of current undergraduate students and the other with retail, hospitality, and tourism professionals. The survey of undergraduate students resulted in 130 responses. Among the current students, 52.3% (n=45) expressed interest in the proposed master's degree, and 58.1% (n=76) were interested in applying for the accelerated option. The survey of working professionals garnered 1,022 responses. Sixty-seven percent of respondents had an undergraduate degree in retail, hospitality, tourism, and event management, while another 15.3% had other business majors. Of this core group, interest in the proposed program was overwhelmingly positive, with 51.4% (n=302) indicating strong interest in applying. Ninety percent (n=206) of working professionals without a bachelor's degree expressed interest in applying to the proposed program, indicating a potential pool of future students for both the undergraduate and graduate degrees. Free response data also provided useful information to the program designers, including suggestions for improving online learning, specific topics of interest to potential students, and desires for project-based learning.

The enrollment and graduation figures below represent full-time and part-time enrollment, in addition to students enrolled in an accelerated 4+1 bachelor's to master's program.

|                   | 2026-27 | 2027-28 | 2028-29 | 2029-30 | 2030-31 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <b>Enrollment</b> | 30      | 57      | 65      | 70      | 76      |
| <b>Graduates</b>  | 0       | 24      | 27      | 31      | 32      |

## PROGRAM COSTS AND REVENUES

The proposed one-time and recurring expenditures as well as revenues for the Master of Science in Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism program are listed in Table 1. The proposed program expects relatively low start-up costs, with most recurring expenditures in the faculty and instructional staff category to support the growth of the program. One-time costs include \$45,000 for new course development in the planning year; however, these costs are covered by an internal curriculum development grant. A non-tenure-track faculty member has been hired to support programming at all levels, and two additional faculty members will be hired to start Fall 2026. The program anticipates being revenue-positive in Year 1.

**Table 1: Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program**

| <b>Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program</b> |                 |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |
|--|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>One-Time Expenditures</b>                           |                 |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b>    | <b>Year 2</b>    | <b>Year 3</b>    | <b>Year 4</b>    | <b>Year 5</b>    |
| <i>Total One-Time Expenditures</i>                     | \$46,000        | \$0              | \$0              | \$0              | \$0              | \$0              |
| <b>Recurring Expenditures</b>                          |                 |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b>    | <b>Year 2</b>    | <b>Year 3</b>    | <b>Year 4</b>    | <b>Year 5</b>    |
| <i>Total Recurring Expenditures</i>                    | \$28,903        | \$63,260         | \$65,610         | \$66,963         | \$171,277        | \$175,936        |
| <b>Grand Total (One-Time and Recurring)</b>            | <b>\$74,903</b> | <b>\$63,260</b>  | <b>\$65,610</b>  | <b>\$66,963</b>  | <b>\$171,277</b> | <b>\$175,936</b> |
| <b>Projected Revenues</b>                              |                 |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b>    | <b>Year 2</b>    | <b>Year 3</b>    | <b>Year 4</b>    | <b>Year 5</b>    |
| <b>Total Revenues</b>                                  | <b>\$45,000</b> | <b>\$229,500</b> | <b>\$367,200</b> | <b>\$436,050</b> | <b>\$466,650</b> | <b>\$515,100</b> |

**PROGRAM COSTS FOR STUDENTS**

Total instructional costs, including tuition and fees, are included in the table below. There are no additional one-time fees or licensure fees associated with the program.

| <b>Annual Cost Per Student</b>                          |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Category</b>   | <b>Cost Per Year (based on 15 credits)</b> |
| Total Instructional Cost* – Resident                    | \$11,200                                   |
| Total Instructional Cost* – Non-Resident                | \$12,325                                   |
| <b>Additional Costs for Program</b>                     |  |
| <b>Category</b>   | <b>Dollar Amount</b>                       |
| Per Student One-Time Required Fees (if applicable)      | N/A  |
| Estimated Post-Graduation Licensure Fee (if applicable) | N/A  |
| <b>Estimated Completion Time</b>                        |  |
| Estimated Time to Degree                                | Two years                                  |

\* Total Instructional Cost does not include estimates for room and board



# TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM: III.C.

**MEETING DATE:** May 14, 2026  
**SUBJECT:** New Academic Program  
Austin Peay State University  
Master of Science in Athletic Training (MSAT)  
**ITEM TYPE:** Action

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Title and Designation</b>         | Master of Science in Athletic Training (MSAT)   |
| <b>Concentrations</b>                | None  |
| <b>Accreditation</b>                 | Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE)  |
| <b>CIP Code and Description</b>      | <b>CIP 51.0913 (Athletic Training/Trainer)</b><br>A program that prepares individuals to work in consultation with, and under the supervision of physicians to prevent and treat sports injuries and associated conditions. Includes instruction in the identification, evaluation, and treatment of athletic injuries and illnesses; first aid and emergency care; therapeutic exercise; anatomy and physiology; exercise physiology; kinesiology and biomechanics; nutrition; sports psychology; personal and community health; knowledge of various sports and their biomechanical and physiological demands; and applicable professional standards and regulations. |
| <b>SOC Code and Title</b>            | <b>29-9091 (Athletic Trainers)</b>  |
| <b>Credit Hours</b>                  | 63  |
| <b>Implementation Date</b>           | July 6, 2027  |
| <b>Modality and Delivery Site</b>    | Majority On-Ground (Hybrid)<br>Main Campus, Austin Peay State University  |
| <b>Department/College</b>            | Department of Health and Human Performance / College of Behavioral and Health Sciences  |
| <b>Governing Board Approval Date</b> | June 6, 2025  |

## ACADEMIC PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

Austin Peay State University (APSU) proposes a Master of Science in Athletic Training (MSAT) program to address regional and statewide workforce demand for certified athletic trainers and to provide a graduate-level, accredited preparation pathway required for the Certified Athletic Trainer (ATC) credential granted by the Board of Certification (BOC) and subsequent state licensure.

In 2020, the National Athletic Training Association (NATA) began requiring graduate education as the minimum for professional preparation and BOC certification eligibility, which is required for state licensure. This shift significantly altered the national pipeline for athletic training preparation, and as

a result, nearly 40 programs are closing nationwide, creating an enhanced need for accessible, affordable, and accredited graduate-level athletic training programs in Tennessee and beyond.

The proposed MSAT will be offered in a majority on-ground (hybrid) modality and is intended to serve recent APSU undergraduates in kinesiology, students from regional institutions, and professionals in adjacent health fields seeking career advancement. The program is designed for full-time, cohort-style enrollment and includes clinical placements in the region. The program will leverage community and industry partnerships to ensure all students experience a range of patient populations, including soldiers, civilian patients in a hospital setting, Division I athletes, and adolescent athletes.

The proposed MSAT requires 63 credit hours and is aligned with Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) standards. The proposed curriculum includes 18 credits of clinical experiences and 45 credit hours of structured progression from foundational coursework to advanced clinical immersion. The program will seek CAATE accreditation, with the initial self-study due July 1, 2028, and the site visit occurring in fall 2028 or spring 2029. Accreditation is expected prior to the on-time completion of the first cohort.

An external review of the proposed program was conducted on September 26, 2025, by Dr. Leslie Oglesby, Associate Professor and MSAT Program Coordinator at the University of Southern Mississippi. Dr. Oglesby expressed support for the program, highlighting the curriculum's anatomical review sequence as a notable strength and confirming that workforce demand is sufficient to ensure employment opportunities for graduates who obtain BOC certification. Dr. Oglesby noted that the program "has a high chance of success," and recommended approval.

## **ALIGNMENT WITH STATE MASTER PLAN AND INSTITUTIONAL MISSION/STRATEGIC PLAN**

The proposed MSAT aligns with each of the three priorities identified in the 2025-2035 Tennessee State Master Plan for Higher Education. The program is *aligned* with Tennessee's healthcare workforce needs by preparing graduates to enter high-demand clinical and community settings through a curriculum that provides all students with real-world clinical experiences through employer partners such as hospitals and medical clinics, industrial and occupational health settings, and high schools. The program is *achievable* because its accelerated, two-year structure uses a tightly sequenced combination of coursework and clinical experiences designed for recent kinesiology graduates and working professionals, supporting the Master Plan's priority for faster, workforce-connected pathways that reduce time to completion. The program is *agile* as it aligns with the Master Plan's emphasis on using data and collaboration to anticipate and respond to evolving workforce and educational needs.

Additionally, the program supports APSU's institutional mission by offering a curriculum that serves documented regional needs. The proposed program's design incorporates clinical experiences in diverse healthcare environments and patient populations, including non-orthopedic conditions and administrative and professional development settings, consistent with APSU's commitment to community-oriented educational engagement. The program also advances APSU's strategic goals by meeting regional workforce needs and establishing partnerships that provide clinical rotation opportunities benefiting both students and partner organizations.

## **WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

Labor market evidence shows a sustained shortage of athletic trainers in Tennessee. Lightcast identified 357 unique statewide job postings for athletic trainers from 2025 to 2026, with a median advertised salary of \$62,300. In Middle Tennessee, employers posted 164 openings between February 2025 and February 2026, including 130 in the Nashville-Murfreesboro-Franklin Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and 34 in the Clarksville MSA. JobsEQ occupational projections for 2021 to 2031 further confirm the need for athletic trainings in Tennessee, forecasting 24.1% growth in athletic trainer employment, with positions increasing from 561 to 696 and approximately 57 annual openings statewide.

Statewide degree production does not meet this level of employer demand. According to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Tennessee institutions awarded 25 master's degrees in athletic training in the 2023-2024 academic year, with 22 of these graduates from institutions in southeast Tennessee – 12 graduates at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga and 10 graduates from Lee University.

According to a Hanover Research Feasibility Report, athletic training employment in the Southeast United States is projected to increase by 24.4% between 2021 and 2031. Additionally, national labor projections from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) indicate steady, long-term demand for certified athletic trainers, with employment expected to increase from 29,400 to 34,500 positions between 2021 and 2031 and federal forecasts showing 11% growth from 2024 to 2034 with approximately 2,400 openings per year. These national figures represent stable growth across all settings in the United States and complement the much higher regional growth rates in Tennessee and the Southeast, where employer demand for athletic trainers is accelerating more rapidly. Finally, BLS 2024 wage data for athletic trainers include a \$57,090 median in the Nashville metropolitan area, a \$54,040 median statewide in Tennessee, and a \$60,250 median nationally.

Community and industry partners, such as Northwest High School, APSU Athletics, Blanchfield Army Community Hospital, Clarksville High School, Montgomery Central High School, and the Tennessee Orthopedic Alliance, have committed to supporting the proposed MSAT program through supervised clinical education placements and opportunities for students to work alongside certified athletic trainers. These organizations describe ongoing shortages of athletic trainers in secondary schools, collegiate athletics, military healthcare, and regional clinical settings, indicating persistent local demand for graduates prepared to enter the athletic training workforce. Their letters of support identify needs ranging from unfilled school-based athletic training positions to increased service demands in Division I athletics, military treatment facilities, and orthopedic outpatient clinics, reinforcing the value of a program that prepares credentialed athletic trainers for these roles.

## **PROGRAM DUPLICATION**

Tennessee currently has two public institutions offering master's-level programs in athletic training – the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga (UTC) and Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), and three private institutions – Lee University, Cumberland University, and Union University. Although programs exist statewide, most program capacity remains concentrated in East Tennessee at UTC and Lee University which produce the majority of the state's MSAT graduates. MTSU and Union University both have newer programs which have not yet reported graduation data.

In addition to expanding geographic access, the proposed MSAT offers distinctive academic value through a three-course scholarship sequence that develops evidence-based practice skills across the curriculum and provides structured research preparation. This sequenced approach strengthens

students' analytical and clinical decision-making abilities and offers a higher level of guided scholarly training than is typically found in comparable programs.

## **PROJECTED ENROLLMENT, GRADUATION, AND STUDENT INTEREST**

Student interest at APSU was assessed through a survey of current kinesiology majors. Among respondents (n=49), 84% (41) indicated prior interest in becoming a certified athletic trainer, and most of these students also expressed interest in enrolling in the proposed MSAT program.

The enrollment and attrition estimates below are informed by CAATE expectations for program structure and national norms from the CAATE Analytic Report. CAATE standards require a structured and sequenced two-year curriculum in which students complete all required coursework and clinical experiences in a defined order. Because clinical education must span at least two academic years and all curricular and clinical requirements follow a logical and sequenced progression, the program utilizes a cohort model. National CAATE data show that professional programs typically admit about 10 new students per year and maintain an average total enrollment of 18 students, which is consistent with a two-cohort model.

Based on these standards and national program patterns, APSU projects the following enrollment and graduate numbers:

|                   | <b>2027-28</b> | <b>2028-29</b> | <b>2029-30</b> | <b>2030-31</b> | <b>2031-32</b> |
|-------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>Enrollment</b> | 10             | 16             | 16             | 18             | 18             |
| <b>Graduates</b>  | 0              | 6              | 6              | 6              | 8              |

## **PROGRAM COSTS AND REVENUES**

The proposed expenditures for the MSAT are listed in Table 1. The total projected costs for implementing the program over the first five years include recurring expenditures for faculty and staff salaries, routine equipment replenishment, clinical software and tracking system expenses, and other ongoing operational needs such as clinical supplies and program delivery infrastructure. The program will require three full-time core faculty positions to meet CAATE accreditation requirements, including a program director, a clinical education coordinator, and an additional faculty member, and it will also require a Medical Director, a non-instructional role that is not a full-time position. One-time startup expenditures cover planning-year needs such as initial accreditation fees, consultant support, major equipment purchases, and facility setup as well as initial information-technology configuration and initial hiring expenses associated with program launch.

Revenue for the MSAT program is generated through tuition and student fees based on projected enrollment. Initial revenue is limited due to small cohort sizes, with gradual increases over the first five years as enrollment grows within the program's two-year structure. The program includes a \$250 per-student, per-semester fee to support supplies, equipment maintenance, and student development.

**Table 1: Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program**

| <b>Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program</b> |                 |               |               |               |               |               |
|--|-----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>One-Time Expenditures</b>                           |                 |               |               |               |               |               |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b> | <b>Year 2</b> | <b>Year 3</b> | <b>Year 4</b> | <b>Year 5</b> |
| <i>Total One-Time Expenditures</i>                     | \$129,049       | \$3,000       | \$6,500       | \$0           | \$0           | \$0           |
| <b>Recurring Expenditures</b>                          |                 |               |               |               |               |               |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b> | <b>Year 2</b> | <b>Year 3</b> | <b>Year 4</b> | <b>Year 5</b> |
| <i>Total Recurring Expenditures</i>                    | \$216,345       | \$332,025     | \$361,414     | \$379,916     | \$392,397     | \$405,378     |
| <b>Grand Total (One-Time and Recurring)</b>            | \$345,394       | \$335,025     | \$367,914     | \$379,916     | \$392,397     | \$405,378     |
| <b>Projected Revenues</b>                              |                 |               |               |               |               |               |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b> | <b>Year 2</b> | <b>Year 3</b> | <b>Year 4</b> | <b>Year 5</b> |
| <b>Total Revenues</b>                                  | \$0             | \$194,700     | \$313,415     | \$313,415     | \$352,355     | \$384,988     |

\* The program includes an expense under "other" for a required student tracking system for clinicals, with costs of \$1,800 in Year 1 and \$2,150 annually in Years 2-5, scaled to enrollment and fully absorbed by the program.

**PROGRAM COSTS FOR STUDENTS**

The proposed instructional costs for students are listed below. The bulk of costs are for tuition across the MSAT's six semesters. Additional costs include the Board of Certification Licensure Exam fee.

| <b>Annual Cost Per Student</b>                          |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Category</b>   | <b>Cost Per Year</b>  |
| Total Instructional Cost* – Resident                    | Year 1: \$18,970.00<br>Year 2: \$16,536.40  |
| Total Instructional Cost* – Non-Resident                | Year 1: \$27,610.00<br>Year 2: \$24,312.50  |
| <b>Additional Costs for Program</b>                     |   |
| <b>Category</b>   | <b>Dollar Amount</b>  |
| Per Student One-Time Required Fees (if applicable)      | N/A   |
| Estimated Post-Graduation Licensure Fee (if applicable) | Board of Certification for the Athletic Trainer, Licensure Exam<br>NATA members: \$75 |

|                                  |                         |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
|                                  | Non-NATA members: \$100 |
| <b>Estimated Completion Time</b> |                         |
| Estimated Time to Degree         | Two years               |

*\* Total Instructional Cost does not include estimates for room and board*



# TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM: III.D.

**MEETING DATE:** May 15, 2026

**SUBJECT:** New Academic Program  
East Tennessee State University  
Hospitality and Tourism Management, Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA)

**ITEM TYPE:** Action

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Title and Designation</b>         | Hospitality and Tourism Management, Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA)  |
| <b>Concentrations</b>                | Event Management; Hospitality Leadership; Hospitality Marketing; and Appalachian Craft Beverage and Culture  |
| <b>Accreditation</b>                 | Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB); Accreditation Commission for Programs in Hospitality Administration (ACPHA)   |
| <b>CIP Code and Description</b>      | <b>52.0901 (Hospitality Administration/Management, General)</b><br>A program that prepares individuals to serve as general managers and directors of hospitality operations on a system-wide basis, including both travel arrangements and promotion and the provision of traveler facilities. Includes instruction in principles of operations in the travel and tourism, hotel and lodging facilities, food services, and recreation facilities industries; hospitality marketing strategies; hospitality planning; management and coordination of franchise and unit operations; business management; accounting and financial management; hospitality transportation and logistics; and hospitality industry policies and regulations. |
| <b>SOC Code and Title</b>            | <b>11-9051: Food Service Managers</b><br><b>11-9081: Lodging Managers</b><br><b>11-9179: Personal Service Managers, All Other</b><br><b>13-1121: Meeting, Convention, and Event Planners</b>   |
| <b>Credit Hours</b>                  | 120  |
| <b>Implementation Date</b>           | August 24, 2026  |
| <b>Modality and Delivery Site</b>    | On-Ground/Traditional<br>ETSU Main and Sevierville Campus  |
| <b>Department/College</b>            | Department of Management and Supply Chain<br>College of Business and Technology  |
| <b>Governing Board Approval Date</b> | May 23, 2025   |

## **ACADEMIC PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW**

East Tennessee State University (ETSU) proposes a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) in Hospitality and Tourism Management to address the growing need for skilled professionals in one of Tennessee's fastest-growing economic sectors. Hospitality and tourism represents a significant and expanding driver of economic activity across the state, particularly in Northeast Tennessee and the Appalachian Highlands region. The proposed program builds on ETSU's existing Management, BBA with a Hospitality and Tourism concentration, which has demonstrated strong year-over-year enrollment growth since its launch in Fall 2023, growing from 18 students to 47 students in just two years.

The proposed 120 credit hour program will be offered in an on-ground modality on ETSU's main campus in Johnson City and the Sevierville Center, supporting traditional, transfer, adult, and place-bound students in the Appalachian Highlands region. The curriculum is structured around 40 credits of general education, 36 credits of business core coursework, 12 credits of hospitality and tourism major core coursework, nine credits in a chosen concentration, 18 credits of guided electives, and five credits of general electives. The business core provides students with a strong foundation in accounting, finance, marketing, analytics, operations, and strategic management, while the hospitality and tourism major core prepares students with industry-specific competencies in areas such as lodging operations, customer relationship management, talent acquisition, and strategic revenue and operations management.

As a program housed within the Department of Management and Supply Chain in ETSU's College of Business and Technology, the BBA in Hospitality and Tourism Management will align with existing Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation standards. ETSU also plans to pursue specialized accreditation through the Accreditation Commission for Programs in Hospitality Administration (ACPHA) in the years following program launch, ensuring the program meets national quality standards and reinforces its long-term credibility and industry recognition.

A virtual external review of the proposed program was conducted on February 27, 2026, by Dr. R.M. O'Halloran, Professor and Director of the School of Hospitality Leadership at East Carolina University. The external reviewer expressed strong support for the program, noting that "a solid hospitality and tourism management program can support a region and its communities." He noted that the proposed curriculum "is comprehensive and offers a strong business perspective, for service sector operations inclusive of lodging, restaurants, meetings and events and tourism attractions and marketing." Dr. O'Halloran further highlighted the program's potential for broad workforce impact, noting that hospitality and tourism management programs help create a service sector workforce that extends into "healthcare, human resources, retail, and grocery industry opportunities." On regional alignment, he encouraged the program to "embrace local industry partners and reach beyond its immediate region and connect with statewide industry organizations and tourism attractions," specifically highlighting Sevierville and Dollywood as noted regional partners.

## **ALIGNMENT WITH STATE MASTER PLAN AND INSTITUTIONAL MISSION/STRATEGIC PLAN**

The proposed Hospitality and Tourism Management, BBA aligns with the 2015-2025 Tennessee State Master Plan for Higher Education's priorities of workforce readiness in high-demand fields, institutional mission differentiation, and regional capacity building. More specifically, the state master plan emphasizes preparing a workforce that can sustain and grow Tennessee's economy,

where it is already strong, and build new capacity where it is needed. The proposed program supports the master plan by equipping students with industry-aligned competencies in lodging operations, food and beverage management, event planning, destination marketing, and strategic business decision-making, which are skills identified as critical to the state's rapidly expanding hospitality and tourism sector. The proposed program most directly advances the state master plan's "Future Workforce" pillar by offering a distinctive undergraduate program that fills a regional gap in hospitality and tourism education, deepens existing partnerships with industry employers, and creates clear career pathways for students seeking to enter one of Tennessee's largest and fastest-growing industries.

The proposed program also aligns with ETSU's "Go Beyond" Strategic Plan by advancing institutional priorities in access and success, teaching excellence, and community stewardship. The program expands ETSU's academic offerings and provides students with new pathways to pursue careers in a vital and growing industry, which aligns with the strategic plan's goal of maximizing the student experience both inside and outside the classroom. By embedding experiential learning, internships, and industry projects throughout the curriculum, the program reflects ETSU's commitment to high-quality, real-world instruction and aligns with the strategic plan's emphasis on teaching excellence. Finally, the proposed program reinforces ETSU's longstanding commitment to serving as a steward of place by leveraging existing relationships with local and regional hospitality and tourism businesses, destination marketing organizations, and community partners across Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia, directly advancing the strategic plan's priority of community stewardship and regional economic development.

## **WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

According to the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development's 2024 Economic Impact of Travel on Tennessee report, Tennessee's hospitality and tourism industry has experienced significant and sustained growth, welcoming more than 144 million visitors in 2023 and generating \$30.65 billion in visitor spending, a 26% increase over just two years. The same report notes that tourism supported 191,522 direct jobs statewide, equivalent to approximately one in every 24 jobs, and that 84 of Tennessee's 95 counties reported year-over-year growth in visitor spending. O\*NET data reflect strong projected growth for key hospitality and tourism occupations in Tennessee, including food service managers at 30% compared to a 2% national average, lodging managers at 32% compared to a 10% national average, and meeting, convention, and event planners at 33% compared to a 7% national average. At the national level, the U.S. Department of Labor projects that the leisure and hospitality sector will add roughly 822,700 jobs between 2023 and 2033, and estimates that approximately one in eight new jobs created during that period will be in this sector, reinforcing strong long-term demand for hospitality and tourism talent across the country.

The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development's Workforce Insights, Research and Reporting Engine Division (WIRED), projects that employer demand for hospitality and tourism professionals in Tennessee remains strong, particularly in Northeast Tennessee where the accommodation and food services sector is projected to grow 44% and the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector is projected to grow nearly 60% between 2020 and 2030.

The region is also situated within the broader Smoky Mountain tourism corridor, anchored by Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which attracts more than 12 million recreational visits annually and generates more than \$2 billion in visitor spending in nearby communities, with the largest shares accruing to lodging and restaurants, as reported by the National Park Service. Lightcast Analytics Q3 2025 data identified approximately 460,000 unique hospitality and tourism job postings across

Tennessee and neighboring states between 2020 and 2025, including nearly 10,000 unique hospitality management positions within Tennessee alone, with the strongest demand observed for meeting and event planners, lodging managers, and destination management professionals.

The proposed program will build on existing and growing community and industry partnerships across Northeast Tennessee and the broader Appalachian Highlands region through internship and field experience opportunities, site visits, mentorship programs, career pathway development, and collaborative industry projects. Partners span destination marketing organizations, lodging and hospitality operators, cultural and heritage attractions, chambers of commerce, and workforce development organizations, including the Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association, Visit Johnson City, Visit Kingsport, Explore Bristol, The Carnegie Hotel, Meadowview Conference Resort and Convention Center, The Bristol Hotel, Hard Rock Casino Bristol, Bristol Motor Speedway, the Birthplace of Country Music Museum, the International Storytelling Center, the Kingsport Chamber, the Johnson City Chamber, the Bristol TN/VA Chamber of Commerce, the Tennessee Hospitality and Tourism Association, and the Sevier County Economic Development Council. The program will also pursue articulation agreements with Northeast State Community College and Walters State Community College to create seamless transfer pathways for students completing associate degrees in culinary or hospitality programs, further strengthening the regional talent pipeline.

### **PROGRAM DUPLICATION**

The proposed Hospitality and Tourism Management, BBA would be the only hospitality and tourism management degree located in Northeast Tennessee and housed within a college of business in the state of Tennessee. Bachelor's-level hospitality and tourism programs are offered by Austin Peay State University, Middle Tennessee State University, the University of Memphis, and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, as well as associate and certificate options at Tennessee community and technical colleges. The proposed program is distinctive from existing hospitality and tourism offerings in Tennessee because it provides an integrated curriculum combining a comprehensive business core with industry-specific hospitality and tourism coursework.

### **PROJECTED ENROLLMENT, GRADUATION, AND STUDENT INTEREST**

The enrollment and graduation figures below represent full-time enrollment of in-state and out-of-state students. ETSU submitted compelling evidence of student interest, including enrollment data from the existing Management major with a Hospitality and Tourism concentration, which has demonstrated strong year-over-year growth since its launch in Fall 2023. Enrollment counts reflect distinct students enrolled in each academic year, growing from 18 students in 2023 to 29 students in 2024 to 47 students in 2025, representing a 161% increase over just two years.

|                   | <b>2026-27</b> | <b>2027-28</b> | <b>2028-29</b> | <b>2029-30</b> | <b>2030-31</b> |
|-------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>Enrollment</b> | 30             | 75             | 83             | 91             | 100            |
| <b>Graduates</b>  | 0              | 6              | 8              | 12             | 22             |

### **PROGRAM COSTS AND REVENUES**

The proposed expenditures for the Hospitality and Tourism Management, BBA are listed in Table 1. The total projected costs for implementing the program over the first five years include costs for faculty salaries, graduate assistantships, accreditation, marketing, and travel. The program will require two new full-time tenure-track faculty positions in Hospitality and Tourism Management,

with one appointment anticipated to begin in August 2026 and a second in August 2028, both contingent on enrollment growth.

**Table 1: Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program**

| <b>Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program</b> |                 |                  |                  |                  |                    |                    |
|--|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| <b>One-Time Expenditures</b>                           |                 |                  |                  |                  |                    |                    |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b>    | <b>Year 2</b>    | <b>Year 3</b>    | <b>Year 4</b>      | <b>Year 5</b>      |
| <i>Total One-Time Expenditures</i>                     | \$20,000        | \$28,000         | \$0              | \$0              | \$3,500            | \$5,100            |
| <b>Recurring Expenditures</b>                          |                 |                  |                  |                  |                    |                    |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b>    | <b>Year 2</b>    | <b>Year 3</b>    | <b>Year 4</b>      | <b>Year 5</b>      |
| <i>Total Recurring Expenditures</i>                    | \$0             | \$47,211         | \$398,211        | \$398,211        | \$398,211          | \$398,211          |
| <b>Grand Total (One-Time and Recurring)</b>            | <b>\$20,000</b> | <b>\$75,211</b>  | <b>\$398,211</b> | <b>\$398,211</b> | <b>\$401,711</b>   | <b>\$403,311</b>   |
| <b>Projected Revenues</b>                              |                 |                  |                  |                  |                    |                    |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b>    | <b>Year 2</b>    | <b>Year 3</b>    | <b>Year 4</b>      | <b>Year 5</b>      |
| <b>Total Revenues</b>                                  | <b>\$0</b>      | <b>\$329,820</b> | <b>\$824,550</b> | <b>\$912,502</b> | <b>\$1,000,454</b> | <b>\$1,099,400</b> |

**PROGRAM COSTS FOR STUDENTS**

Total instructional costs, including tuition and fees, are included in the table below.

| <b>Annual Cost Per Student</b>                          |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Category</b>   | <b>Cost Per Year (based on 15 credits)</b> |
| Total Instructional Cost* - Resident                    | \$13,269                                   |
| Total Instructional Cost* - Non-Resident                | \$17,469                                   |
| <b>Additional Costs for Program</b>                     |  |
| <b>Category</b>   | <b>Dollar Amount</b>                       |
| Per Student One-Time Required Fees (if applicable)      | N/A  |
| Estimated Post-Graduation Licensure Fee (if applicable) | N/A  |
| <b>Estimated Completion Time</b>                        |  |
| Estimated Time to Degree                                | Four years                                 |

\* Total Instructional Cost does not include estimates for room and board



# TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

**REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM: III.E.**

**MEETING DATE:** May 15, 2026

**SUBJECT:** New Academic Program  
East Tennessee State University  
Environment, Health, and Disaster Sciences, Master of Science (MS)

**ITEM TYPE:** Action

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>Title and Designation</b>    | Environment, Health, and Disaster Sciences, Master of Science (MS)   |
| <b>Concentrations</b>           | Environmental Health Sciences<br>Disaster Sciences   |
| <b>Accreditation</b>            | Applied and Natural Science Accreditation Commission (ANSAC) of ABET   |
| <b>CIP Code and Description</b> | <b>CIP 51.2202 (Environmental Health)</b><br>A program that focuses on the application of environmental sciences, public health, the biomedical sciences, and environmental toxicology to the study of environmental factors affecting human health, safety, and related ecological issues, and prepares individuals to function as professional environmental health specialists. Includes instruction in epidemiology, biostatistics, toxicology, public policy analysis, public management, risk assessment, communications, environmental law, occupational health and safety emergency response, and applications such as air quality, food protection, radiation protection, solid and hazardous waste management, water quality, soil quality, noise abatement, housing quality, and environmental control of recreational areas. |
| <b>SOC Code and Title</b>       | <b>19-1041 (Epidemiologists)</b><br><b>19-1042 (Medical Scientists, Except Epidemiologists)</b><br><b>19-2041 (Environmental Scientists and Specialists, Including Health)</b><br><b>19-5011 (Occupational Health and Safety Specialists)</b><br><b>19-5012 (Occupational Health and Safety Technicians)</b><br><b>25-1071 (Health Specialties Teachers, Postsecondary)</b><br><b>11-9121 (Natural Sciences Managers)</b><br><b>19-1029 (Biological Scientists, All Other)</b><br><b>19-1031 (Conservation Scientists)</b><br><b>19-2021 (Atmospheric and Space Scientists)</b><br><b>19-2042 (Geoscientists, Except Hydrologists and Geographers)</b><br><b>19-4042 (Environmental Science and Protection Technicians)</b><br><b>19-4043 (Geological Technicians, Except Hydrologic Technicians)</b>                                    |
| <b>Credit Hours</b>             | 30-34  |

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Implementation Date</b>           | August 15, 2026   |
| <b>Modality and Delivery Site</b>    | Primary: On-Ground/Traditional<br>Secondary: Fully Online               |
| <b>Department/College</b>            | Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology / College of Public Health |
| <b>Governing Board Approval Date</b> | November 14, 2025   |

**ACADEMIC PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW**

East Tennessee State University (ETSU) proposes a Master of Science (MS) in Environment, Health, and Disaster Sciences to meet documented workforce needs in environmental health, disaster preparedness, emergency management, and geosciences across Tennessee and Central Appalachia. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Tennessee was affected by 116 separate inflation-adjusted, billion-dollar weather and climate disasters between 1980 and 2024. The frequency of these events has increased recently, with the state averaging 7.8 disasters per year from 2020 to 2024. This trend includes devastating events like Hurricane Helene, which alone resulted in fatalities, casualties, and \$1.2 billion in damage. These impacts are especially severe in Central Appalachian distressed counties, which experience higher disease burden, persistent poverty, and disproportionate vulnerability to flooding, drought, wildfire, and extreme storms. The proposed program prepares graduates with research-based and interdisciplinary skills across environmental, ecological, wildlife, agricultural, and human health perspectives needed to address environmental health challenges and to strengthen Tennessee’s disaster-resilience workforce.

The program will be offered in on-ground/traditional and fully online modalities in both a thesis and non-thesis version. The thesis track will be delivered on-ground because it requires laboratory work, field experiences, and faculty-mentored research, while the non-thesis track may be completed on-ground or fully online. The program will serve ETSU undergraduates in Environmental Health, Biology, Geosciences, Health Sciences, Microbiology, and related majors, as well as working professionals in governmental agencies, state institutions, research organizations, and private industry. The proposed part-time, six-semester online pathway provides flexibility for working professionals.

The program is designed for collaborative delivery by the College of Public Health, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Graduate School, with the administrative home in the Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology. Participating departments include Environmental and Occupational Health and Safety Sciences, Biomedical Health Sciences, and Geosciences. The curriculum draws entirely on existing graduate courses, supported by current faculty and expertise, allowing ETSU to launch the degree without creating new courses. The program will be supported by established interdisciplinary research facilities, including the Environmental Health Sciences Laboratory, geospatial and disaster science laboratories, biomedical research facilities, and the Tennessee Climate Office.

ETSU maintains partnerships with state, regional, and national agencies such as the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), the Tennessee Department of Health (TDH), the Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA), the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA), and the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA), which support optional field-based learning opportunities, that complement the curriculum and are available to students through thesis work, capstone projects, or elective applied experiences.

The Environment, Health, and Disaster Sciences, MS requires 30 to 34 credit hours and offers thesis and non-thesis pathways that support research-focused and applied professional goals. The credit-hour range is due to the structure of the program in which concentration requirements and the thesis or capstone components carry different credit values, resulting in total degree pathways of 30 to 34 hours.

All students will complete a 13 credit core in analytic methods, environmental health practice, geospatial analysis, and One Health principles. Students then complete 11 to 14 credits in one of two concentrations. The Environmental Health Sciences concentration includes coursework in environmental risk assessment, toxicology, environmental microbiology, environmental chemistry, and epidemiology, emphasizing environmental exposures, laboratory methods, and population-level health impacts. The Disaster Sciences concentration offers advanced study in geosciences, remote sensing, cartography, unmanned aerial systems, hydrology, and engineering geology to prepare students for hazard analysis, modeling, and disaster-focused applied science.

The thesis track is delivered on-ground and includes 3 to 6 credits of thesis research. The non-thesis track may be completed on ground or online and requires 5 to 7 credits of a capstone and advisor-approved electives. All students complete a culminating experience that takes the form of required research in the thesis track or a required applied project in the non-thesis track. These pathways support both full-time learners and working professionals.

ETSU intends to seek accreditation through the Applied and Natural Science Accreditation Commission (ANSAC) of ABET, with the first accreditation review planned after the initial cohort graduates in 2028.

An external review of the proposed program was conducted on April 8, 2026, by Dr. Ritchie D. Taylor, Interim Associate Dean and Professor of Environmental Science at Western Kentucky University. The external reviewer expressed strong support for the program, highlighting its interdisciplinary design, the strength and expertise of the 15 collaborating faculty, the relevance of its two concentrations, and its clear alignment with regional workforce needs in environmental health, disaster preparedness, and emergency management. Dr. Taylor also emphasized the program's potential to address documented shortages in environmental and disaster-related professions and its capacity to prepare graduates for a wide range of applied and research-oriented careers.

## **ALIGNMENT WITH STATE MASTER PLAN AND INSTITUTIONAL MISSION/STRATEGIC PLAN**

The proposed Environment, Health, and Disaster Sciences, MS strongly aligns with Tennessee's 2025–2035 Strategic Higher Education Master Plan by connecting education to workforce needs and by preparing graduates for fields experiencing persistent shortages in Tennessee, including environmental scientists and specialists, occupational health and safety specialists, epidemiologists, geoscientists, and emergency management professionals. The program supports the Master Plan's *aligned* cornerstone by connecting education to workforce needs through partnerships with TDEC, TDH, TDA, TEMA, and NEHA that create opportunities for experiential and applied learning consistent with the plan's emphasis on linking learning to real-world experiences and ensuring education is meaningful and workforce-relevant. It supports the *achievable* cornerstone by offering an online, nonthesis pathway that expands access for working professionals and students in rural or distressed counties, reinforcing the plan's call for a higher education system that is simpler to navigate, more accessible, and more supportive of students' diverse circumstances. The program

advances the *agile* cornerstone by expanding in-state, graduate preparation in high-need environmental and disaster-related fields, which aligns with the plan's expectation that higher education remains responsive to evolving workforce needs, incorporates labor-market intelligence, and prepares graduates to thrive in a dynamic and changing economy.

The Environment, Health, and Disaster Sciences, MS supports ETSU's core mission of providing a student-centered community of learning that promotes professional preparation and continuous improvement through a wide array of educational and research programs, including those of the comprehensive Academic Health Sciences Center. The program reinforces ETSU's role in that Center by preparing graduates to address environmental and disaster-related challenges affecting Central Appalachia. It aligns with ETSU's Strategic Plan 2016 to 2026 and the university's 2022 Strategic Vision, "Go Beyond", by expanding graduate research capacity, fostering interdisciplinary innovation, and strengthening workforce and economic development in environmental health and disaster preparedness.

## **WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

Data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) indicate that, in May 2023, the Johnson City area employed 50 environmental scientists and specialists and 110 occupational health and safety specialists, and the Kingsport-Bristol area employed 70 environmental scientists and specialists. These figures reflect local labor market demand for professionals trained in environmental health, hazard analysis, and environmental monitoring, particularly given recent events such as water quality advisories issued by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation following Hurricane Helene. Evidence of unmet demand is further demonstrated by a LinkedIn search conducted in spring 2026 identifying 38 open positions in the Johnson City-Kingsport-Bristol metropolitan area and approximately 700 open positions nationally for which graduates of this program would be qualified.

Additionally, Tennessee projections from CareerOneStop indicate that occupational health and safety specialists are expected to grow 28% by 2032, with approximately 420 annual openings; epidemiologists are projected to grow 43%, with approximately 20 annual openings; and environmental scientists and specialists are projected to grow 17%, with approximately 110 annual openings. At the national level, epidemiologists are projected to grow 16% and occupational health and safety specialists 13% through 2034. Taken together, these projections indicate sustained and growing demand for professionals with graduate-level preparation in the fields this program addresses.

State hazard data from the Tennessee State Hazard Mitigation Plan, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, the Tennessee Department of Health, and the National Centers for Environmental Information identify major statewide hazards such as drought, flooding, severe storms, tornadoes, wildfire, and geologic hazards, reinforcing demand for a trained environmental and disaster-focused workforce.

Furthermore, BLS projections for 2024 to 2034 anticipate continued growth in related occupations. Environmental scientists and specialists are projected to grow 4% with about 8,500 annual openings; geoscientists are projected to grow 3% with about 2,000 annual openings; epidemiologists are projected to grow 16% with about 800 annual openings; and occupational health and safety specialists are projected to grow 13%.

Community and industry partners such as the Tennessee Department of Health, the Tennessee Department of Health Northeast Regional Office, the Tennessee Department of Environment and

Conservation, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, and the National Environmental Health Association provided letters of support that have committed to supporting the Environment, Health, and Disaster Sciences, MS through activities that include guest instruction, applied projects, internships, field placements, practica, experiential learning opportunities, subject-matter expertise, collaborative research, and advisory engagement, demonstrating strong regional demand for graduates who are prepared to address environmental health, disaster resilience, and public health challenges.

## **PROGRAM DUPLICATION**

Currently, no public institution in Tennessee offers a master’s program comparable to the proposed Environment, Health, and Disaster Sciences, MS. The proposed Master of Science in Environment, Health, and Disaster Sciences will be the first program of its kind in Tennessee due to the unique integration of environmental health, geosciences, epidemiology, and disaster sciences not available through existing adjacent programming.

## **PROJECTED ENROLLMENT, GRADUATION, AND STUDENT INTEREST**

Full-time students are expected to complete the program within two academic years, while part-time enrollment is available only to online students who may take up to six years to finish the degree. Survey results demonstrate that among a total of 43 students surveyed, 60% (n=26) reported being extremely likely to enroll in the proposed program, with most respondents drawn from existing ETSU programs such as the Environmental Health, BSEH, Master of Public Health, MPH, and the Graduate Certificate in One Health and Climate Studies.

|                   | <b>2026-27</b> | <b>2027-28</b> | <b>2028-29</b> | <b>2029-30</b> | <b>2030-31</b> |
|-------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>Enrollment</b> | 8              | 16             | 17             | 18             | 19             |
| <b>Graduates</b>  | 0              | 6              | 7              | 7              | 8              |

## **PROGRAM COSTS AND REVENUES**

The proposed expenditures for the Environment, Health, and Disaster Sciences, MS are listed in Table 1. The total projected costs for implementing the program over the first five years include recurring expenditures for the program coordinator stipend, graduate assistantships, and start-up costs to support faculty-led student research. These recurring expenditures total \$280,000 over five years, and the program’s one-time expenditures total \$12,000 for consultant fees, marketing, and travel.

The program will not require new faculty or staff positions. Fifteen existing faculty members across participating departments will support the program and no new faculty or instructional staff are anticipated.

One-time startup expenditures cover consultant fees for the required external review, marketing materials developed in coordination with ETSU Marketing and the Graduate School, and travel to support program planning and partner engagement.

**Table 1: Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program**

| <b>Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program</b> |                 |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |
|--|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>One-Time Expenditures</b>                           |                 |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b>    | <b>Year 2</b>    | <b>Year 3</b>    | <b>Year 4</b>    | <b>Year 5</b>    |
| <i>Total One-Time Expenditures</i>                     | \$8,000         | \$0              | \$0              | \$4,000          | \$0              | \$0              |
| <b>Recurring Expenditures</b>                          |                 |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b>    | <b>Year 2</b>    | <b>Year 3</b>    | <b>Year 4</b>    | <b>Year 5</b>    |
| <i>Total Recurring Expenditures</i>                    | \$0             | \$56,000         | \$56,000         | \$56,000         | \$56,000         | \$56,000         |
| <b>Grand Total (One-Time and Recurring)</b>            | <b>\$8,000</b>  | <b>\$56,000</b>  | <b>\$56,000</b>  | <b>\$60,000</b>  | <b>\$56,000</b>  | <b>\$56,000</b>  |
| <b>Projected Revenues</b>                              |                 |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b>    | <b>Year 2</b>    | <b>Year 3</b>    | <b>Year 4</b>    | <b>Year 5</b>    |
| <b>Total Revenues</b>                                  | <b>\$0</b>      | <b>\$101,776</b> | <b>\$213,010</b> | <b>\$236,874</b> | <b>\$262,538</b> | <b>\$290,124</b> |

\*Other expenses: Three graduate students will receive \$4,000 in annual thesis support, totaling \$12,000 for three students per year.

### **PROGRAM COSTS FOR STUDENTS**

Students can expect annual instructional costs of \$13,892 for residents and \$29,012 for non-residents, which include institutional tuition and fees, course materials (\$1,170), and course fees (\$900). The program requires four semesters to complete and has no one-time fees or licensure costs.

| <b>Annual Cost Per Student</b>                          |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| <b>Category</b>   | <b>Cost Per Year</b> |
| Total Instructional Cost* - Resident                    | \$13,892             |
| Total Instructional Cost* - Non-Resident                | \$29,012             |
| <b>Additional Costs for Program</b>                     |                      |
| <b>Category</b>   | <b>Dollar Amount</b> |
| Per Student One-Time Required Fees (if applicable)      | N/A                  |
| Estimated Post-Graduation Licensure Fee (if applicable) | N/A                  |
| <b>Estimated Completion Time</b>                        |                      |
| Estimated Time to Degree                                | Two years            |

*\* Total Instructional Cost does not include estimates for room and board*



# TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM: III.F.

**MEETING DATE:** May 15, 2026  
**SUBJECT:** New Academic Program  
Middle Tennessee State University  
Mechatronics Systems Engineering, Master of Science (MS)  
**ITEM TYPE:** Action

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Title and Designation</b>         | Mechatronics Systems Engineering, Master of Science (MS)   |
| <b>Concentrations</b>                | None   |
| <b>Accreditation</b>                 | Not applicable   |
| <b>CIP Code and Description</b>      | <b>CIP 14,4201 (Mechatronics, Robotics, and Automation Engineering)</b><br>A program that prepares individuals to apply mathematical and scientific principles to the design, development and operational evaluation of computer controlled electromechanical systems and products with embedded electronics, sensors, and actuators; and which includes, but is not limited to, automata, robots and automation systems. Includes instruction in mechanical engineering, electronic and electrical engineering, computer and software engineering, and control engineering. |
| <b>SOC Code and Title</b>            | <b>17-2199: Engineers, All Other</b><br><b>11-9041: Architectural and Engineering Managers</b>   |
| <b>Credit Hours</b>                  | 30-36  |
| <b>Implementation Date</b>           | August 17, 2026  |
| <b>Modality and Delivery Site</b>    | On-Ground/Traditional; Majority On-Ground (Hybrid)<br>MTSU Main Campus   |
| <b>Department/College</b>            | Department of Engineering Technology<br>College of Basic and Applied Sciences  |
| <b>Governing Board Approval Date</b> | March 17, 2026   |

## ACADEMIC PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) proposes a Master of Science (MS) in Mechatronics Systems Engineering to address the growing need for highly-skilled engineers in the advanced manufacturing and automation industries. Nationally, demand for mechatronics engineers continues to rise amid expanded automation, and the gap between qualified professionals and industry need is growing. The proposed program will complement MTSU's existing Bachelor of Science in Mechatronics Engineering, which has been offered since 2013 and currently enrolls almost 250 students. The proposed program will be offered in both a 30-credit hour, non-thesis option and a 36 credit hour, thesis option through a combination of on-ground, online, and hybrid

courses. The program will serve students and working professionals interested in advanced training in mechatronics and can be completed in as little as a calendar year.

The proposed program's curriculum will integrate theoretical and applied aspects preparing students for high-demand careers across industries through a strong foundation in mechatronic systems design, embedded systems, robotics, industrial automation, artificial intelligence in manufacturing, and advanced control systems. MTSU will leverage existing industry partnerships to provide students with hands-on experience, research opportunities, and career pathways. The proposed Mechatronics Systems Engineering, MS will also integrate pathways for students to obtain industry-recognized professional certifications, such as Certified Manufacturing Engineering (CMfgE), Certified Automation Professional (CAP), and Professional Engineer (PE) licensure.

A virtual external review of the proposed program was conducted on January 29 – 30, 2026 by Dr. Frank Zhou, Associate Professor of Electrical Engineering and Director of the Master of Engineering at the University of Cincinnati. The external reviewer expressed strong support for the program, highlighting its strong alignment with the State Master Plan's emphasis on "preparing a workforce that can adapt to rapid technological change and drive Tennessee's economic competitiveness." He noted that the curriculum "aligns with current industry and research expectations, ensuring that graduates are well prepared for professional practice or further advanced study." Dr. Zhou recommended approval, noting that there is "high demand for the program at both the national and local levels."

## **ALIGNMENT WITH STATE MASTER PLAN AND INSTITUTIONAL MISSION/STRATEGIC PLAN**

The proposed Mechatronics Systems Engineering, Master of Science aligns with the Tennessee State Master Plan for Higher Education's priorities of workforce readiness in high-demand fields, institutional mission differentiation, and regional capacity building. More specifically, the state master plan emphasizes preparing a workforce that can adapt to rapid technological change and drive Tennessee's competitiveness. The proposed program responds by equipping students with advanced expertise in automation, robotics, and intelligent systems—skills identified as critical to the state's manufacturing and technology sectors. The proposed program advances the Tennessee State Master Plan's goals of institutional mission differentiation and regional capacity building by offering a distinctive graduate program to complement existing engineering programming that enhances existing and expanded local partnerships with industry and applied research.

The proposed program also aligns with MTSU's Strategic Plan 2035 by advancing institutional priorities in research, community engagement, and partnerships. The proposed program is designed to enhance MTSU's research profile and to foster faculty-student research in intelligent systems, robotics, and automation. By offering in-person, hybrid, and online courses, the program provides flexible learning options across a wide range of students, including those seeking to advance their careers without taking a break from professional responsibilities, which aligns with Priority 2 of the MTSU Strategic Plan 2035 to strengthen inclusive access and workforce readiness. Finally, the proposed program will reinforce MTSU's commitment to building and sustaining regional industry collaborations through various engagement strategies, which aligns to Priority 3 of the Strategic Plan, which is to "cultivate sustainable partnerships."

## WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Tennessee has over 2,600 advanced manufacturing establishments employing more than 153,000 Tennesseans, which is 31% more than the national average. Hanover Research conducted in 2024 projected mechatronics-related positions to increase by nearly 14,000 nationally. Since MTSU's proposed program would be the first of its kind in the state, it will address a documented skills gap and provide a unique pathway for engineers to meet employer demand at the advanced level. The 2025 Academic Supply for Occupational Demand Report indicates 13 engineering programs with high employment rates and first-year wages above the state median, including mechatronics, robotics, and automation engineering. In the Southeast region, there is above average opportunity for mechatronics engineers, and nationally, employment growth for electrical engineers and mechanical engineers are anticipated to grow 9% and 10%, respectively, between 2023-2033.

Employer demand for engineering professionals in Tennessee remains strong, particularly in fields closely related to mechatronics, which is interdisciplinary and combines advanced manufacturing, automation, robotics, and smart systems. Mechatronics engineers are not categorized distinctly, but the "All Other" category of engineering is projected to grow 22%, translating to 390 annual openings. Furthermore, statewide LinkedIn data indicate 139 mechatronics engineering jobs, over 700 mechanical engineer jobs, and over 1,200 electrical engineer jobs in Tennessee. According to Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development data, regional projections for Middle Tennessee show elevated demand due to automotive/tech clusters, where mechatronics systems expertise is a priority. State economic development initiatives and employer investments in Industry 4.0 technologies, such as increased automation, AI, and other technology advancements, are accelerating the need for master's-prepared professionals who can lead complex system design, integration, optimization, and research and development—roles that often prefer or require graduate-level preparation for advanced technical leadership.

Careers associated with the proposed program have median salaries well above the national, state, and local living wage, with mechanical engineers earning a median wage of \$102,320 and \$113,795 nationwide and in the Nashville metropolitan region, respectively. Master's-prepared mechatronics engineers in automation, robotics, and systems integration roles can command 10-20% higher total compensation compared with bachelor's-level peers based on Bureau of Labor Statistics and Noodle.com Payscale data. Furthermore, job postings in Tennessee for complex automation, robotics, and systems roles frequently prefer or require master's degrees for research and development, senior engineering, and managerial positions. Finally, letters of support from four industry partners describe preference for masters-prepared graduates, particularly leadership, system architecture design, advanced automation integration, and cross-disciplinary problem solving.

The proposed program will build on existing robust community and industry partnerships for MTSU's Engineering Technology Department. Existing and future partnerships include an industry advisory board, internship opportunities for students, career fair participation, hiring of graduates, sponsoring capstone/senior projects, offering plant tours, and foundation donations. Industry partners willing to provide internships for students include Middle Tennessee Electric, Automation NTH, Southeastern Technology, Nissan North America, Insequence Corporation, Quality Industries, Assurant, Berry Global, Spring Automation, Qubits Energy, O-FLEX, Ingram Book, Tenneco, Kasai, DalTile, Kloeckner Metals Corp, Quanta Manufacturing, Ultium Cells, Five Points Production, Fives, and Allvan. Industry partners who have expressed interest in hiring graduates include Automation NTH, Southeastern Technology, Nissan North America, Insequence Corporation, Quality Industries,

Assurant, Spring Automation, O-FLEX, Ingram Book, Schwan Cosmetics, Shiroki North America, Destaco, Tenneco, Kasai, TE Connectivity, and Quanta Manufacturing.

## PROGRAM DUPLICATION

The proposed Mechatronics Systems Engineering, MS would be the first masters-level program in mechatronics in the state of Tennessee. Bachelor’s-level mechatronics programs are offered by East Tennessee State University, MTSU, and the University of Tennessee, Martin. The proposed program is distinctive from existing master’s-level programs in mechanical engineering because it provides an integrated curriculum combining mechanical, electrical, computer, and control systems engineering in a single interdisciplinary program.

## PROJECTED ENROLLMENT, GRADUATION, AND STUDENT INTEREST

The enrollment and graduation figures below represent full-time enrollment of in-state, out-of-state, and international students. MTSU submitted compelling evidence of student interest, including results of two targeted surveys of undergraduate mechatronics engineering students conducted in 2017 (n=46) and 2024 (n=91). Responses to both surveys indicated interest in the proposed program, with 95.9% (n=46) and 93% (n=85) in 2017 and 2024, respectively, indicating that MTSU “probably” or “absolutely” should “offer a master’s program in mechatronics engineering.”

|                   | 2026-27 | 2027-28 | 2028-29 | 2029-30 | 2030-31 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <b>Enrollment</b> | 15      | 20      | 23      | 26      | 30      |
| <b>Graduates</b>  | 10      | 14      | 15      | 16      | 18      |

## PROGRAM COSTS AND REVENUES

The proposed expenditures for the Mechatronics Systems Engineering, MS are listed in Table 1. The total projected costs for implementing the program over the first five years include costs for faculty salaries, summer pay, and release time, graduate assistantships, and marketing.

The program will require two new full-time positions, both of which are contingent on enrollment and anticipated to start in Year 4: a full-time temporary instructor and an administrative assistant. One-time startup expenditures cover marketing (\$10,000 in Year 1), external review (\$4,000 in planning), and program evaluation for Quality Assurance Funding (\$3,000 in Year 4).

MTSU anticipates state grants and research funding starting in Year 3 (\$50,000) and growing nominally each year (\$60,500 by Year 5).

**Table 1: Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program**

| <b>Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program</b> |                 |               |               |               |               |               |
|--|-----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>One-Time Expenditures</b>                           |                 |               |               |               |               |               |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b> | <b>Year 2</b> | <b>Year 3</b> | <b>Year 4</b> | <b>Year 5</b> |
| <i>Total One-Time Expenditures</i>                     | \$4,000         | \$10,000      | \$0           | \$0           | \$3,000       | \$0           |
| <b>Recurring Expenditures</b>                          |                 |               |               |               |               |               |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b> | <b>Year 2</b> | <b>Year 3</b> | <b>Year 4</b> | <b>Year 5</b> |

|   |                 |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |
|---|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <i>Total Recurring Expenditures</i>         | \$0             | \$107,642        | \$167,054        | \$168,854        | \$321,204        | \$383,428        |
| <b>Grand Total (One-Time and Recurring)</b> | <b>\$4,000</b>  | <b>\$117,642</b> | <b>\$167,054</b> | <b>\$168,854</b> | <b>\$324,204</b> | <b>\$383,428</b> |
| <b>Projected Revenues</b>                   |                 |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| <b>Category</b>                             | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b>    | <b>Year 2</b>    | <b>Year 3</b>    | <b>Year 4</b>    | <b>Year 5</b>    |
| <b>Total Revenues</b>                       | <b>\$0</b>      | <b>\$281,430</b> | <b>\$362,592</b> | <b>\$468,878</b> | <b>\$530,164</b> | <b>\$623,360</b> |

## PROGRAM COSTS FOR STUDENTS

Total instructional costs, including tuition and fees, are included in the table below. There are no additional one-time fees; however, as licensure and certification pathways are included as an option in the program, a range of licensure exam costs are represented in the table as a range.

| <b>Annual Cost Per Student</b>                          |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Category</b>   | <b>Cost Per Year</b>   |
| Total Instructional Cost* – Resident                    | \$21,739.50  |
| Total Instructional Cost* – Non-Resident                | \$53,350.50  |
| <b>Additional Costs for Program</b>                     |  |
| <b>Category</b>   | <b>Dollar Amount</b>   |
| Per Student One-Time Required Fees (if applicable)      | N/A  |
| Estimated Post-Graduation Licensure Fee (if applicable) | \$275 - \$600**  |
| <b>Estimated Completion Time</b>                        |  |
| Estimated Time to Degree                                | One year – non-thesis option<br>One and a half years – thesis option |

\* Total Instructional Cost does not include estimates for room and board

\*\*Professional certification exams are not required, but graduates will be eligible to take the Certified Manufacturing Engineer (CMfgE) exam (\$275 – 520); the Certified Automation Professional (CAP) (\$373 – 467); and the Professional Engineer (PE) licensure exam (\$400).



# TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM: III.G.

**MEETING DATE:** May 15, 2026  
**SUBJECT:** New Academic Program  
Tennessee Technological University  
Integrative Biology, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)  
**ITEM TYPE:** Action

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Title and Designation</b>         | Integrative Biology, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)   |
| <b>Concentrations</b>                | None  |
| <b>Accreditation</b>                 | Not applicable  |
| <b>CIP Code and Description</b>      | <b>26.0101 (Biology/Biological Sciences, General)</b><br>A general program of biology at the introductory, basic level or a program in biology or the biological sciences that is undifferentiated as to title or content. Includes instruction in general biology and programs covering a variety of biological specializations. |
| <b>SOC Code and Title</b>            | <b>11-9121: Natural Sciences Managers</b><br><b>19-1029: Biological Scientists, All Other</b><br><b>19-1099: Life Scientists, All Other</b>   |
| <b>Credit Hours</b>                  | 60  |
| <b>Implementation Date</b>           | August 1, 2026  |
| <b>Modality and Delivery Site</b>    | On-Ground/Traditional<br>TTU Main Campus  |
| <b>Department/College</b>            | Department of Biology<br>College of Arts and Sciences   |
| <b>Governing Board Approval Date</b> | March 12, 2026  |

## ACADEMIC PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

Tennessee Technological University (TTU) proposes a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Integrative Biology to address the growing need for researchers who can synthesize knowledge across traditional biological subdisciplines to tackle complex biological challenges, including emerging diseases, climate change, and habitat loss. Nationally, the demand for scientists who can work at the intersections of multiple biological fields continues to grow, as these challenges cannot be fully understood through a single disciplinary perspective. The proposed program will leverage TTU's existing expertise in the Department of Biology, which includes 23 research and teaching professionals with proficiency in molecular genetics, microbial ecology, conservation biology, physiological ecology, and evolutionary biology, as well as the University's unique geographic setting in the biologically diverse Upper Cumberland region. The program will be offered on-ground

through traditional face-to-face instruction and research experiences and will consist of 60 credit hours.

The proposed program's curriculum will integrate theoretical and applied approaches, preparing graduates to conduct rigorous research across multiple scales of biological organization. The program includes 13 credits of required core courses providing a strong foundation in integrative biology, research design, scientific leadership, and cross-disciplinary inquiry, 12 credits of graduate coursework electives, and 35 credits of research and dissertation hours, with all students required to complete a dissertation. TTU will leverage existing on-campus research infrastructure, including the Lab Sciences Commons, 160,000 square-foot facility housing core research facilities for cell and molecular biology, microscopy, and genomics, and the Water Center (TTU's Center for the Management, Utilization, and Protection of Water Resources), along with advanced genomics and proteomics facilities and high-performance computing resources. These assets, combined with established partnerships with state and federal agencies such as the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Oak Ridge National Laboratory, provide robust support for student research and career pathways. Graduates of the proposed Integrative Biology, PhD program will be prepared for careers in research universities, government agencies, conservation organizations, and private industry, including biotechnology, pharmaceutical research, and environmental consulting.

A virtual external review of the proposed program was conducted on January 29, 2026, by Dr. Sarah L. Milton, Professor and Chair of Biological Sciences at Florida Atlantic University, and Dr. Bernard B. Rees, Professor and Chair of Biological Sciences at the University of New Orleans. The external reviewers expressed strong support for the program, highlighting its integrative approach, focus on questions of regional importance, and flexibility to tailor coursework to student interests as features that clearly distinguish the proposed program from more narrowly focused doctoral programs. They noted that the program will train the next generation of biologists to tackle "current and emerging problems that face the region, nation, and globe," and that community partners and potential employers "uniformly supported this program and indicated a need for biologists with training offered by this program." The reviewers further observed that Tennessee's robust research institutions, growing biotech industry, and state and wildlife agencies represent strong employment opportunities for graduates. Drs. Milton and Rees recommended approval, noting that the program "will clearly benefit TTU faculty, students, and the state of Tennessee through its focus on systems biology across scales, its regional scientific focus, and the intentional development of soft skills in leadership and project management."

## **ALIGNMENT WITH STATE MASTER PLAN AND INSTITUTIONAL MISSION/STRATEGIC PLAN**

TTU's proposed PhD in Integrative Biology advances the 2015-2025 Tennessee State Master Plan for Higher Education's emphasis on preparing a workforce equipped to address emerging challenges and drive Tennessee's economic competitiveness. The proposed program prepares graduates with sophisticated research skills and the ability to synthesize knowledge across biological disciplines, addressing the state master plan's call for a workforce capable of tackling complex, emerging challenges. The program strengthens both the breadth of the state's doctoral offerings and its capacity to develop researchers who can contribute to Tennessee's growing research and innovation economy. Finally, the proposed program advances the family prosperity pillar of the State Master Plan Update by preparing graduates for high-earning careers and advancement, with PhD-level

biological scientists in Tennessee starting at competitive salaries well above the median, ranging from \$75,000 - \$125,000 annually.

The proposed program also aligns with TTU's mission to create, advance, and apply knowledge to expand opportunity and economic competitiveness as a STEM-infused, comprehensive institution. The program supports this mission by delivering rigorous, technology-enhanced biological education, providing advanced training in cutting-edge instrumentation and computational research methods, and developing a highly skilled STEM workforce prepared to drive innovation and economic growth in the Upper Cumberland region and across Tennessee. Through collaborative partnerships with regional industries, government agencies, and research institutions, the program further embodies TTU's mission of delivering impactful research and collaborative service to the state.

## **WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

Tennessee is home to a growing network of research institutions, biotechnology firms, state and wildlife agencies, and federal laboratories that collectively represent robust employment opportunities for PhD-level biological scientists. Demand for researchers trained to work across biological disciplines continues to grow as complex challenges, including emerging diseases, climate change, and habitat loss, require scientific expertise that transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), employment in life, physical, and social science occupations is projected to grow at 7%, nearly double the national average of 4% for all occupations from 2023 to 2033, with approximately 148,400 openings projected each year due to growth and worker replacement. Additionally, BLS data and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission's 2024 Academic Supply for Occupational Demand Report indicate that employment of biological scientists and related research positions in Tennessee is projected to grow by 7.2% through 2032, outpacing the overall state employment growth rate of 6.8%.

Employer demand for PhD-prepared biological scientists in Tennessee is particularly strong across academic and government settings. Oak Ridge National Laboratory's Biosciences Division regularly employs PhD-level biological scientists with median salaries ranging from \$85,000 to \$120,000 annually, and major research institutions, including Vanderbilt University Medical Center and St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, maintain active research programs requiring PhD-level scientists, with entry-level research positions starting at \$75,000 to \$85,000 annually. State and federal agencies, including the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, employ PhD-level scientists in research director and program manager positions with salary ranges of \$70,000 to \$95,000, and organizations such as the Tennessee Aquarium Conservation Institute provide additional applied research and employment opportunities for integrative biology graduates.

Private sector opportunities are also expanding. According to data from the Tennessee Economic and Community Development, over 20 biotechnology companies have established or expanded operations in Tennessee since 2020, creating new demand for PhD-level scientists in positions that typically offer starting salaries between \$90,000 and \$115,000 annually. Life Science Tennessee, a nonprofit trade association representing the state's life sciences industry, reports that Tennessee's bioscience sector employed 48,258 workers in 2023, reflecting 60% growth in four years, with research, testing, and medical laboratories increasing by 164% over that period.

Each of these organizations provided letters of support for the proposed program, affirming the need for doctoral-prepared researchers capable of leading complex, long-term biological studies and contributing to applied research on issues of regional and statewide importance.

## **PROGRAM DUPLICATION**

The proposed Integrative Biology, PhD would be the first doctoral program specifically focused on integrative biological sciences at a public institution in Tennessee. Doctoral programs at the PhD level in related biological science fields are currently offered at East Tennessee State University, Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee State University, the University of Memphis, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and the University of Tennessee Health Science Center.

The proposed program is distinct from these existing doctoral programs in its deliberate focus on biological processes spanning multiple organizational scales, from the molecular to the ecological, rather than guiding students toward specialization in a particular subdiscipline. While existing programs concentrate on areas such as biomedical sciences, molecular biosciences, ecology and evolutionary biology, or microbiology, the proposed program uniquely prepares graduates to synthesize knowledge across traditional biological boundaries and apply integrative approaches to complex biological challenges that cannot be fully addressed through a single disciplinary perspective.

## **PROJECTED ENROLLMENT, GRADUATION, AND STUDENT INTEREST**

The enrollment and graduation figures below represent full-time student enrollment. TTU submitted compelling evidence of student interest, including results of a targeted survey distributed to biology and related department administrators across all four-year public universities in Tennessee during the summer of 2025. The survey received 51 responses from current students and recent graduates at East Tennessee State University, the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and TTU, primarily in fields including organismal biology, environmental science, cell and molecular biology, and microbiology. Open-ended responses were generally positive, with 35% (n=18) providing explicit positive statements describing the program as great, amazing, excellent, or essential, and 30% (n=15) indicating interest due to factors such as competitive stipends, clear specialization options, and alignment with research interests.

|                   | <b>2026-27</b> | <b>2027-28</b> | <b>2028-29</b> | <b>2029-30</b> | <b>2030-31</b> | <b>2031-32</b> | <b>2032-33</b> |
|-------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>Enrollment</b> | 8              | 12             | 15             | 19             | 22             | 24             | 25             |
| <b>Graduates</b>  | 0              | 0              | 0              | 2              | 4              | 5              | 6              |

## **PROGRAM COSTS AND REVENUES**

The proposed expenditures for the Integrative Biology, PhD are listed in Table 1. The total projected costs for implementing the program over the first seven years include costs for faculty and instructional staff, non-instructional staff, equipment, marketing, travel, and other operational expenses.

One-time expenditures include \$5,000 for planning costs for the external review process, \$10,000 for marketing in Year 1, and \$100,000 for faculty startup costs in Year 2. Recurring expenditures begin at \$114,720 in Year 1 and grow to approximately \$265,515 by Year 7, driven primarily by faculty salary costs beginning in Year 2 and non-instructional staff costs starting in Year 1. Additional recurring costs include \$10,000 annually for equipment, \$20,000 annually for travel, \$2,000 annually

for marketing, and \$50,000 annually for other operating costs, including consumable lab supplies, permits, fees, publication costs, and miscellaneous expenses incurred by graduate students.

TTU anticipates tuition revenue beginning at \$106,272 in Year 1 and growing to approximately \$396,545 by Year 7 as enrollment expands. While the program anticipates securing external research grants to support faculty and student research opportunities as the program matures, no grant funding has been secured at this time, and none is reflected in the current revenue projections.

**Table 1: Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program**

| <b>Estimated Costs to Deliver the Proposed Program</b> |                 |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |
|--|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>One-Time Expenditures</b>                           |                 |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b>    | <b>Year 2</b>    | <b>Year 3</b>    | <b>Year 4</b>    | <b>Year 5</b>    | <b>Year 6</b>    | <b>Year 7</b>    |
| <i>Total One-Time Expenditures</i>                     | \$5,000         | \$10,000         | \$100,000        | \$0              | \$0              | \$0              |                  |                  |
| <b>Recurring Expenditures</b>                          |                 |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b>    | <b>Year 2</b>    | <b>Year 3</b>    | <b>Year 4</b>    | <b>Year 5</b>    | <b>Year 6</b>    | <b>Year 7</b>    |
| <i>Total Recurring Expenditures</i>                    | \$0             | \$104,720        | \$240,302        | \$245,051        | \$249,942        | \$254,980        | \$260,170        | \$265,515        |
| <b>Grand Total (One-Time and Recurring)</b>            | <b>\$5,000</b>  | <b>\$114,720</b> | <b>\$340,302</b> | <b>\$245,051</b> | <b>\$249,942</b> | <b>\$254,980</b> | <b>\$260,170</b> | <b>\$265,515</b> |
| <b>Projected Revenues</b>                              |                 |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Planning</b> | <b>Year 1</b>    | <b>Year 2</b>    | <b>Year 3</b>    | <b>Year 4</b>    | <b>Year 5</b>    | <b>Year 6</b>    | <b>Year 7</b>    |
| <b>Total Revenues</b>                                  | <b>\$0</b>      | <b>\$106,272</b> | <b>\$164,190</b> | <b>\$211,395</b> | <b>\$275,800</b> | <b>\$328,928</b> | <b>\$369,595</b> | <b>\$396,545</b> |

## PROGRAM COSTS FOR STUDENTS

Total instructional costs, including tuition and fees, are included in the table below. There are no additional one-time fees or licensure fees associated with the program.

| <b>Annual Cost Per Student</b>                     |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Category</b>                                    | <b>Cost Per Year (based on 15 credits)</b> |
| Total Instructional Cost* – Resident               | \$14,106                                   |
| Total Instructional Cost* – Non-Resident           | \$17,356                                   |
| <b>Additional Costs for Program</b>                |  |
| <b>Category</b>                                    | <b>Dollar Amount</b>                       |
| Per Student One-Time Required Fees (if applicable) | N/A  |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Estimated Post-Graduation Licensure Fee (if applicable) | N/A        |
| <b>Estimated Completion Time</b>                        |            |
| Estimated Time to Degree                                | Five years |

*\* Total Instructional Cost does not include estimates for room and board*



# TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

---

**REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM: IV.A.**

**MEETING DATE:** May 15, 2026  
**SUBJECT:** FY2026-27 Annual Binding Tuition and Fee Policy  
**ITEM TYPE:** Action

---

## BACKGROUND

Since 2010, the Complete College Tennessee Act has required the Commission to make student fees and state appropriation recommendations concurrently. The FOCUS Act expanded THEC's authority on student fee levels, requiring that the Commission issue binding tuition and fee maximum increases each year. These maximum increases apply only to the tuition rate for resident, undergraduate students, as well as the total increase to tuition and mandatory fees for these students.

During the 2025 legislative session, Public Chapter 186 amended Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-7-202(n), THEC's tuition and fee authority, to allow the Commission to approve separate maximum increases for one or more public institutions of higher education if the Commission determines that it is necessary based on the circumstances or needs of the respective institution.

Following the Commission's approval of an annual binding tuition and fee policy, any institution may submit a statement of financial necessity to the Executive Director substantiating the financial need for the institution's separate tuition and fee policy.

## TENNESSEE TUITION & FEE PROFILE

Average full-time, annual tuition and mandatory fees for 2025-26 are \$11,126 at Tennessee's public universities, \$5,163 at community colleges, and \$4,461 at the Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs). Tennessee's public higher education tuition and fee levels are marginally higher than peers across member states of the Southern Regional Education Board.<sup>1</sup> Listed tuition and fees in the two- and four-year sectors ranked 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, respectively, out of sixteen SREB states in the most recent year of data available.

Despite an elevated sticker price, Tennessee reported the second lowest net tuition revenue per full-time equivalent student in the two-year sector and the highest state investment in public financial aid. In the four-year sector, Tennessee's net tuition revenue per full-time equivalent student is on par with the national average, and public financial aid is above the national average.<sup>2</sup>

## BINDING TUITION & FEE MAXIMUM INCREASES

In November 2025, the Commission approved a 2.5% guiding tuition and fee maximum increase for 2026-27, along with \$73.8 million to fund the outcomes-based funding formula and \$37.6 million to

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education, College Scorecard.

<sup>2</sup> State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. (2026). *2025 State higher education finance report (SHEF)*. <https://shef.sheeo.org/report/>

partially fund an estimated 2.5% salary increase at Tennessee's public institutions of higher education.

The FY2026-27 appropriations bill, HB2631/SB2690, includes funding to formula units totaling \$39.4 million for operating and to partially fund an estimated 1.5% salary increase. Unlike other state-funded entities, higher education must provide a portion of the salary increase from institutional resources. To make the salary increase whole and meet the estimated 1.5% salary increase for state employees, institutions will need to fund a \$16.3 million balance—which may be met with remaining operating funds and tuition revenue (Attachment II).

THEC's tuition model suggests an average tuition increase need of 7.2% at universities, 3.7% at community colleges, and 6.1% at TCATs. However, THEC staff recommend a **4.5% maximum increase** in tuition and combined tuition and mandatory fees for in-state undergraduate students at universities, community colleges and TCATs. A 4.5% maximum increase recognizes ongoing inflationary pressures impacting both students and institutions alongside limited recurring investments in higher education, accounts for uncertainty in lottery revenue and scholarship expenditures, and encourages institutions to continue implementing cost-saving measures.

## TUITION SETTING CONSIDERATIONS

Higher than normal inflationary pressures present an ongoing challenge for both institutions and students. While inflation had been trending downward in late 2025, March 2026 data show inflation is once again increasing, with the largest one month increase in the consumer price index (CPI) since June 2022, leaving current year-over-year CPI at 3.3%, well above the Federal Reserve's target rate of 2.0%.<sup>3</sup>

At the student level, increases in the CPI have an immediate impact on finances, especially when those costs are produced by consumable goods, or those goods that necessitate frequent purchasing, such as food or energy. While the overall CPI has increased 3.3% over the last year, the cost of energy has increased significantly, up 12.5% for the energy sector overall and 18.9% on gas alone. These increased fuel prices are expected to increase costs of other goods and services in the broader CPI metric and keep inflation elevated through the remainder of the year.

Adding to the potential pressure faced by students, lower projected lottery revenues and continued demand for Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship programs, such as HOPE, Promise, Reconnect, and the Dual Enrollment grant, are creating potential funding shortfalls across Tennessee's lottery-funded financial aid programs. These shortfalls may necessitate restructuring scholarship programs in the upcoming academic year, including the possibility of reductions, thereby shifting a greater share of educational costs to students. Taken together, reduced financial aid and higher tuition would significantly hinder affordability for Tennessee students.

At institutions, rising costs can present immediate pressure on the institutions' ability to purchase energy, supplies, contract services, and other items. Downstream effects of high inflation on the consumer price index can translate into larger budget pressure in the form of increased salary expectations from faculty and staff to account for changes in the cost of living. Data from the Higher Education Price Index (HEPI), a measure that better captures inflation on higher education salaries and benefits, shows an increase of 3.6% for the most recent year, above even today's high inflation

---

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor. (2026). *Consumer Price Index-March 2026*. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cpi.pdf>

on CPI. High inflation on the HEPI indicates a market that is putting increasing pressure on institutions to elevate faculty and staff salaries to attract and retain talent.

The binding tuition policy works to balance state appropriations, scholarship expenditures, student-borne costs, and institutional financial needs. Given these competing financial pressures, THEC staff recommend a lower maximum increase than the tuition model may suggest: a maximum increase of 4.5% on tuition and combined tuition and mandatory fees for in-state undergraduate students.

Attachment I details the comparison of 2025-26 tuition and mandatory fee rates with the maximum allowed increase for each university, community college, and TCAT under a 4.5% binding maximum increase for 2026-27.

Attachment II calculates the budget balance under a 4.5% tuition increase after accounting for the state's estimated 1.5% salary increase. It identifies the additional revenue the institution must generate to fully cover the 1.5% salary increase after factoring in the operating appropriations from the outcomes-based funding formula and the state-funded portion of the salary adjustment.

Attachment III details the tuition increase needed to meet the institutional share of the state's salary increase, and the tuition increase needed to remain revenue neutral relative to the prior year, adjusted for inflation.

Attachment IV details the one year change in tuition and fees between 2024-25 and 2025-26 and shows the five year annual growth rate in tuition and fees between 2020-21 and 2025-26.

**Attachment I - Tuition and Fee Ranges**  
**2026-27 Tuition and Mandatory Fees - Scenario for 4.5% Tuition Increase**

| Institution                  | 2025-26         |                 | 2026-27 Maximum  |                 | Maximum Increase |               |               |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|
|                              | Tuition         | Mandatory Fee   | Combined         | Tuition         | Combined         | Tuition       | Combined      |
| Austin Peay                  | \$ 8,028        | \$ 1,824        | \$ 9,852         | \$ 8,389        | \$ 10,295        | \$ 361        | \$ 443        |
| East Tennessee               | 8,802           | 2,192           | 10,994           | 9,198           | 11,489           | 396           | 495           |
| Middle Tennessee             | 8,814           | 2,257           | 11,071           | 9,211           | 11,569           | 397           | 498           |
| Tennessee State              | 8,190           | 1,248           | 9,438            | 8,559           | 9,863            | 369           | 425           |
| Tennessee Tech               | 10,470          | 1,456           | 11,926           | 10,941          | 12,463           | 471           | 537           |
| University of Memphis        | 9,336           | 1,920           | 11,256           | 9,756           | 11,763           | 420           | 507           |
| Chattanooga                  | \$ 4,842        | \$ 332          | \$ 5,174         | \$ 5,060        | \$ 5,407         | \$ 218        | \$ 233        |
| Cleveland                    | 4,842           | 322             | 5,164            | 5,060           | 5,396            | 218           | 232           |
| Columbia                     | 4,842           | 348             | 5,190            | 5,060           | 5,424            | 218           | 234           |
| Dyersburg                    | 4,842           | 318             | 5,160            | 5,060           | 5,392            | 218           | 232           |
| Jackson                      | 4,842           | 310             | 5,152            | 5,060           | 5,384            | 218           | 232           |
| Motlow                       | 4,842           | 298             | 5,140            | 5,060           | 5,371            | 218           | 231           |
| Nashville                    | 4,842           | 292             | 5,134            | 5,060           | 5,365            | 218           | 231           |
| Northeast                    | 4,842           | 342             | 5,184            | 5,060           | 5,417            | 218           | 233           |
| Pellissippi                  | 4,842           | 346             | 5,188            | 5,060           | 5,421            | 218           | 233           |
| Roane                        | 4,842           | 318             | 5,160            | 5,060           | 5,392            | 218           | 232           |
| Southwest                    | 4,842           | 318             | 5,160            | 5,060           | 5,392            | 218           | 232           |
| Volunteer                    | 4,842           | 316             | 5,158            | 5,060           | 5,390            | 218           | 232           |
| Walters                      | 4,842           | 312             | 5,154            | 5,060           | 5,386            | 218           | 232           |
| UT Chattanooga               | \$ 8,712        | \$ 2,050        | \$ 10,762        | \$ 9,104        | \$ 11,246        | \$ 392        | \$ 484        |
| UT Knoxville                 | 11,560          | 2,316           | 13,876           | 12,080          | 14,501           | 520           | 624           |
| UT Martin                    | 9,066           | 1,758           | 10,824           | 9,474           | 11,311           | 408           | 487           |
| UT Southern                  | 9,930           | 1,334           | 11,264           | 10,377          | 11,771           | 447           | 507           |
| TN Colleges of Applied Tech  | \$ 4,212        | \$ 249          | \$ 4,461         | \$ 4,402        | \$ 4,662         | \$ 190        | \$ 201        |
| <b>University Avg</b>        | <b>\$ 9,291</b> | <b>\$ 1,836</b> | <b>\$ 11,126</b> | <b>\$ 9,709</b> | <b>\$ 11,627</b> | <b>\$ 418</b> | <b>\$ 501</b> |
| <b>Community College Avg</b> | <b>\$ 4,842</b> | <b>\$ 321</b>   | <b>\$ 5,163</b>  | <b>\$ 5,060</b> | <b>\$ 5,395</b>  | <b>\$ 218</b> | <b>\$ 232</b> |

## Attachment II 2026-27 Salary and Operating Needs Analysis - 4.5% Tuition Increase

| Tuition Revenue Impact                  |                        |   |                           |  |                                   |   |   |                       |  |                                    |
|---|------------------------|---|---------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|---|---|-----------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| A                                       | B                      | C   | D                         | E                                      | F                                 | G   | H   | I                     | J  |                                    |
| Outcomes Redistribution                 | Outcomes Improvements  | State Portion of Estimated Salary Increase <sup>1</sup> | Full Salary Increase Cost | Institution Portion of Salary Increase | Remaining Available for Operating | Additional Revenue from 1% Tuition Increase | Additional Revenue from 4.5% Tuition Increase | Net Revenue           | Total Estimated Inflationary Need <sup>3</sup> | Balance with 4.5% Tuition Increase |
| = A + B + C = D - C = E = A + B + C + F |                        |   |                           |  |                                   |   |   |                       |  |                                    |
| <b>Locally Governed Institutions</b>    |                        |   |                           |  |                                   |   |   |                       |  |                                    |
| Austin Peay                             | \$ (3,466,900)         | \$ 853,300  | \$ 914,400                | \$ 1,651,700                           | \$ 737,300                        | \$ (3,350,900)                              | \$ 603,200                                    | \$ 1,015,200          | \$ 5,188,600                                   | \$ (4,173,400)                     |
| East Tennessee                          | (3,115,800)            | 907,400   | 1,473,400                 | 2,678,900                              | 1,205,500                         | (3,413,900)                                 | 995,500                                       | 3,744,800             | 7,433,200                                      | (3,688,400)                        |
| Middle Tennessee                        | (4,739,900)            | 1,406,500   | 2,029,900                 | 3,678,800                              | 1,648,900                         | (4,982,300)                                 | 1,440,500                                     | 5,178,800             | 10,728,700                                     | (5,549,900)                        |
| Tennessee State                         | (1,174,100)            | 449,900   | 813,200                   | 1,465,200                              | 652,000                           | (1,376,200)                                 | 262,300                                       | 1,180,400             | 3,591,300                                      | (2,321,900)                        |
| Tennessee Tech                          | (465,000)              | 761,000   | 1,134,100                 | 1,936,400                              | 802,300                           | (506,300)                                   | 789,800                                       | 4,984,200             | 5,954,000                                      | (969,800)                          |
| University of Memphis                   | (1,095,400)            | 1,924,600   | 2,407,400                 | 4,310,300                              | 1,902,900                         | (1,073,700)                                 | 1,407,600                                     | 9,570,800             | 11,623,900                                     | (2,053,100)                        |
| <b>Locally Governed Institutions</b>    | <b>\$ (14,057,100)</b> | <b>\$ 6,302,700</b>                                     | <b>\$ 8,772,400</b>       | <b>\$ 15,721,300</b>                   | <b>\$ 6,948,900</b>               | <b>\$ (14,703,300)</b>                      | <b>\$ 5,498,900</b>                           | <b>\$ 25,763,050</b>  | <b>\$ 44,519,700</b>                           | <b>\$ (18,756,650)</b>             |
| <b>Community Colleges<sup>2</sup></b>   |                        |   |                           |  |                                   |   |   |                       |  |                                    |
| Chattanooga                             | \$ (621,400)           | \$ 471,300  | \$ 520,400                | \$ 778,100                             | \$ 257,700                        | \$ (407,800)                                | \$ 254,900                                    | \$ 1,517,400          | \$ 2,305,700                                   | \$ (788,300)                       |
| Cleveland                               | 304,500                | 257,600   | 189,200                   | 281,600                                | 92,400                            | 469,700                                     | 103,400                                       | 1,216,600             | 973,900  | 242,700                            |
| Columbia                                | (6,600)                | 301,700   | 281,400                   | 419,000                                | 137,600                           | 157,500                                     | 185,900                                       | 1,413,100             | 1,451,000                                      | (37,900)                           |
| Dyersburg                               | 636,900                | 221,100   | 197,400                   | 293,600                                | 96,200                            | 761,800                                     | 107,800                                       | 1,540,500             | 940,600  | 599,900                            |
| Jackson                                 | (60,200)               | 242,200   | 218,700                   | 326,000                                | 107,300                           | 74,700                                      | 134,600                                       | 1,006,400             | 1,106,300                                      | (99,900)                           |
| Motlow                                  | 894,900                | 343,200   | 336,400                   | 502,100                                | 165,700                           | 1,072,400                                   | 212,100                                       | 954,500               | 1,652,500                                      | 876,500                            |
| Nashville                               | 1,030,200              | 315,100   | 427,400                   | 639,500                                | 212,100                           | 1,133,200                                   | 286,800                                       | 3,063,300             | 1,968,500                                      | 1,094,800                          |
| Northeast                               | 714,000                | 383,800   | 336,200                   | 503,100                                | 166,900                           | 930,900                                     | 188,400                                       | 2,281,800             | 1,613,000                                      | 668,800                            |
| Pellissippi                             | 1,072,500              | 514,300   | 611,900                   | 917,900                                | 306,000                           | 1,280,800                                   | 311,300                                       | 3,599,600             | 2,643,500                                      | 956,100                            |
| Roane                                   | 649,100                | 325,800   | 404,400                   | 603,600                                | 199,200                           | 775,700                                     | 178,400                                       | 2,182,100             | 1,609,000                                      | 573,100                            |
| Southwest                               | (966,800)              | 404,800   | 453,400                   | 676,100                                | 222,700                           | (784,700)                                   | 193,600                                       | 762,600               | 1,945,000                                      | (1,182,400)                        |
| Volunteer                               | (796,900)              | 403,100   | 466,300                   | 697,700                                | 231,400                           | (625,200)                                   | 267,900                                       | 1,278,100             | 2,164,300                                      | (886,200)                          |
| Walters                                 | 117,000                | 526,400   | 378,300                   | 565,400                                | 187,100                           | 456,300                                     | 189,800                                       | 1,875,800             | 1,921,000                                      | (45,200)                           |
| <b>Community Colleges<sup>2</sup></b>   | <b>\$ 2,967,200</b>    | <b>\$ 4,710,700</b>                                     | <b>\$ 4,821,400</b>       | <b>\$ 7,203,700</b>                    | <b>\$ 2,382,300</b>               | <b>\$ 5,295,300</b>                         | <b>\$ 2,613,500</b>                           | <b>\$ 24,260,050</b>  | <b>\$ 22,294,300</b>                           | <b>\$ 1,965,750</b>                |
| <b>UT Universities</b>                  |                        |   |                           |  |                                   |   |   |                       |  |                                    |
| UT Chattanooga                          | \$ (161,500)           | \$ 726,000  | \$ 1,258,900              | \$ 2,272,100                           | \$ 1,013,200                      | \$ (448,700)                                | \$ 923,700                                    | \$ 5,980,100          | \$ 6,326,300                                   | \$ (346,200)                       |
| UT Knoxville                            | 12,870,500             | 2,786,600   | 6,228,400                 | 11,221,400                             | 4,993,000                         | 10,664,100                                  | 5,382,300                                     | 46,105,900            | 34,793,200                                     | 11,312,700                         |
| UT Martin                               | (1,801,800)            | 476,000   | 628,200                   | 1,136,400                              | 508,200                           | (1,834,000)                                 | 491,200                                       | 1,512,800             | 3,677,000                                      | (2,164,200)                        |
| UT Southern                             | 182,700                | 97,600  | 104,500                   | 190,100                                | 85,600                            | 194,700                                     | 73,500  | 715,600               | 618,800  | 96,800                             |
| <b>UT Universities</b>                  | <b>\$ 11,089,900</b>   | <b>\$ 4,086,200</b>                                     | <b>\$ 8,220,000</b>       | <b>\$ 14,820,000</b>                   | <b>\$ 6,600,000</b>               | <b>\$ 8,576,100</b>                         | <b>\$ 6,870,700</b>                           | <b>\$ 54,314,250</b>  | <b>\$ 45,415,300</b>                           | <b>\$ 8,898,950</b>                |
| <b>TN Colleges of Applied Tech</b>      |                        |   |                           |  |                                   |   |   |                       |  |                                    |
|   | \$ -                   | \$ 1,132,600  | \$ 1,354,000              | \$ 1,692,500                           | \$ 338,500                        | \$ 794,100                                  | \$ 593,000                                    | \$ 5,155,100          | \$ 6,075,000                                   | \$ (919,900)                       |
| <b>Total Academic Units</b>             | <b>\$ -</b>            | <b>\$ 16,232,200</b>                                    | <b>\$ 23,167,800</b>      | <b>\$ 39,437,500</b>                   | <b>\$ 16,269,700</b>              | <b>\$ (37,800)</b>                          | <b>\$ 15,576,100</b>                          | <b>\$ 109,492,450</b> | <b>\$ 118,304,300</b>                          | <b>\$ (8,811,850)</b>              |

1 - Salary increases for formula units are partially covered by state appropriations. The 1.5% salary increase is estimated based on FY2026-27 appropriations. The state provides 55% of funding for salary increases at the universities, 67% at community colleges, and 80% at the TN Colleges of Applied Tech.

2 - Legislative action is for the community colleges sector as a whole. Institutional detail displayed here is estimated and for informational purposes only.

3 - Data reflect overall revenue needed to remain revenue-neutral relative to the prior year adjusted for 3.1% inflation from the core consumer price index.

**Attachment III**  
**2026-27 Tuition and Mandatory Fees - Increase Needs Simplified**

|  | % Increase Needed<br>for Salary <sup>1</sup> | % Increase Needed<br>for Inflation <sup>3</sup> |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Locally Governed Institutions</b>           |  |   |
| Austin Peay                                    | 5.6%   | 11.4%   |
| East Tennessee                                 | 3.4%   | 8.2%  |
| Middle Tennessee                               | 3.5%   | 8.4%  |
| Tennessee State                                | 5.2%   | 13.4%   |
| Tennessee Tech                                 | 0.6%   | 5.7%  |
| University of Memphis                          | 0.8%   | 6.0%  |
| <b>Locally Governed Institutions Average</b>   | 2.7%   | 7.9%  |
| <b>Community Colleges <sup>2</sup></b>         |  |   |
| Chattanooga                                    | 1.6%   | 7.6%  |
| Cleveland                                      | 0.0%   | 2.2%  |
| Columbia                                       | 0.0%   | 4.7%  |
| Dyersburg                                      | 0.0%   | 0.0%  |
| Jackson  | 0.0%   | 5.2%  |
| Motlow   | 0.0%   | 0.4%  |
| Nashville                                      | 0.0%   | 0.7%  |
| Northeast                                      | 0.0%   | 1.0%  |
| Pellissippi                                    | 0.0%   | 1.4%  |
| Roane  | 0.0%   | 1.3%  |
| Southwest                                      | 4.1%   | 10.6%   |
| Volunteer                                      | 2.3%   | 7.8%  |
| Walters  | 0.0%   | 4.7%  |
| <b>Community Colleges Average <sup>2</sup></b> | 0.0%   | 3.7%  |
| <b>UT Universities</b>                         |  |   |
| UT Chattanooga                                 | 0.5%   | 4.9%  |
| UT Knoxville                                   | 0.0%   | 2.4%  |
| UT Martin                                      | 3.7%   | 8.9%  |
| UT Southern                                    | 0.0%   | 3.2%  |
| <b>UT Universities Average</b>                 | 0.0%   | 3.2%  |
| <b>TN Colleges of Applied Tech</b>             | 0.0%   | 6.1%  |
| <b>Total Academic Units Average</b>            | 0.0%   | 5.1%  |

1 - Salary increases for formula units are partially covered by state appropriations. The state provides 55% of funding for salary increases at the universities, 67% at community colleges, and 80% at the TN Colleges of Applied Tech. This column represents the additional tuition revenue needed to meet the institutional share of the FY2026-27 appropriations estimated 1.5% salary increase. If no tuition increase is needed due to sufficient operating balance after salary or inflation, it is signified with a 0% increase.

2 - Legislative action is for the community college sector as a whole. Institutional detail displayed here is estimated and for informational purposes only.

3 - Data reflect overall tuition increase needed to remain revenue-neutral relative to the prior year adjusted for 3.1% inflation from the core consumer price index.

## Attachment IV Tuition and Mandatory Fees History

### Tuition and Mandatory Fees History

|                  | 2020-21  | 2024-25  | 2025-26  | 1 Year Change | 5 Year Annual Growth Rate <sup>1</sup> |
|------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------------|--|
| APSU             | \$ 8,627 | \$ 9,384 | \$ 9,852 | 5.0%          | 2.7%                                   |
| ETSU             | 9,491    | 10,472   | 10,994   | 5.0%          | 3.0%                                   |
| MTSU             | 9,424    | 10,396   | 11,071   | 6.5%          | 3.3%                                   |
| TSU              | 8,183    | 8,981    | 9,438    | 5.1%          | 2.9%                                   |
| TTU              | 10,338   | 11,376   | 11,926   | 4.8%          | 2.9%                                   |
| UoM              | 9,924    | 10,728   | 11,256   | 4.9%          | 2.6%                                   |
| UTC              | 9,268    | 10,462   | 10,762   | 2.9%          | 3.0%                                   |
| UTK              | 13,264   | 13,812   | 13,876   | 0.5%          | 0.9%                                   |
| UTM              | 9,748    | 10,566   | 10,824   | 2.4%          | 2.1%                                   |
| UTS <sup>2</sup> |          | 10,924   | 11,264   | 3.1%          |  |
| CC Avg           | 4,553    | 5,003    | 5,163    | 3.2%          | 2.5%                                   |
| TCATs            | 3,936    | 4,320    | 4,461    | 3.3%          | 2.5%                                   |

### Tuition History

|                  | 2020-21  | 2024-25  | 2025-26  | 1 Year Change | 5 Year Annual Growth Rate <sup>1</sup> |
|------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------------|--|
| APSU             | \$ 7,044 | \$ 7,650 | \$ 8,028 | 4.9%          | 2.6%                                   |
| ETSU             | 7,572    | 8,376    | 8,802    | 5.1%          | 3.1%                                   |
| MTSU             | 7,554    | 8,334    | 8,814    | 5.8%          | 3.1%                                   |
| TSU              | 7,026    | 7,734    | 8,190    | 5.9%          | 3.1%                                   |
| TTU              | 8,550    | 9,990    | 10,470   | 4.8%          | 4.1%                                   |
| UoM              | 8,220    | 8,856    | 9,336    | 5.4%          | 2.6%                                   |
| UTC              | 7,448    | 8,458    | 8,712    | 3.0%          | 3.2%                                   |
| UTK              | 11,332   | 11,560   | 11,560   | 0.0%          | 0.4%                                   |
| UTM              | 8,214    | 8,802    | 9,066    | 3.0%          | 2.0%                                   |
| UTS <sup>2</sup> |          | 9,640    | 9,930    | 3.0%          |  |
| CC Avg           | 4,242    | 4,680    | 4,842    | 3.5%          | 2.7%                                   |
| TCATs            | 3,687    | 4,071    | 4,212    | 3.5%          | 2.7%                                   |

### Mandatory Fees History

|                  | 2020-21  | 2024-25  | 2025-26  | 1 Year Change | 5 Year Annual Growth Rate <sup>1</sup> |
|------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------------|--|
| APSU             | \$ 1,583 | \$ 1,734 | \$ 1,824 | 5.2%          | 2.9%                                   |
| ETSU             | 1,919    | 2,096    | 2,192    | 4.6%          | 2.7%                                   |
| MTSU             | 1,870    | 2,062    | 2,257    | 9.5%          | 3.8%                                   |
| TSU              | 1,157    | 1,247    | 1,248    | 0.1%          | 1.5%                                   |
| TTU              | 1,278    | 1,386    | 1,456    | 5.1%          | 2.6%                                   |
| UofM             | 1,704    | 1,872    | 1,920    | 2.6%          | 2.4%                                   |
| UTC              | 1,820    | 1,990    | 2,050    | 3.0%          | 2.4%                                   |
| UTK              | 1,932    | 2,252    | 2,316    | 2.8%          | 3.7%                                   |
| UTM              | 1,534    | 1,728    | 1,758    | 1.7%          | 2.8%                                   |
| UTS <sup>2</sup> |          | 1,284    | 1,334    | 3.9%          |  |
| CC Avg           | 311      | 321      | 321      | 0.0%          | 0.7%                                   |
| TCATs            | 249      | 249      | 249      | 0.0%          | 0.0%                                   |

1- Annual Growth Rate represents the average yearly rate of tuition increase over the 5 year period, assuming each year builds on the last. It offers a clear view of long-term trends by smoothing out year-to-year fluctuations making it useful for policy evaluation and comparison.

2- On July 1, 2021, Martin Methodist College (MMC) merged with University of Tennessee System as the University of Tennessee Southern (UTS). Due to data limitations, THEC is unable to provide tuition and mandatory fees data for 2020-21.



# TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

---

**REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM: IV.B.**

**MEETING DATE:** May 15, 2026

**SUBJECT:** FY2026-27 Separate Tuition and Fee Policy Requests

**ITEM TYPE:** Action

---

## **BACKGROUND**

During the 2025 legislative session, Public Chapter 186 amended Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-7-202(n), THEC's tuition and fee authority, to allow the Commission to approve separate maximum increases for one or more public institutions of higher education if the Commission determines that it is necessary based on the circumstances or needs of the respective institution.

Following the Commission's approval of an annual binding tuition and fee policy, the Commission may hear from any institution who submitted a statement of financial necessity to the Executive Director substantiating the financial need for the institution's separate tuition and fee policy.



# TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

---

**REGULAR CALENDAR ITEM: V.**

**MEETING DATE:** May 15, 2026  
**SUBJECT:** Focused Baccalaureate Degrees  
**ITEM TYPE:** Information

---

## **BACKGROUND**

Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-7-202(q)(2)(A), THEC holds statutory authority to review and approve new academic programs at public institutions of higher education. The proposed THEC Academic Policy A1.6: Focused Baccalaureate Degrees: Approval Process Policy establishes the statewide framework for the naming, development, review, and approval of reduced-credit bachelor's programs.

The proposed policy defines Focused Baccalaureate Degrees (FBDs) as undergraduate, bachelor's degrees that are at least 90 credit hours, but less than 120 credit hours, fulfill an in-demand workforce need, and prepare students for direct entry into the workforce. In order for a program to be considered for approval as a FBD, institutions must be able to demonstrate alignment with in-demand workforce needs, clearly involve industry partners in the development of the proposed program, integrate work-based learning experiences into the curriculum, embed stackable credentials where appropriate, and discuss alignment to potential graduate programs.

If the institution successfully provides evidence of these criteria, the approval of the Focused Baccalaureate Degree program will follow existing procedures outlined in THEC Academic Policy A1.0 – New Academic Programs or THEC Academic Policy A1.1 – Academic Program Modifications. Programs approved under this policy will undergo annual monitoring for five years after initial approval.

The drafted focused baccalaureate degree policy has been developed with stakeholder feedback via a taskforce comprised of representation from universities, faculty, the University of Tennessee system office, the Tennessee Board of Regents, the Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association, and the Tennessee Secretary of State's office. The draft presented below has not been finalized and the draft presented below is for discussion and feedback. A finalized policy draft will be presented at a forthcoming Commission meeting.

A draft of the policy is included in Attachment A.

**Section Title:** Academic Policies

**Policy Title:** Focused Baccalaureate Degrees: Approval Process

**Policy Number:** A1.6

- 1.6.1 Purpose.** Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-7-202(q)(2)(A), the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) has the statutory responsibility to review and approve new academic programs for public institutions of higher education in the State of Tennessee.
- 1.6.2 Definition of Focused Baccalaureate Degrees.** Focused Baccalaureate Degrees vary in length between 90 – 119 semester credit hours (SCH); must fulfill an in-demand workforce need; and will prepare students for direct entry into the workforce. It is recommended that Focused Baccalaureate Degrees contain embedded, stackable credentials, where appropriate. Focused Baccalaureate Degrees should be distinctive from existing offerings at the university and must have the degree designation “Focused Baccalaureate Degree (FBD)”.
- 1.6.3 Request for Consideration.** In order for a program to be considered a Focused Baccalaureate Degree, the Locally Governed Institution or University of Tennessee System must submit a request containing the following information to THEC for review and approval prior to the submission of a Letter of Notification or Academic Program Modification:
- Demonstrated alignment with an in-demand workforce need in Tennessee not adequately met by current offerings.
  - Clear industry involvement with the development and sustainability of the proposed program.
  - Intentional integration of work-based learning and/or other experiential learning opportunities, such as apprenticeships, co-ops, fellowships, field work, internships, service learning, and/or undergraduate research.
  - Identified embedded, stackable credentials, if applicable.
  - Discussion of alignment to potential graduate programs.
- 1.6.4 Approval Process for Focused Baccalaureate Degrees.** Focused Baccalaureate Degrees will follow THEC Academic Policy A1.0 – New Academic Programs: Approval Process or THEC Academic Policy A1.1 – Academic Program Modifications.
- 1.6.6 Monitoring for Focused Baccalaureate Degrees.** Focused Baccalaureate Degrees will be monitored annually for the first five years after approval per THEC guidelines.