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Inviting Applications and Nominations for

Director of the Data Science Institute



MYERSMcRAE
EXECUTIVE SEARCH AND CONSULTING



*Middle Tennessee State University seeks an experienced professional and proven leader to serve as the **Director of the Data Science Institute** to lead an interdisciplinary group of scholars to advance innovative solutions in data science, artificial intelligence, and machine learning.*

Middle Tennessee State University offers exceptional academic programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels that prepare students to thrive in their chosen profession and prioritize student success. As one of Tennessee's largest comprehensive universities, MTSU places high value on outstanding teaching, research, creative activity, and public service that support the emerging needs and challenges of our state, nation, and world.



ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY

The No. 1 producer of college graduates for greater Nashville, Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) has more than 300 graduate and undergraduate majors and concentrations to help students reach their career goals. From the acclaimed academic programs and state-of-the-art facilities to MTSU campus life and its thriving Blue Raider athletic programs, MTSU is known for doing it all. With more than 250 student organizations, there is always plenty to do. Great facilities on campus are coupled with a college-friendly town, lots of local entertainment, plenty of access to athletic events, and a beautiful physical environment.

Situated at the geographic center of the state in Murfreesboro, MTSU is a comprehensive university that embraces its role as a preferred destination for Tennessee undergraduates while expanding its reach nationally and internationally through signature programs and select master's and doctoral programs. The combination of high-quality programs, student resources, incredible scholarship programs, and low tuition costs is unmatched in Tennessee. In fact, MTSU has the lowest tuition rate of any major university in Tennessee.

With an enrollment of more than 20,000 students and more than 300 majors and concentrations, MTSU is the largest locally governed university in Tennessee. It is the No. 1 producer of graduates for the Greater Nashville economy; a top choice for first-generation and transfer students; a leader in adult degree completion programs; and home to the Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center, one of the largest and most comprehensive facilities of its kind on a college campus. MTSU Online features 73 fully online majors, concentrations, and certificates, offering accessible and engaging educational experiences students can access from anywhere in the world.

While MTSU has been named to The Princeton Review's list of the Best Colleges in the U.S. six years in a row, it also has been named one of the best places to earn an undergraduate degree in the nation by The Princeton Review, which called it "a go-to choice for those wishing to receive a quality and affordable education." It is also featured on the best colleges lists of *The Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, and *U.S. News and World Report*.



DATA SCIENCE INSTITUTE

The Data Science Institute strives to be the leader in knowledge and research in the area of data science and big data concepts. This is accomplished by facilitating interdisciplinary research, industry and government partnerships, and community outreach which puts MTSU at the forefront of data science regionally and nationally in terms of education and research. Data science is an interdisciplinary field that uses scientific methods, algorithms, and systems to extract knowledge and insights from structured and unstructured data. It combines elements of statistics, computer science, mathematics, and domain expertise to analyze and interpret complex data for decision-making, prediction, and innovation.

At Middle Tennessee State University, the Data Science program offers a dynamic and interdisciplinary

education at the undergraduate (BS), master's (MS), and doctoral (Ph.D.) levels. Designed to prepare students for success in one of the fastest-growing fields, its curriculum blends core principles and recent innovations from Computer Science, Mathematics, Economics & Finance, and Information Systems & Analytics.

What sets MTSU apart is its thriving data science community. The faculty come from across MTSU, bringing unique expertise from diverse academic departments which gives students access to a wide range of perspectives and mentorship. Students also benefit from year-round events, workshops, and speaker series that connect them to the latest tools, trends, and real-world applications of data science.



PURPOSE, VISION, AND VALUES

Our Purpose

To fulfill its mission as a comprehensive, public institution of higher education, the University's diverse community of students, faculty, and staff:

- Educates and challenges students through a broad array of high-quality, affordable bachelor's, master's, specialist, and doctoral programs grounded in a common core of arts and sciences;
- Collaboratively promotes excellence through innovative teaching and learning, research, creative activity, service, and engagement;
- Fosters a student-centered environment conducive to lifelong learning, personal development, and success for all students, including first-generation, Pell-eligible, transfer, veteran, non-traditional, and international students;
- Enhances access through unique programs, distance learning, and advising to meet the needs of a diverse student population;
- Supports student learning through effective teaching and advising, experiential and integrative learning, emerging technologies, research, and co-curricular and extra-curricular activities;
- Attracts and retains exceptional faculty and staff and develops resources to support excellence in instruction, research, creative activity, and public and professional service;

- Develops and sustains academic partnerships, entrepreneurial activities, and public service to support instruction, research, and communities throughout the region;
- Promotes ongoing engagement with its alumni, partners, and friends; and
- Serves as an emerging center for international study, understanding, and exchange.

Middle Tennessee State University educates students to:

- Think logically, critically, and creatively;
- Make sound judgments informed by ethical, moral, and aesthetic values;
- Acquire knowledge of a discipline or a group of related disciplines;
- Examine, analyze, and shape the rapidly changing world through scientific knowledge, creative undertakings, and an understanding of culture and history;
- Communicate clearly and precisely and understand the proper role of free expression and civic engagement in our society; and
- Demonstrate the effective and adaptive use of current and evolving technologies.

Our Vision

To provide the highest quality education and student experience, enabling members of our community to excel in professional, scholarly, and public life.

Our Community Standards and Values

MTSU is committed to developing and nurturing a community devoted to learning, growth, and service. Each person who joins or affiliates with the community does so freely and accepts and practices the following core values and expectations:

- **Honesty and Integrity.** The notions of personal and academic honesty and integrity are central to the existence of the MTSU community. All members of the community will strive to achieve and maintain the highest standards of academic achievement in the classroom and personal and social responsibility on and off campus.
- **Respect for Diversity.** The MTSU community is composed of individuals of different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, religions, cultures, and ways of thinking. We respect individual differences and unique perspectives as we acknowledge our commonalities.
- **Engagement in the Community.** All members of the community are encouraged to participate in educationally purposeful activities that support and enhance the MTSU experience. Active involvement and personal investment in academic and student life are hallmarks of an engaged citizen.
- **Commitment to Nonviolence.** MTSU is committed to the principles of non-violence and peaceful conflict resolution. Community members will freely express their ideas and resolve differences using reason and persuasion.





THE OPPORTUNITY

Middle Tennessee State University and the Office of the Vice Provost for Research are seeking an experienced leader for the Director of the Data Science Institute position. The successful candidate will report directly to the Vice Provost for Research. The Director will develop and maintain a robust and ongoing extramurally funded program of research in data science, artificial intelligence, or machine learning, which will be administered through the Data Science Institute, serve as a resource in grantsmanship for faculty, and inspire faculty and students to progress in their research and scholarship endeavors.

Expectations

It is expected that the Director will fund 50% of their non-stipend salary and benefits with extramural funding by the end of year three, with annual progress toward this goal each year, and 95% of non-stipend salary funded externally beyond Year 5. If at least 50% of salary and benefits are not covered by extramural funding by the end of year three, then the 95% threshold beyond Year 5 will not likely be met.

Responsibilities

- Provide visionary research leadership in data science, artificial intelligence, and machine learning at the state and national levels.
- Lead an interdisciplinary research team(s) around the topics of data science, AI, and machine learning.
- Assist in the development of intellectual property and commercialization of their research.

Required Qualifications

Minimum required qualifications at the time of hire include the following:

- Terminal degree in computer science, artificial intelligence/machine learning, data science, or a closely related discipline offered at MTSU.
- Record of scholarship/research in data science, AI, or machine learning to qualify for faculty rank of Associate or Full Professor with tenure.

Desired Qualifications

- Data Science Research Expertise: Applicants must demonstrate a strong record of data science, AI, or machine learning research through at least five peer-reviewed publications or evidence of impactful research leadership, such as serving as a principal investigator on a collaborative data science research initiative.
- Record of Sustained External Funding: Applicants must have a history of external funding, including at least one currently funded research project or a record of securing at least three (3) externally funded projects over the last 5 years.
- Leadership and Involvement in National Data Science or AI Professional Organizations preferred.



MURFREESBORO

The geographic center of Tennessee, Murfreesboro is located in the Nashville metropolitan area and is only 34 miles southeast of downtown Nashville, a healthcare industry hub and with the nation's largest concentration of health care companies. According to the Nashville Health Care Council, about 900 companies in the healthcare ecosystem are based in Nashville. With a population of 165,430, Murfreesboro is the sixth-largest city in Tennessee. It is also the county seat of Rutherford County, serving as the state capital from 1818 to 1826. Murfreesboro is located in Rutherford County which has been the fastest growing county in Tennessee for eight years in a row according to a 2024 study by the Tennessee State Data Center Boyd Business Economic Research Center.

The West Fork of the Stones River flows through Murfreesboro. A walking trail, the Greenway, parallels the river for several miles. A smaller waterway, Lytle Creek, flows through downtown, including historic Cannonsburgh Village, which is a reproduction of what a working pioneer village would have looked like from the period of the 1830s to the 1930s. Murfreesboro is home to a number of natural and man-made lakes, plus several small wetlands, including Todd's Lake and the Murfree Spring wetland area. It is also home to several parks and the Murfreesboro Greenway System, a system of greenways with 12 miles of paved paths and 11 trail heads.

Several points of interest include the Discovery Center at Murfree Spring, Oaklands Historic House

Museum, Stones River Greenway Arboretum, Stones River National Battlefield, and, of course, Middle Tennessee State University. The Earth Experience, the Middle Tennessee Museum of Natural History; Batey Farms; MayDay Brewery, Center for the Arts, The Avenue Murfreesboro add to the adventures as do many restaurants and shopping opportunities.

According to Murfreesboro's 2023 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, the top employers in Rutherford County are Nissan, Rutherford County government and schools, Amazon Fulfillment Center, City of Murfreesboro. Middle Tennessee State University, Ascension St. Thomas Rutherford, Ingram Content Group, Taylor Farms, Alvin C. York Veterans Administration Medical Center, and Asurion.

Elementary education within the city is overseen by Murfreesboro City Schools while secondary schools are overseen by Rutherford County Schools, which has 50 schools. The Japanese Supplementary School in Middle Tennessee, a weekend Japanese education program, holds its classes in Peck Hall at Middle Tennessee State University, while its school offices are in Jefferson Square. Top ranked private schools in Murfreesboro, TN include St. Rose Catholic School, Franklin Road Christian School, Providence Christian Academy, The Webb School Bell Buckle, Lighthouse Christian School & Preschool Antioch, Lancaster Christian Academy Smyrna, and Redeemer Classical Academy Murfreesboro.

NASHVILLE MSA

The Nashville Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which includes Murfreesboro and 13 other counties, is one of the fastest-growing regions in the United States, with a population exceeding 2 million. Known for its vibrant economy blending music, healthcare, and technology, the Nashville MSA has become a major tech hub, attracting significant investments from global companies and fostering innovation in data science, AI, cloud computing, and related fields. Major tech companies have established substantial operations in the area, driving employment and creating opportunities for academic-industry partnerships. Notable examples include:

- **Oracle:** Oracle is developing a \$1.35 billion campus in Nashville's River North district on the East Bank of the Cumberland River, with plans to create 8,500 jobs focused on cloud infrastructure, health tech, and applications. While construction has faced some delays and is expected to fully open by 2030, Oracle has actively expanded its local presence through office subleases and zoning approvals, maintaining a growing footprint in the city.
- **Amazon and AWS:** Amazon's Operations Center of Excellence in downtown Nashville has already created over 5,000 corporate and tech jobs, with ongoing expansions including leased space at Nashville Yards. Amazon Web Services (AWS) supports the region's cloud ecosystem through initiatives like Wavelength Zones for 5G edge computing and participation in local tech events, further bolstering data-intensive industries.
- **Other prominent players:** The area is home to tech giants like Dell Technologies, Meta (with data centers), Google, Apple, and local innovators such as Asurion, Change Healthcare, Zeta Global, and a thriving startup community in fintech, martech, and health tech. The tech sector in the Nashville MSA is projected to reach over 65,000 jobs by the end of 2025, ranking 10th nationwide for tech job growth with a 35% increase in recent years. This expansion is fueled by high demand for skills in software development, cybersecurity, AI, and data analytics, providing MTSU's Data Science Institute with rich prospects for research collaborations, grant opportunities, internships, and career pathways for students and faculty.



Application & Nomination Process

Confidential inquiries are welcomed, and nominations are invited.



Applications

All application packets must include the following:

- 1) A letter of application that includes the candidate's (a) interest in and qualifications for the position and (b) vision for the Data Science Institute
- 2) Current curriculum vitae
- 3) Unofficial transcripts of all degrees and certificates earned (*Official transcripts will be required of finalists.*)
- 3) At least four references with full contact information including e-mail (*References will not be contacted without consent from applicant.*)

Submit application materials online, preferably as PDFs. Additional information is requested with the submission of materials. **For best consideration, complete applications should be received before September 21, 2025.**

[APPLY HERE](#)

Nominations

Submit nominations with complete contact and e-mail information for the individual being nominated.

[NOMINATE HERE](#)

Consultant

Middle Tennessee State University has retained **Myers McRae Executive Search and Consulting** to assist the Search Committee in its identification and review of the Director of the Data Science Institute candidates. **Jennifer Barfield**, Executive Vice President of Myers McRae Executive Search and Consulting, is the lead consultant for this search. **Request a conversation regarding this search at JenniferBarfield@myersmcr ae.com.**



At Middle Tennessee State University, we fully embrace, value, and respect the backgrounds, cultures, and identities of our students, faculty, staff, visitors and all who partner or do business with us. Our vision is to foster a culture of inclusive excellence through our diverse people, philosophies, and perspectives in order to advance MTSU as a national leader who leverages diversity to achieve its goals.