



July 4, 2025

Dr. Donde Ashmos Plowman
Chancellor
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
800 Andy Holt Tower
1331 Circle Park Drive
Knoxville, TN 37996-0180

Dear Dr. Plowman:

Thank you for submitting the following substantive change:

Substantive change:

New Program-Approval

Doctor of Philosophy in Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications

Submission date:

6/10/2025

Intended Implementation date:

8/18/2025

Case ID:

SC031866

The institution proposes the implementation of the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) in the Herbert College of Agriculture with a launch date of August 18, 2025. The primary target audience was identified as teachers in middle and high school agricultural education and science, community college educators, agribusiness professionals, extension agents, communication specialists, administrators, and agency directors. The projected initial enrollment should reach a maximum of 14 in year 6. The program will be ongoing, and students should complete the 72-semester credit hour (SCH) program in three to four years. The institution currently offers a Master of Science degree in Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications. The Ph.D. program will be offered through face-to-face and distance education (online) methods of delivery. The face-to-face courses will be offered on the main campus. The online program courses will be offered through the Canvas learning management system (LMS). The institution was approved to offer distance education on February 12, 1998.

The strengths to offer the program include the institution's Carnegie Classification of R1 and its status as the state's largest and most comprehensive institution. The ALEC Department's faculty are diverse, well-established in their areas of expertise, and innovative and award-winning. The program plans to utilize existing foundational graduate courses in ALEC and other colleges and strategically add new ALEC courses with more depth and specialized knowledge. The need for the program was determined by an academic program review of the ALEC Department, which reviewed the potential for a Ph.D. program. Following a second academic program review, ALEC conducted a feasibility study that surveyed current and former students and regional and state employees working in ALEC-



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related professions and examined the employment outlook. Results indicated that the demand for graduates exceeded the annual production of graduates from existing programs.

The Ph.D. program was described in the context of the institution's mission and the UT Institute of Agriculture vision and appears to be consistent. Graduate faculty in the ALEC Department were actively engaged in the Ph.D. program planning. The ALEC Graduate Coordinator and the Chancellor Emeritus (a former ALEC faculty member) led the planning and development of the Ph.D. program. ALEC faculty discussed the composition of the program, including admissions standards, student learning outcomes (SLOs), credit hours, required courses, and non-course requirements, during biweekly faculty meetings. The program proposal was reviewed and approved by the ALEC Department, the Herbert College of Agriculture, the Graduate Council, and the Faculty Senate. Documentation was provided. The institution received system approval of the change from the UT Board of Trustees. Documentation was provided. The institution received state approval from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. Documentation was provided.

The Ph.D. curriculum, program schedule, six program-specific goals, and four student learning outcomes (SLOs) were provided. The Ph.D. program will require a minimum of 72 SCHs beyond the bachelor's degree or a minimum of 48 SCHs beyond the master's degree. Students will complete 24 SCHs of dissertation research and a minimum of 6 additional credit hours at the 600-level. Students must also complete a minimum of 18 SCHs in graduate level research methods and statistics. Students will complete a minimum of 20 SCHs of ALEC specialization courses chosen in consultation with their doctoral committee. Non-course requirements were also provided. The assessment measures include capstone assignments from each course that are assessed via scoring rubrics. Course descriptions for all program courses were provided and appear to be appropriate for a doctoral program.

Requirements for admission into and graduation from the program were provided and are consistent with higher education practices in a graduate field. The institution stated that the program will follow existing institutional policies and procedures to grant credit for the courses in the program. The institution adheres to the federal definition of a credit hour.

Overall administrative oversight of the program will be provided by the Dean of the Herbert College of Agriculture. The Department Head of ALEC reports to the Dean and ensures that the Ph.D. program aligns with the institution's academic policies and standards and meets program goals and SLOs. They work with faculty to review course components to maintain academic rigor and relevance. The ALEC Graduate Coordinator leads the ALEC graduate faculty, oversees ALEC graduate admissions, assessment data collection and report assessment results, and leads the faculty in reviewing and revising graduate courses, admissions standards, and degree requirements based on assessment data. The Graduate Coordinator reports to the Dean.

The courses in the program will not be offered in a compressed time frame. Face-to-face courses will be offered at the main campus. Online courses will be offered through the Canvas learning management system (LMS).



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The institution provided a faculty roster that listed twenty-nine full-time faculty members. The faculty members appear to be qualified to teach the courses to which they are assigned. A description of the scholarship, research, and experience in directing student research of the current faculty members was provided. The number of faculty appears to be adequate to teach the program. Only two courses in the curriculum are not currently being taught, one of which is ALEC 600 – Doctoral Research and Dissertation. The responsibilities for this course will be distributed across faculty chairing Ph.D. committees. Keep in mind that the ultimate determination of faculty qualifications and faculty adequacy is the responsibility of the peer review team who will assess the program as part of the institution's next SACSCOC accreditation review.

The library and learning/information resources supporting the new program were provided and appear to be adequate. The institution has an Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine specific library. Discipline-specific resources include collections of all major ALEC-related journals (examples provided) and research databases. Students can access library resources on the main library webpage with a valid UT NetID and password. Resource sharing is available. The primary methods for program students to obtain information on accessing resources are via orientation, advising, by faculty in their courses, and through links on the Canvas LMS home pages. A subject-specific LibGuide for ALEC was provided. A subject librarian for ALEC is available who can guide students on accessing library resources. Tutorials are available on research basics, specific database access tips, and citation management. All students can receive general information or in-depth research consultations with librarians in-person, by email, phone, chat, text, through FAQs.

Student and academic support services provided at the institution are available for all program students and include a faculty mentor and committee chair who will provide support and advice on selected coursework and research initiatives. In addition, support is available through the Writing Center, the Division of Teaching and Learning Innovation, and counseling and mental health services. The Office of Innovative Technologies provides support on the use of general technology issues and the Canvas LMS with the *Canvas Student Guide* and the *Getting Started with Canvas* tutorials. Support is available via phone and ticket.

The Ph.D. in ALEC program will use existing facilities; no new space will be required. The designated space is located in Morgan Hall, McCord Hall, and the Agriculture and Natural Resources Building and includes faculty offices, conference rooms, classrooms, and an office for program support personnel. Each full-time Ph.D. student on an assistantship will be provided with an office cubicle and a computer. Faculty will have access to multimedia studios, cameras, and video and podcast production equipment in support of online courses. All classrooms are technology enhanced. The impact on the physical facilities and equipment for existing program will be minimal.

The institution appears to have a sound financial base and stability. The institution provided a budget for the first seven years of operation. The primary sources of revenue for the new program are tuition/fees and grants (estimated at \$80K per year). The budget expenses include faculty and staff salaries (pro-rated), graduate student assistantships, equipment, graduate student travel, and information technology. A one-time expense of \$3,000 in the planning year for consultants for external reviewers was provided. The budget demonstrates that revenues will exceed expenses



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beginning in year 3. The institution does not predict that any budget resources will be directed to institutions or organizations for contractual or support services related to the Ph.D. program. A contingency plan was provided should costs exceed revenue. If the program fails to achieve expected enrollments, the department will re-evaluate and adjust the marketing strategy and/or adjust spending.

The institutional planning and assessment process was described and appears to be adequate. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness oversees the annual assessment of academic programs. Assessment of student learning outcomes includes data collection, analysis, and reporting that focuses on seeking improvement in student learning. In addition, student assessment of all academic courses and instructors is accomplished through end-of-course evaluations. Peer teaching evaluations are also conducted to assess course structure, assessment methods, and pedagogical strategies. Each academic department conducts an annual meta-assessment review and prepares a summary report that is shared with faculty and administration for continuous improvement. The Ph.D. in ALEC will be included in the existing assessment processes.

The Board of Trustees of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges reviewed the materials seeking approval of the Doctor of Philosophy in Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications. It was the decision of the Board to approve the program and include it in the scope of accreditation.

An invoice for \$500 to help defray the cost of reviewing the prospectus is enclosed with the liaison's copy of this letter.

Should you need assistance, please contact Dr. J. Matthew Melton at (404) 994-6553 or via email at mmelton@sacscoc.org.

Please include the Case ID number above in all submissions or correspondence about this substantive change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Belle S. Wheelan".

Belle S. Wheelan, Ph.D.
President

BSW/TBB:lp

Enclosure (invoice with liaison's copy only)

cc: Dr. Heather G. Hartman, Associate Vice Provost for Institutional Effectiveness, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Dr. J. Matthew Melton, Vice President, SACSCOC