# NEWS FROM THE PRESIDENT

**AND INFORMATION** 



MTSU January 21, 2025 mtsu.edu



#### Welcome to the Spring 2025 semester and my biannual Campus Newsletter!

MTSU is uniquely positioned to continue making a significant impact on our students, our community, and our region. We possess a wealth of advantages that, leveraged effectively, propel us to new heights of excellence and innovation.

First and foremost, we have an exceptional faculty and staff. Your expertise, dedication, and passion are the lifeblood of our institution. Thank you for reading this newsletter and for your investment in our success.

I welcome your feedback and comments. Please contact me at sidney.mcphee@mtsu.edu. I also invite you to visit my blog at mtsu.edu/president for updates and information from my office.

#### True Blue!

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#### **SALARY UPDATE**

On Dec. 4, the MTSU Board of Trustees took formal action on my salary enhancement recommendations, which went into effect Jan. 1.

Upon my recommendation, the Board authorized us to use a total of \$1.5 million to continue to address the gap between actual employee salaries and market salaries as reported by the College and University Professional Association (CUPA) for 2020–21, along with covering any benefits associated with these salary increases.

These adjustments applied to employees on the payroll as of Dec. 31 and were effective Jan. 1 (and reflected in the Jan. 31 payroll).

This funding allowed the University to provide an increase to all full-time employees with an actual salary below the 2020–21 CUPA reported salary as outlined in the University's approved compensation plan. This adjustment was designed to provide an increase of 65% of an employee's calculated difference.

The methodology used for the market adjustment calculations has been posted to the MTSU website. This action was another major step to addressing this long-standing priority for the University. Please know how much I value each of you and appreciate your good work. I am pleased that our board was in agreement and that we were able to give these salary increases to our employees.

#### QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PLAN UPDATE

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is part of our ongoing effort to support student learning and success.

The QEP process is designed and mandated by our University's accrediting body as a data-driven and grassroots undertaking. It is an opportunity for us to collaborate, innovate, and make a positive impact on our campus community.

Based on a review of campus data, Career Readiness is the QEP Program Development Committee's chosen topic. We, as a campus community, have flexibility in determining how this topic is defined to meet the needs of our students.

As you know, past QEPs have established programs and initiatives that are now part of the academic fabric of MTSU, including Experiential Learning and MT Engage.

The committee, which consists of students, faculty, and staff across divisions and colleges, is enthusiastic about defining the topic and creating a program to implement it. This includes receiving feedback from our campus community on a formal program name and program elements. Stay tuned!

#### **TECHNOLOGY**

Our Information Technology Division (ITD) works tirelessly to provide students, faculty, and staff the resources needed to deliver and receive instruction and to do our jobs on a day-to-day basis.

Here are some recent highlights:

- An interdisciplinary team from ITD, Marketing and Communications, and Academic Affairs launched the newly designed MTSU website homepage and the webpages showcasing more than 300 majors and concentrations in 2024. Currently, 99% of the MTSU website has been updated to the new design. The updates will be completed in early 2025.
- MTSU digital signage is moving to the cloud. Work started in fall 2024 and will continue into spring to update all digital signage software to the new cloud-based Poppulo system, which offers several new features and possibilities.

- Marketing, Athletics, Geosciences (GIS Lab), ITD Classrooms, the Center for Popular Music, and the Albert Gore Research Center have, in total, added more than 25 TB of content to the Merlin digital assets system in 2024. Other areas have completed training and will start utilizing the tool in 2025.
- Grammarly is now available free to all students, faculty, and staff! This productivity app reviews and offers suggestions for spelling, grammar, punctuation, and clarity of writing. The app was previously offered only to College of Business students. Onboarding for students, faculty, and staff started just before the Fall 2024 semester. To date, more than 33% of the faculty/staff and 25% of the student body take advantage of Grammarly. Workshops for students, faculty, and staff will be scheduled in the coming year.

#### **BUDGET OVERVIEW**

Looking toward the 2025–26 fiscal year, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) is recommending operating state appropriations of \$147.4 million for MTSU. This would be a \$2.1 million increase, or 1.5%, over 2024–25 appropriations. This net increase is a combination of a decrease of \$1.4 million in outcomes formula adjustments and an increase of \$3.6 million in proposed new funding for the University. Funding for any 2025–26 salary increases is not included in these figures and will not be known until the release of the governor's budget in early February.

Last June, the MTSU Board of Trustees approved one 2025–26 fiscal year capital outlay project to be submitted to THEC. The request was for a proposed Civic Leadership and Applied Humanities Building. Total project cost is \$112.5 million, with \$103.6 million requested from the state and the University required to match the remaining \$8.9 million. THEC included the \$103.6 million in the budget request to the governor as the No. 2 project in the state.

THEC also voted to recommend \$23.5 million in capital maintenance funds for 13 MTSU projects, which mainly includes central plant and campus utilities updates, roof repairs and replacement, structural and exterior envelope repairs, campuswide access control and security updates, elevator modernization, lighting and electrical updates, plumbing and restroom upgrades, and HVAC and controls updates. In addition, for 2025–26, THEC proposed two separate funding requests for special initiatives for ADA improvements and for safety and security. MTSU's portion will be \$1.57 million for ADA improvements and \$2.1 million for safety and security, if funded in the governor's budget.

THEC's recommendations have been submitted to the Department of Finance and Administration for consideration in the proposed state budget that Gov.

Bill Lee will be submitting to the state legislature. At that point, we will have more information regarding our likely 2025–26 state and capital appropriations.

#### STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

In fall 2023, Provost Mark Byrnes and I launched an integrated strategic planning process designed to unite our three existing plans (the Quest for Student Success, Academic Master Plan, and the 2015–2025 MTSU Strategic Plan) into a single institutional Strategic Plan 2035.

The 2035 integrated strategic planning process has been organized around four pillars:

- Academic Quality
- Student Success
- Engagement
- Innovation

Goals, strategies, and metrics for each of these pillars were developed by subcommittees that included broad representation from faculty, staff, students, and alumni and community leaders. A complete timeline of that process is available on the University website at mtsu.edu/strategicplan.

All members of the University community were invited to participate in development of the strategic plan through activities such as:

- Responding to mission review surveys
- Attending town halls and focus group sessions
- Reviewing and responding to drafts of the strategic plan

The process is now shifting to the development of an implementation plan. An implementation committee consisting of plan development co-chairs and implementation partners from across the University's divisions will establish concrete action steps to position us to launch the plan during the 2025–26 academic year.

We invite you to visit the Strategic Plan 2035 webpage often to keep updated about the activities of the Strategic Plan Committee and how you can continue to be involved.



#### **ENROLLMENT AND ADMISSIONS**

MTSU experienced a second consecutive year of enrollment growth in 2024, recording a 1.7% year-over-year increase in its Fall 2024 semester census.

MTSU's student population of 20,488 for 2024–25 included a slight increase in new freshmen—which is on top of a record increase in this category the previous year.

Results like these don't happen by sitting back and waiting for the students to come, or even by just doing what we have done in the past.

Our recruitment team, MT One Stop, advising staff, academic department chairs, deans, and faculty work hard all year round to deliver these results.

For many years, our focus in undergraduate admissions was simply on increasing the number of applicants. However, the trend in student recruitment over the past decade has been for students to apply to more and more institutions, which naturally meant more applicants. In Tennessee, for Fall 2024, high school seniors submitted applications to an average of six to eight institutions.

MTSU has achieved rising enrollment numbers (amid national declines) by adjusting our attention to emphasize a focus on yield of admitted students. To that end, we will be pursuing numerous additional measures in 2025 in an attempt to increase yield even more.

For instance, we will hold our first Admitted Student Day on Feb. 22. The focus of the event will be to give students a taste of life as a Blue Raider. Students will choose from rotating sessions with essential offices such as MT One Stop, the Center for Student Involvement and Leadership, Student Success, Study Abroad, and the Disability and Access Center. There also will be dedicated time with each student's academic college to provide an overview of the academic opportunities and resources available at MTSU. Additionally, this session will serve as preparation for their orientation in the summer.

Attendees will receive special advantages, including the chance to sign up for an orientation session before anyone else and pick up their student IDs. Lunch vouchers will be provided, and the future students



will receive up to three tickets each to cheer on the MTSU men's basketball team as it faces Sam Houston that afternoon—an exciting way to show their Blue Raider pride!

In another move to affect yield and address the belonging needs of our incoming class for Fall 2025, we are rebranding the orientation program under a new name, **New to Blue Orientation!** The full rebranding is a move to a more MTSU-themed orientation program. As part of New to Blue Orientation, students complete an online component in preparation for the on-campus part of orientation. The orientation staff, under the leadership of Gina Poff, is working with instructional designers to create a D2L course required before orientation sessions with a progression module outline. Checklists and important information will be covered to acclimate new students with policies, procedures, resources, and deadline dates before they come to campus—all to prepare them for college life at MTSU.

As always, a big part of our overall student recruitment effort is our annual True Blue Tour, a three-month, three-state, 13-city recruitment effort to draw new students to our Murfreesboro campus.



In conclusion, we continue to work extremely hard to ensure that we are attracting the best and the brightest new undergraduate students from across the state of Tennessee and the region. And when I get a chance to personally meet these prospective students, I am confident in telling them that if they come to MTSU, they will get the attention of faculty and staff that they will need to be successful in college.



#### STUDENT LIFE

Creating an environment that allows students to engage with their community in multiple ways is the foundation of the student experience at MTSU. We take the slogan "Your Journey, Our Commitment" to mean that we will create opportunities to make our students' experiences better.

The Fall 2024 semester at MTSU included a series of impactful events designed to foster community engagement, support student needs, and enhance career readiness. Among the standout initiatives was the True Blue Feeds You program, which exemplified the University's commitment to addressing food insecurity among its student population. In collaboration with the Student Government Association and MT Dining, this initiative encouraged students to donate meals, which were then distributed to fellow students in need. The program not only helped alleviate food insecurity on campus but also promoted a spirit of generosity and solidarity among the student body, reinforcing the University's mission to ensure that all students have access to basic resources.

Another significant event was the **Big Career Fair**, organized by the MTSU Career Development Center. This bustling event attracted thousands of students eager to connect with hundreds of employers across various industries. The fair provided valuable networking opportunities, allowing students to explore potential internships and job openings and to gain insights into different career paths. The presence of numerous local and national companies underscored the fair's importance in bridging the gap between education and employment. Students were able to engage in meaningful conversations, submit resumes, and even secure interviews on the spot, making it a pivotal moment in their professional development.

Homecoming at MTSU also saw a remarkable turnout in 2024, with one of the largest crowds in recent history participating in the Homecoming parade. This festive event brought together students, alumni, faculty, and community members, all celebrating the University's spirit and traditions. The parade featured colorful floats, spirited performances, and a palpable sense of pride that resonated throughout the campus. Homecoming events fostered a sense of belonging and nostalgia, strengthening the ties between current students and alumni.

Overall, these events reflect MTSU's commitment to enhancing student life by addressing immediate needs, providing professional development opportunities, and nurturing community spirit. Through such initiatives, MTSU continues to create an inclusive and supportive environment that empowers students to thrive academically and socially.

As the University looks to the future, these successful events set a positive precedent for ongoing engagement and support within the MTSU community.







#### STUDENT SUCCESS



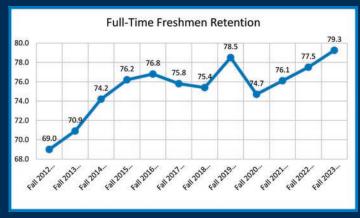


MTSU continues its focus on improving student success through implementation of our Quest for Student Success 2025. The efforts of Quest 2025 strategic priority work groups, along with colleagues from across the campus, have made an incredible difference for students.

The Office of Student Success is responsible for facilitating, coordinating, and leading the implementation of MTSU's Quest for Student Success. The office works to enhance the institution's persistence, retention, and graduation rates. It does this by focusing on primary strategic initiatives that include enhancing advising, promoting and facilitating course redesign, ensuring that effective tutoring is available to students, and establishing a system to communicate student success initiatives and performance metrics.

#### Here are some recent student success updates: Retention

The release of Fall 2024 census data shows that the retention of first-time freshman students continues to increase—a trend reflected in the chart below. In fact, retention rates for every undergraduate classification—sophomores, juniors, seniors, and transfer students—increased compared to the previous year. Although six-year graduation rates remained steady compared to the previous year, four-year graduation rates continue to show a strong upward trend.



#### **Upward Bound**

MTSU's Upward Bound program continues to make a transformative impact by equipping high school students with the tools and experiences they need to achieve their academic and career aspirations. The program strengthens the bridge between high school and higher education for underserved communities through educational support, college readiness, and cultural enrichment activities.

This past fall, the program was bustling with activities aimed at fostering student success. For example, in mid-October, the program hosted students from Shelbyville Central High School and Community High School at the University College and Office of Student Success Tailgate. This experience included a spirited

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gathering at Walnut Grove, culminating in the MTSU vs. Kennesaw State football game at Floyd Stadium. Beyond the excitement of the game, the event highlighted the sense of community and pride that comes with being part of the MTSU family.

The Upward Bound program continues to provide life-changing opportunities for students, making strides toward closing equity gaps and fostering a collegegoing culture in middle Tennessee. By partnering with local schools, hosting enriching experiences, and advocating for digital equity, MTSU is proud to lead efforts that empower the next generation of leaders.

#### **Adult Students**

More than 2,400 of MTSU undergraduate students are 25 or older. Expanding services to adult students represents one of the most significant opportunities to offset anticipated declines in the number of traditional-age college students.

A work group of 12 colleagues from across campus has been established with a focus on three specific areas relating to adult students: recruitment, retention, and institutional processes. Be on the lookout for regular updates as the group works to produce a focused set of recommendations this spring.

#### **Corporate Partnerships**

Our Corporate Education Agreements continue to play a pivotal role in supporting working adults as they complete their degrees. In 2024, 32 corporate partnership students completed a degree at MTSU. Three new agreements were added this year, bringing the total number of partnerships to 21. We also introduced an on-site Applied Leadership cohort in collaboration with Nissan North America, one of our corporate partners, at their Smyrna Training Center. Enrollment through these Corporate Education Agreements is on the rise, with a 25% increase from Fall 2023 to Fall 2024—growing from 134 to 168 students.

#### **Prior Learning Assessment**

MTSU's Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) program has set a benchmark for other institutions by supporting adult learners in documenting and earning college credits for their nontraditional learning experiences. Over its 17-year history, the program has seen 1,296 students complete the assessment process, with 27,861 PLA credits awarded, an average of more than 20 credits earned per student.





#### **GraduateMT**

The GraduateMT program continues to transform lives through its unwavering commitment to supporting adult learners. With more than 5,000 students returning to pursue their education and nearly 1,400 graduates since its inception in 2018, the program is still experiencing steady growth. By guiding returning students through the readmission process, removing barriers, and offering personalized degree plans, GraduateMT makes graduation a reality for many who once thought it was out of reach.

#### **Adult Degree Completion Program**

The Adult Degree Completion Program has launched a communication plan geared specifically to prospective adult students through MTSU's new customer relationship management (CRM) program, Slate.
MTSU uses the Slate CRM to manage admissions, student success, and advancement, streamlining administrative processes and improving student outcomes. We are excited about this new opportunity to connect with students and provide them with vital information focused specifically on information and questions that adult learners face when returning to school. Since the plan's implementation last summer, we have received almost 280 inquiries from prospective

students and are looking forward to enhancing the plan in the future.

#### Summer and Winter Sessions

The summer session continues to fulfill its mission of providing students with opportunities to get ahead, stay on track, graduate early, or expand learning outside the classroom through summer research, study abroad, or internship experiences. Students registered for 38,379 credit hours this past summer, with just over 60% of those hours delivered in an online format. Summer session also serves as a vital part of MTSU operations and generated \$11 million to the general fund with 13,000 enrollments and 602 faculty members, adjunct instructors, and graduate teaching assistants leading instruction this past summer.

As student awareness and need for winter session courses expand, so too do course offerings and enrollments. Now in its fourth year, the recent winter session recorded increased student credit and generated significant dollars to the general fund.

#### **Scholars Academy**

The Scholars Academy recently hired a new director of the Scholars Academy, Shamaya Andrews, who came to us from Fisk University as the former executive director

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of student support services. We are excited to be fully staffed and continue our recruiting efforts to establish our upcoming Fall 2025 freshman class.

The Scholars Academy hosted a reunion and end-ofsemester celebration where the Scholars came together to eat, paint, play games, and enjoy fellowship.

Through funding made possible by a generous gift, the Office of Student Success was able to award 10 Diversity Mentor Scholarships for Fall 2024 and seven for Spring 2025. Students were awarded \$500–\$1,000 for demonstrating satisfactory academic progress and leadership at MTSU.

A partnership was developed with the Office of Student Success and the Office of Student Care and Conduct to establish the CARE Team. Continued efforts will be made to streamline our services and better support our students.

MTSU has agreed to participate in a mega study with the University of Pennsylvania called the Behavior Change for Good Initiative, which is designed to analyze first-year student outcome and evaluate the effectiveness of the different versions of the program for improving student outcomes.

In addition, Michelle Arnold, associate vice provost of student success, has been actively engaged with the New Skills Ready Grant with the Nashville Chamber of Commerce. She has worked to establish meaningful relationships with other grant partners and the Nashville community. She served on the Summer Melt and Advising Work Team. This team worked to improve and/ or expand summer programming to address summer melt, so students are more likely to enroll and have a successful transition. An inaugural Advising Summit was developed, and MTSU had high attendance numbers from its academic advisors and managers and the Office of Student Success staff. Through this partnership, MTSU and the Scholars Academy has a high visibility within the Metro Nashville New Skills Ready high schools.

#### **Experiential Learning (EXL)**

The EXL Scholars Program is at a record high in student participation, faculty participation, and number of course sections offered. This past year, 16,640 students participated in EXL. There were 1,033 EXL course sections offered with 415 EXL faculty members. During the past year, 197 students graduated with the EXL Scholar Graduation Distinction. Both qualitative and quantitative research shows experiential learning at MTSU has an overwhelmingly positive impact on student success and graduation rates. A recent quantitative study reveals the substantial incremental benefits of students' taking multiple EXL courses. Students who participate in EXL courses are significantly associated with a higher graduation rate than those who do not, and the likelihood of graduation increases as the number of EXL courses taken increases.



#### **University Studies**

The University Studies Department began offering classes at the Nissan Training Center in Smyrna this past fall. Led by Lt. Gen. Keith M. Huber, senior advisor for veterans and leadership initiatives, and Hilary Miller, director of the Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center, these courses are part of the Integrated Studies undergraduate degree with a concentration in Applied Leadership. Designed to support working adults, these classes are scheduled to align with employee shifts, including weekends. We are excited to expand this partnership in the future, with plans to offer additional courses and expand to other Nissan training centers.

With the inclusion of UNIV 1010 University Seminar in the True Blue Core, we partnered with the Student-Athlete Enhancement Center (SAEC) to create tailored sections of the course specifically for student-athletes. This initiative not only provides enhanced support for student-athletes but also strengthens our collaboration with the SAEC, building on existing student-athlete-focused courses.

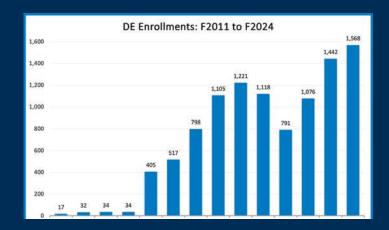
#### **Dual Enrollment (DE)**

Our DE program continues the momentum from a record-setting Fall 2024 semester wherein 1,568 DE students enrolled in 122 course sections at 18 partner schools. The accomplishments in MTSU's DE program would not be possible without the tremendous work of

faculty, chairs, staff, and school partners. Students participating in MTSU's DE program possess average ACT subscores of 24.9 in English, 23.3 in Math, and 25.6 in Reading.

We are excited to expand our partnership with Knox County Schools, as we will be offering an online section of NFS 2220 – Nutrition for the Health Sciences, with students from various high schools in Knoxville. MTSU officials will travel to Bearden High School in February to help promote the growing partnership.

The growing number of homeschool students in Rutherford County and the surrounding communities will have another opportunity to learn about our DE program as we will host a presentation at the new Legacy Homeschool Resource Center in Murfreesboro in February.





#### **CAMPUS EXPANSION**

Facilities growth represents an investment in areas of study that will solve problems, improve the social good, and supply a skilled regional workforce. MTSU has been blessed with more than \$1.5 billion in campus improvements and renovations during my tenure as president.

Here are updates on our current major projects:



#### **Applied Engineering Building**

- \$74.8 million project
- more than \$1 million in automation equipment
- 89,000-square-foot facility
- will house MTSU's renowned Mechatronics
   Engineering program and Engineering Technology
- will provide enhanced student opportunities for faculty-led research and labs for student teams, including the Experimental Vehicles Program and robotics competitions

#### opens in 2025

 represents the finishing touch to MTSU's Science Corridor of Innovation, which also includes the \$40.1 million Concrete and Construction management building, two renovated science buildings, and the 250,000-square-foot Science Building, which opened in 2014 as the single largest investment by the state for an academic facility

#### Kirksey Old Main and Rutledge Hall completion expected by summer 2026

- \$54.3 million renovation to two of MTSU's original buildings
- iconic columns of KOM, the first building on campus founded in 1911, will be preserved
- KOM to remain home to Mathematical Sciences, Computer Science, and Data Science
- Rutledge being transformed from a dormitory to an academic building that houses the University Studies Department

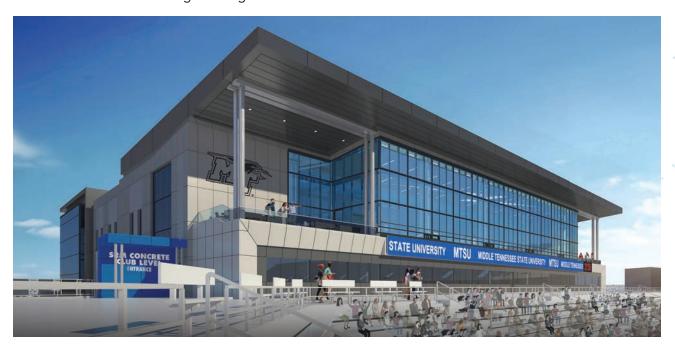




#### Student-Athlete Performance Center

estimated completion this summer

- \$66 million project
- first stage of redevelopment of the entire northwest corner of the MTSU campus envisioned in the MTSU Athletics Master Plan
- small section of outdoor loge seating to be added
- to the north end of Floyd Stadium
- 75,000-square-foot facility to include training spaces, strength and conditioning rooms, locker rooms, meeting space, and offices to serve MTSU Athletics and student-athletes



#### Aerospace Project-Shelbyville

- \$62.2 million total project cost
- estimated \$50.2 million construction cost
- site located along Highway 231 and just west of the Shelbyville Municipal Airport

#### estimated completion by fall 2027

• includes facilities for the Professional Pilot concentration: 50,000-square-foot net space for main academic building(s), including classroom, dispatch, faculty and staff offices, flight briefing; 28,000-square-foot hangar to maintain Professional Pilot aircraft fleet; site and utility improvements for 16-acre parcel



#### INTERNATIONAL **AFFAIRS**

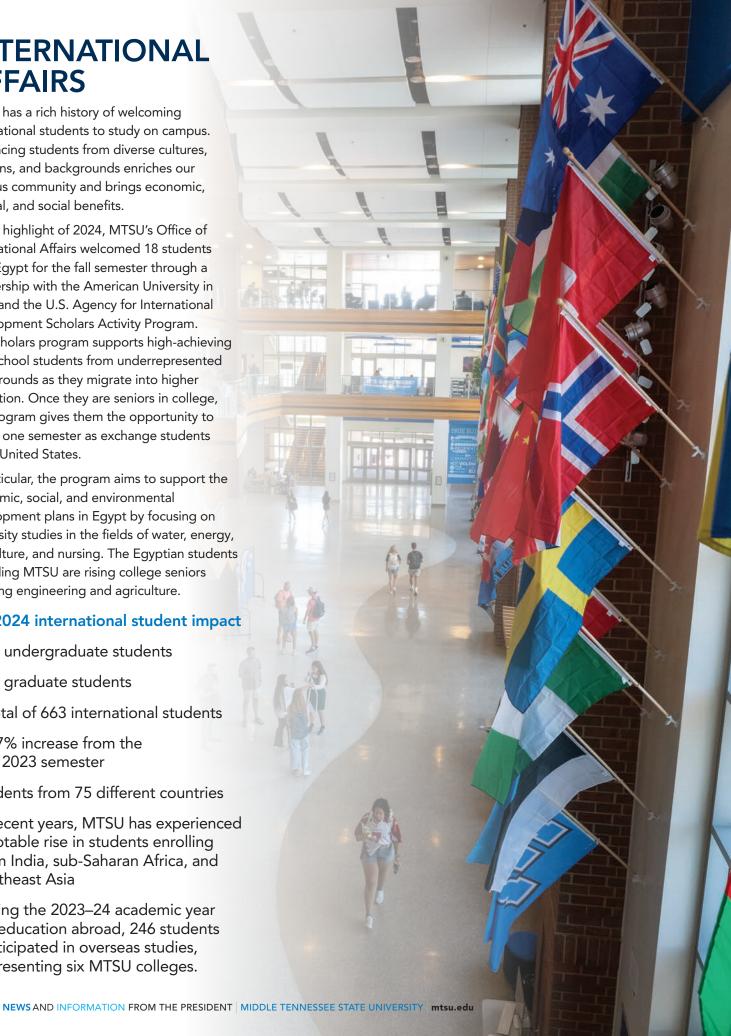
MTSU has a rich history of welcoming international students to study on campus. Embracing students from diverse cultures, religions, and backgrounds enriches our campus community and brings economic, cultural, and social benefits.

In one highlight of 2024, MTSU's Office of International Affairs welcomed 18 students from Egypt for the fall semester through a partnership with the American University in Cairo and the U.S. Agency for International Development Scholars Activity Program. The scholars program supports high-achieving high school students from underrepresented backgrounds as they migrate into higher education. Once they are seniors in college, the program gives them the opportunity to spend one semester as exchange students in the United States.

In particular, the program aims to support the economic, social, and environmental development plans in Egypt by focusing on university studies in the fields of water, energy, agriculture, and nursing. The Egyptian students attending MTSU are rising college seniors studying engineering and agriculture.

#### Fall 2024 international student impact

- 442 undergraduate students
- 221 graduate students
- a total of 663 international students
- 4.57% increase from the Fall 2023 semester
- students from 75 different countries
- in recent years, MTSU has experienced a notable rise in students enrolling from India, sub-Saharan Africa, and southeast Asia
- during the 2023–24 academic year for education abroad, 246 students participated in overseas studies, representing six MTSU colleges.



#### **MTSU ONLINE**

MTSU's online program experienced record growth last fall with 54% of students taking at least one MTSU Online course.

The number of fully online programs offered has more than tripled since 2016—from 20 in 2016 to 72 in 2024, with 43 of those programs launched since 2020.

The number of online students began steadily increasing in 2020, due in part to students' being introduced to online learning during the COVID-19 outbreak. Importantly, emergency remote teaching differs from intentional and carefully designed online courses. COVID-19 was more a catalyst than a reason for the growth of MTSU Online, and I am proud that MTSU recognized and prioritized online learning long before the pandemic began.

Now, as of last fall, MTSU Online supports 28 full-time, temporary instructors in 18 academic departments who focus on providing high-quality online teaching. A total of 545 unique online courses were introduced, leading to 27% of all MTSU student credit hours last semester coming from online courses. More than 2,800 students were fully online in the Fall 2024 semester, which comprises almost 14% of our total student headcount. MTSU even had about two dozen full-time, undergraduate MTSU students living in the residence halls, taking fully online courses! That may seem unusual now, but it will likely become more and more common.

University College, which generally focuses on nontraditional students, has been a pioneer in promoting fully online degrees, along with the Jones College of Business.

Most MTSU online courses are asynchronous (students do not have to meet at the same time), providing greater flexibility for working adults to incorporate pursuing a degree into their busy daily lives.

Nontraditional and graduate students may be the majority of online students, but 18- to 24-year-olds are also participating online.

Thirty additional online programs are in active development. We're also working on initiatives such as a virtual student union and virtual clubs—ways for students to connect and engage and feel like they belong at MTSU because they do belong at MTSU, and it's a significant population.

MTSU Online already offers key student services for online students such as counseling services, 24/7 live subject tutoring, library services, and writing center tutors, as well as many faculty services including faculty development and training workshops and peer mentoring.



#### MTSU Online by the numbers:

- 54% of students (a total of 11,121 students) took at least one online course in Fall 2024.
- MTSU now has 73 fully online degrees, concentrations, and certificate programs (up from just over 20 programs in January 2020).
- MTSU had 2,831 fully online students in Fall 2024 (almost 14% of total student headcount).
- 27% of all MTSU semester credit hours in Fall 2024 came from online courses.
- 25% of all Fall 2024 undergraduate semester credit hours and 48% of all graduate semester credit hours were online.
- 62% of summer semester credit hours for 2024 came from online courses.
- Online enrollment (student credit hours) is at an all-time high and has increased for several consecutive years.
- MTSU Online supports 28 fixed-term-track faculty members in 18 academic departments who focus on high-quality online teaching.
- MTSU employs four full-time instructional designers who train and coach our faculty on effective teaching and technology use, to make sure our students are receiving high-quality online instruction.
- MTSU Online supports many faculty services including faculty development and training workshops and peer mentoring to make our online courses highly effective.
- MTSU Online courses feature engaging interaction with our faculty, which is known to increase student retention and degree completion.
- Recently, MTSU Online received awards for its graduate programs from Online Master's Degrees and Online Master's Colleges as well as being named one of the top online colleges by Newsweek and for offering one of the best online nursing and allied health programs by EduMed.



#### **GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH**

Over the past decade, MTSU has aggressively transitioned from a primarily undergraduate institution to a doctoral research university with significant research activity.

MTSU's College of Graduate Studies is one of the fastest-growing graduate schools in Tennessee. We offer 100-plus diverse graduate programs at the certificate, master's, specialist, and doctoral levels so that almost anyone can find their right fit. Our programs are designed to help students develop skills and knowledge to be successful in their careers.

Meanwhile, buoyed by graduate students' working hand in hand with top faculty, MTSU is producing relevant, measurable research on a daily basis on the campus.

#### **Graduate Studies:**

MTSU Board of Trustees recently gave the green light to three new master's programs: Biomedical Sciences, Digital Media, and Legal Studies. Final approval is needed from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and the University's accrediting body. Enrollment is anticipated for fall 2025.



MTSU is designated an R2 doctoral university with high research activity by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. This elite status places us among a select group of only 3% of institutions nationwide.

Faculty, staff, and students at MTSU are involved in countless research and public service initiatives that help Tennesseans in key areas of health and wellness, history and heritage, agriculture and agribusiness, and commerce and industry, to name a few.



COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES



#### By the Numbers

#### Fiscal year 2023-24

- \$22 million in sponsored project funding
- 75% increase from 2022-23

#### First six months of fiscal year 2024–25 (July through Dec.19)

- 85 proposals submitted
- 61 unique investigators
- 59 awards
- \$15,239,646 total

#### First quarter of fiscal year 2024-25

- CBAS alone received new external research grants totaling \$8.4 million.
- That compares to \$4.4 million in the first quarter of the previous fiscal year.

#### **ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS**

Each of the colleges and academic units at MTSU maintains a high level of activity and produces news worth crowing about. Here are just a few examples from last fall.

#### Campuswide

A new report found that MTSU alumni, including alumniowned businesses, generated more than \$15.2 billion in business revenue in the state over the course of a single year. The 2024 MTSU Alumni Impact report by the Business and Economic Research Center (BERC) in our Jennings A. Jones College of Business detailed the positive financial impact made by the University's graduates throughout Tennessee. It also reflected how MTSU particularly bolsters the economies of its home and surrounding counties. Rutherford County alone recorded more than \$4.1 billion in business revenue, the highest among all counties. MTSU released the full report to local and state officials; numbers in the report were from 2022, the base statistical year of the study.



Retired U.S. Marine four-star Gen. Jim Mattis saluted the work of the MTSU Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center during a breakfast fundraiser for the center at Nashville's Hutton Hotel last October. A captivated audience was treated to a one-hour conversation between longtime friends Mattis, a former U.S. secretary of defense, and former U.S. Sen. Bill Frist, of Nashville, who previously served as Senate majority leader. Businesspeople from around the Midstate helped raise almost \$500,000 for MTSU's Daniels Center at the event.

Former U.S. Vice President Mike Pence spoke to a packed house at MTSU's Tucker Theatre on Sept. 17, to round out the University's annual Constitution Day activities. The event drew nearly 900 audience members comprised of students, staff, community members, and local dignitaries.

#### College of Education

The Center for Educational Media in the College of Education recently hosted more than 350 people for targeted professional development for teachers of English learners, school counselors, and special education teachers. The collaboratives are comprised of practitioners in preK–12 schools in Tennessee and are offered at no charge to the participants. The collaboratives are also made available to local, state, national, and global communities of educators via distribution through the web, satellite, and cable TV.





Middle Tennessee Electric gave \$40,000 to MTSU's College of Education to outfit future teacher classrooms each semester for the next four years. The College of Education awarded the first \$2,500 Spark Awards to two student teachers—Lyric James and Natalie Burridge—which allows these future educators to jumpstart their careers without the financial strain of properly setting up their classrooms.

The College of Education recently hosted a banned book awareness event, "Let Freedom READ," to facilitate public discussion around the increasing occurrence of book banning affecting libraries in local communities. The event primarily focused on the legal ambiguity of the laws that determine which books are deemed too graphic for K–12 schools, with many of the books banned as too graphic to be made available in school libraries discussing topics such as race, religion, and sexuality. Participants included MTSU students, retired and current librarians, classroom teachers, and other community members.

The 12th Annual MTSU Literacy Research Conference will be held March 1 at the College of Education. Conference registration opened Jan. 13. Visit mtsu.edu/literacy-conference for more information.

## College of Basic and Applied Sciences

MTSU representatives recently accepted a \$100,000 grant from global device care company Assurant Inc. that will go toward a new laboratory in the University's new Applied Engineering Building, scheduled to open this fall. Assurant recently opened its new 259,000-square-foot Innovation and Device Care Center in Nashville and chose to commemorate the opening by awarding MTSU the grant over two years. This \$100,000 grant will support the construction of a new Assurant Engineering Innovation Lab inside the Applied Engineering Building and expand the company's partnership with MTSU's Mechatronics Engineering program, of which several Assurant employees are alumni.

Aerospace Professor Paul Craig was honored with MTSU's 2024 Career Achievement Award. Craig was the University's first flight instructor for MTSU's renowned aviation training program. Aside from his time in the cockpit, Craig has authored 15 books on aviation safety and flight training, worked for NASA, and received numerous other University and industry awards.



The Aerospace Department has launched a new Unmanned Aircraft Systems Technology concentration that will allow students to explore the engineering and technology side of drone aircraft.

#### James E. Walker Library

Walker Library confirmed from recent student surveys an insufficiency of individual study rooms. Funding from the Library Enrichment Fund supported the acquisition of five new study pods. The pods are designed to mitigate external noise up to 32 decibels, creating an almost soundproof environment for students. This will provide students spaces to take online courses and conduct interviews without using headphones. Additionally, each pod has motion-activated lights and fans to ensure good air circulation while the space is in use.



## College of Behavioral and Health Sciences

MTSU announced a planned public-private partnership to build a campus hotel on campus that will serve the campus community, bolster tourism in the area, and be a favorite destination for visitors to campus. On- or near-campus hotels at other universities accommodate sporting events, graduations, parent visits, speaker appearances, and more. MTSU's facility also will provide educational opportunities for students, serving as a learning laboratory and a place for practical experience for students in our newly accredited Tourism and Hospitality Management program, the only such program in the state accredited by the national Accreditation Commission for Programs in Hospitality Administration (ACPHA). The University hopes to begin construction this year and open the hotel in 2026.



#### College of Liberal Arts

The Telly Award-winning "Joys of the Season" performance had its Nashville PBS premiere on Dec. 20. Nashville PBS aired both the 2023 and 2024 specials in a primetime spot and made the episodes available for streaming nationwide on the PBS app and website.

Professor Joan McRae of World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures received two nationally recognized honors last semester. In October, McRae landed a \$121,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The French language professor also received the national Online Teaching Award from the Distance Learning Special Interest Group of the American Council on Teaching of Foreign Languages, a professional organization that connects foreign language teachers from all educational levels.

The MTSU Arts Celebration Concert returns on Saturday, April 5, featuring the best of our MTSU Arts programs and our MTSU Arts Hall of Fame induction.



#### Jennings A. Jones College of Business

MTSU and the Nashville School of Law (NSL), two storied institutions founded in 1911, are now pairing their various areas of instructional expertise to train students and working professionals seeking deeper legal knowledge to enhance their careers. The collaboration for MTSU's proposed Legal Studies master's degree also will help fulfill a growing Midstate workforce need. Approved by MTSU's Board of Trustees and submitted to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission to consider final approval in early to mid-2025, the M.S. in Legal Studies will be offered primarily through the Jones College of Business. NSL faculty will teach initial core coursework online or at its Armory Oaks Drive campus, and students will complete the program through MTSU. Successful graduates of this program will be well positioned to fill the high-paying, in-demand legal roles



for which they've been trained, with the vast majority of our graduates remaining in this region to invest back into the community with their time, talents, and skills. Designed for those who do not need or want to pursue a Juris Doctor degree, the 30-hour program aims to sharpen students' and working professionals' understanding of the law, including in the areas of contracts, critical legal thinking, legal ethics, writing, and case analysis. Coursework, which could begin as soon as summer 2025, will allow students to further develop in-depth knowledge in one of three concentrations: General Business, Compliance, or Entertainment—the last offered through MTSU's College of Media and Entertainment.

A team comprised of Jones College students took home the title of Grand Champions in their flight at a major collegiate sales competition and a biometrics research conference that together drew hundreds of participants from across the country. At the Selling with the Bulls sales competition hosted by Rob Hammond and the University of South Florida, team members Emilie Conners, Malissa Chanthavong, Chase Holmes, and Bradley Stiles took home over a dozen additional individual awards. They were coached by Thom Coats, director of the Center for Professional Selling, and Ricky Fergurson, a professor of Marketing.

In the ever-evolving field of marketing, understanding the underlying psychological mechanisms that drive consumer behavior is crucial. The Department of Marketing has created a new neuromarketing course, MKT 4200 – Neuromarketing, which provides an indepth exploration of how insights from neuroscience and psychology can be applied to enhance marketing

strategies. The department is also establishing the first neuromarketing research lab in the state of Tennessee and will be hosting Brain Behavior in the Age of AI, an international symposium exploring the topics of neuromarketing and AI, on March 19.

#### **Honors College**

MTSU senior Honors student Anna Collins of Pleasant View was recently awarded a Pioneer Award of \$1,000 from the Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, the nation's oldest and most selective collegiate honor society for all academic disciplines. Collins, who was initiated into MTSU's Phi Kappa Phi chapter last spring, is one of 50 students nationwide to receive the award. The Pioneer Awards are designed to encourage and reward undergraduate members for developing research, engagement, and leadership skills necessary to become a successful scholar. Recipients are selected based on their academic achievement, honors and awards, relevant research experience, service, and leadership experience on and off campus. An Agribusiness major, Collins is preparing for graduate school.



Philip Phillips, English professor and University Honors College associate dean, was elected last summer to serve as president-elect for the Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi. During his 2024–26 term as president-elect, Phillips will serve on the society's 12-person board of directors. His election represents a six-year commitment to PKP, including successive terms as president and past president.

## College of Media and Entertainment

MTSU's Esports NECC Division IV Rocket League team defeated the University of North Carolina–Wilmington to win the championship in our new Level Up gaming arena. This is MTSU's first Esports championship.

MTSU's WMOT-FM Roots Radio 89.5 opened a new satellite studio in Nashville that will allow the station to be where the artists are and expand its live radio and video programming as the largest Americana radio station in the United States. A ribbon-cutting celebration was held in late summer at the new 800-square-foot satellite studio at the Riverside Revival events venue in East Nashville.

Six MTSU alumni and former students all received a total of eight nominations for the upcoming 67th annual Grammy Awards. Receiving nominations in multiple genres, the MTSU-trained professionals, including some previous winners and nominees, are singer-songwriter Jessie Alexander (two nominations); audio production engineers Brandon Bell, Jason Hall (two nominations), Bobby Holland, and Jimmy Mansfield; and singersongwriter Jaelee Roberts (below). MTSU alumni, former or current students, and faculty from across the University have been a part of more than 170 Grammy Award nominations in the last two decades. The number of MTSU-connected Grammy winners since 2001 currently stands at more than 20 people, with nearly 50 Grammys in categories from classical to pop to rock to country to gospel and rap.



For a 10th year, MTSU's Department of Recording Industry was named among the best music business schools by Billboard. MTSU has been on Billboard's best music business schools list since 2013.

#### **ATHLETICS**

Our MTSU Athletics teams and student-athletes well represent the grit and determination we want our entire student body to possess.

Here are some select athletic highlights from 2024.

#### Competitors in the Classroom

MTSU's NCAA Graduation Success Rate for 2023–24 was an impressive 94%, as announced by the NCAA national office. It was the sixth straight year MTSU scored 92% or better. The Graduation Success Rate (GSR) is a six-year measure of freshmen and athletic transfers who entered MTSU as freshmen in 2017–18. The Blue Raiders also ranked first out of the nine teams in Conference USA (CUSA), with Liberty University and Western Kentucky University being the only other schools to reach the 90% plateau. Seven MTSU programs scored a perfect 100%—men's basketball, men's tennis, women's golf, softball, soccer, women's tennis, and volleyball. The Blue Raiders' score of 92% in football ranked tied for 23rd nationally among the Football Bowl Subdivision (formerly Division I-A) and easily led the way in CUSA.



#### Changing of the Guard

After 17 years as the voice of the Lady Raiders, Dick Palmer stepped aside as play-by-play announcer for the women's basketball program. Palmer remains involved with MTSU, hosting the football pre- and post-game shows and calling all Blue Raider baseball games. Palmer will resume his 43rd season of calling play-by-play action at MTSU when the first pitch is thrown at Reese Field this spring. A 1960 graduate of MTSU, Palmer has been broadcasting sporting events for the past 58 years and previously ended a 25-year run in 2005 of calling Blue Raider football. With Palmer's departure, MTSU hired Joe Fisher, who has more than four decades of broadcasting

experience with Nashville media and college sports, to become the new voice of the women's basketball program. He has extensive experience in covering local, regional, and national news and events. Fisher has previously served as news and communications director at Tennessee Tech, director of broadcasting for Vanderbilt Athletics, and weekend sports anchor and reporter for WKRN-TV and WSMV-TV in Nashville. His distinctive voice and personality made him well-known to audience members around the state. Fisher's public relations background also includes experience as an account executive at Dye, Van Mol, and Lawrence Public Relations in Nashville.



## BLUE RAIDERS AT HOME Support our student-athletes! Plan to enjoy a sporting event on campus early this year!

#### Men's Basketball Schedule

N.M. State	UTEP	La. Tech	Sam Houston	Liberty	FIU
Jan. 30	Feb. 1	Feb. 20	Feb. 22	March 6	March 8
6:30 p.m.	2 p.m.	8 p.m.	2 p.m.	6:30 p.m.	2 p.m.

#### Women's Basketball Schedule

Sam Houston	La. Tech	Jax State	Kennesaw	WKU	N.M. State	UTEP
Jan. 23	Jan. 25	Feb. 6	State	Feb. 15	Feb. 27	March 1
6:30 p.m.	Noon	6:30 p.m.	Feb. 8	2 p.m.	6:30 p.m.	1 p.m.
•			5 p.m.			

#### Baseball (Feb.–March dates)

Bowling Green	Fairleigh	Austin Peay	Old Dominion	Tennessee Tech	UAB	FIU
Feb. 14	Dickinson	Feb. 25	March 2	March 11	March 14	March 28
3 p.m.	Feb. 21	3 p.m.	Noon	6 p.m.	6 p.m.	TBA
Feb. 15 1 p.m. Feb. 16 1 p.m.	3 p.m. Feb. 22 1 p.m. Feb. 23 1 p.m.	UT-Martin Feb. 28 Noon St. Bonaventure March 1 4 p.m.	Oakland March 7 3 p.m. March 8 1 p.m. March 9 1 p.m.	Belmont March 12 4 p.m.	March 15 3 p.m. March 16 1 p.m. SEMO March 18 4 p.m.	March 29 TBA March 30 TBA

#### Softball (Feb.-March dates)

Ball State Feb. 28 TBA	Illinois State March 1 TBA	Northern Iowa March 2 TBA	FAU March 3 6 p.m.	Sam Houston March 14 6 p.m.	UT–Martin March 19 5 p.m.	Kennesaw State March 28
				March 15 4 p.m.	.m. rch 16	6 p.m. March 29
				March 16 11 a.m.		4 p.m. March 30
						Noon

#### Men's Tennis (Jan.-March dates) All events at Adams Tennis Complex at Old Fort Park

Auburn	<b>Vanderbilt</b>	Indiana	Arkansas	Eastern	Oklahoma	Utah	New	South
Jan. 31	Feb. 5	Feb. 7	Feb. 9	Kentucky	State	Feb. 21	Mexico	Alabama
5 p.m.	5 p.m.	5 p.m.	Noon	Feb. 9	Feb. 14	5 p.m.	Feb. 22	Feb. 23
·	·	·		5 p.m.	5 p.m.		2 p.m.	2 p.m.

#### Women's Tennis (Jan.-March dates)

Louisville	Eastern Kentucky	Murray State	Missouri State	Ball State	Kennesaw State
Jan. 24	Feb. 9	Feb. 16	Feb. 24	March 8	March 28
4 p.m.	5 p.m.	11 p.m.	2 p.m.	3 p.m.	1 p.m.
Chattanooga	Belmont	Austin Peay	FIU	St. Thomas (MN)	Jacksonville State
Jan. 26	Feb. 15	Feb. 20	March 8	March 26	March 29
11 a.m.	1 p.m.	4:30 p.m.	10 a.m.	4 p.m.	1 p.m.

# THE SILLS ARE THRIVING at MTSU

#### **THEATRE**

#### **Our Town**

February 27-March 2, 2025

**Tucker Theatre** 

This timeless drama first appeared on Broadway in 1938 and won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Don't miss MTSU Theatre's production of this great American classic!

#### **MTSU ARTS**

## MTSU ARTS CELEBRATION CONCERT

April 5, 2025

**Tucker Theatre** 

Save the date for the annual celebration of the best of MTSU Arts. Stay tuned for updates about this year's special guest host and our MTSU Arts Hall of Fame inductees.



Just as our students enrich their lives by showcasing their skills, we invite you to enrich yours by becoming an MTSU Arts Patron. You can join the MTSU Arts Patrons Society and view our events calendar at mtsu.edu/mtsuarts.

Questions? Call 615-898-5223

MTSU Arts
Proudly Presented By



#### MUSIC

#### Steel Pan Ensemble

April 23, 2025

Hinton Hall

Don't miss the opportunity to savor the unique sound of the School of Music's talented Steel Pan Ensemble.

## **Spring Dance Concert**

April 24–26, 2025

**Tucker Theatre** 

Come see original choreographic work from guest artists and our talented faculty! The concert will feature collaborative work with design, technical, and stage management students from the Department of Theatre and Dance.



## TRUE BLUE TV AND TRUE BLUE TV EVENT PRODUCTIONS

Our TV station and our Event Productions team (formerly Production Services) merged into a single entity under the True Blue TV brand. The combination makes sense in many ways, most notably since Event Productions stages and records many of our most important events, meetings, and concerts—and those live broadcasts and recorded shows are shown on our television station (along with streaming services and social media, of course).

True Blue TV Event Productions, led by director Robert Mogensen and based in the James Union Building, is the exclusive provider of event services (sound, lighting, video, staging, roof structures, and other special elements) for all of campus except the Student Unions. Working with the Event Coordination team, they bring to life special events, concerts, and activities in our biggest indoor spaces, including Murphy Center, Floyd Stadium, Alumni Memorial Gym, the MT Center in the Ingram Building, the Tom Jackson Building, and the Rec Center, and many outdoor spaces, such as Walnut Grove and the Quad. It also offers event production services for off-campus events sponsored by University groups.

True Blue TV Event Productions continues to expand its capabilities to better serve the University's production needs. During the Fall 2024 semester, TBTVEP worked closely with MT Athletics on a new control room to expand and enhance productions in Murphy Center and Floyd Stadium. In addition, TBTVEP worked to install and test the new sound system in Murphy Center. I am excited at the improvements this will bring to athletic events, graduations, concerts, and other Murphy Center events. TBTVEP was also asked to provide all the production for the new Party in the Grove tailgate event before football games this past fall, which proved to be a great success. I look forward to the next few years as we grow and further provide enhanced services for this fantastic event.

TBTVEP has also purchased new soundboards and other equipment to enhance its production quality value. The most visible purchase will be the new 26-foot box truck to replace the 20-year-old truck TBTVEP has been using. The old truck will still be used on a limited basis.

Meanwhile, True Blue TV's television operation continues to be based in the Learning Resource Center and is headed by senior manager Ty Whitaker. Launched in 1999, it is the premier hub for video content and live event programming. True Blue TV presents a diverse blend of programming, including campus lectures and academic activities, live and encore broadcasts of University events and ceremonies, features on our undergraduate and graduate majors, and classroom and professional resources for K–12 schools and educators provided by MTSU's Center for Educational Media in the College of Education.

True Blue TV has been focused on improving its programming and offering more live streaming of important University events. These include Commencement ceremonies, Board of Trustees meetings, editions of the University's award-winning news magazine *Out of the Blue*, Blue Raider Extra Point shows, veterans stole ceremonies, significant announcements like the recent agreement with the Nashville School of Law, arts programs like "Joys of the Season," Constitution Day, the Homecoming Parade, and many more. These shows may be seen at mtsu.edu/live, or all shows may be found at the True Blue TV On Demand link at mtsu.edu/truebluetv.

While we continue to expand our cable footprint when we can, we realize that the future is on-demand. As such, True Blue TV is also available on Roku, Apple TV, and Amazon Fire TV.



# BLUE

Visit Blue Print, our on-campus printing services operations, at its new storefront location inside the Student Union!

From large-format mounted posters to yard signs to brochures and booklets to class projects, Blue Print specializes in printing, laminating, binding, and assisting you with your project or printing needs. Recently, Blue Print also became an on-campus outlet for low quantity, customized T-shirts for campus events and activities!

Blue Print welcomes personal projects, too! Need a service they don't currently offer? Let them know. They want to grow with you.

The Blue Print Student Union location is the retail site of Blue Print and serves as the front door to the much larger printing operation on Greenland Drive. Blue Print Greenland encompasses a wide range of high-volume, state-of-the-art equipment that produces the vast majority of the MTSU's printed materials.

Students, faculty, and staff can order through our online portal using your FSA credentials. You must be on campus or connected through MTSU's firewall to access. If you have issues connecting, contact Blue Print.

Learn more about Blue Print at mtsu.edu/blueprint.

Questions? Call 615-898-2100 or email blue.print@mtsu.edu.



## true BLUE GIVE 2025



# February 11,12, 13

**GIVE TO ANYTHING** YOU LOVE ON CAMPUS, **INCLUDING:** 

- **U** A DEPARTMENT OR PROGRAM
- **U** A STUDENT **ORGANIZATION**
- **U** BLUE RAIDER ATHLETICS

OR GIVE TO SUPPORT STUDENTS IN NEED:

- **U** SCHOLARSHIPS
- **U** STUDENT EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUND

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