

# Humans of MTSU: A Strategic Public Relations Campaign

by  
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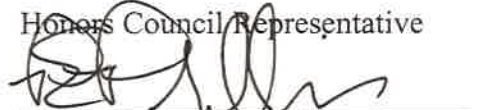
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## Introduction

Humans of MTSU is a social media project that highlights the diverse stories of the student body, faculty, staff, and alumni of Middle Tennessee State University. The project takes the form of Facebook and Instagram pages called Humans of MTSU, which include faces from across the various departments of the university, along with a caption about the individual, to promote the unique voice of each student and to show MTSU caters to all types of students from different backgrounds. This project follows the format of the groundbreaking Humans of New York.

Humans of MTSU is intended to create content that will increase interest in Middle Tennessee State University among students and parents, especially for those who are anxious about the admissions process. When they see a positive message about the school spoken by someone who was not paid to do so, the parents and students will feel more at ease about the university. The stories featured on Humans of MTSU give the school a face and stories, which makes the college experience less scary and more relatable. These endorsements prove that many students are passionate about their school and willing to share the benefits associated with the school and their major or story. Because this is a project to positively reflect the university, the majority of the stories will shed positive light on MTSU.

To enable the brand building to continue through Humans of MTSU, a manual is included in this project for future SGA vice presidents of marketing to ensure the message and style are consistent throughout the years. This strategic campaign highlights how continuing the Humans of MTSU project will benefit university marketing and how they can use this as a tool for recruitment, retention, and community building. This will

enable potential students to see the benefits associated with becoming True Blue. They will see how MTSU has impacted the lives of students, faculty, and alumni. This marketing tool will be an invaluable resource as MTSU seeks to connect with potential students on a personal basis.

## **Literature Review**

Humans of MTSU serves a unique purpose that is needed on the MTSU campus. To highlight the legitimacy of this project, this literature review provides theories, examples, and support for the project. In the literature review, public relations and marketing, third-party endorsements, and branding will all come together to express why this project can close the gap for university admissions in a very personal way that highlights real lives on campus through storytelling.

### **Public Relations and Marketing**

Public relations and marketing are crucial components for any organization because they are the mouthpiece of the organization. Marketing involves researching the target audience and promoting a product or service to that audience. Alvin Silk discusses the major role marketing plays in an organization's strategic direction by saying, "In general terms, marketing refers to what an organization must do to create and exchange value with customers" (Silk 7). He continues, "Successful marketing requires both a deep knowledge of customers, competitors, and collaborators and great skill in deploying an organization's capabilities so as to serve customers profitably" (Silk 7). Thus, marketing is an essential way for an organization to understand and communicate with its target audience. Public relations includes creating a favorable image of a particular organization or company. According to Yann, public relations is a "strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics" (Yann 1). Through creating mutually beneficial relationships, organizations can create a favorable image of their brands and build partnerships with others in the community.



These two branches are crucial for a university so that potential students are aware of the many programs the university offers. Oftentimes, a university's marketing strategy may seem dull and purely based on numbers. According to Ratliff, "Most institutions have experienced significant growing pains in their attempts to manage the variety of initiatives that are taken up by various programs, departments, academic units, and schools, which in many instances leads to a duplication of efforts" (Ratliffe 1). When there is a duplication of efforts across several departments on campus, the content may seem repetitive and boring. Public relations programs that help build mutually beneficial relationships between the university and the community of potential students will help to bridge the gap and create open communication from both sides. Successful marketing and public relations strategies will help to bridge the gap and build relationships between the university and its surrounding community.

### **Third-Party Endorsements**

A third-party endorsement is a "Solicited or unsolicited recommendation or testimonial from an entity, usually a customer or user, other than the manufacturer and seller of a product or service ("What is Third-Party Endorsement? Definition and Meaning"). In other words, this is a statement by someone not employed by the organization. A large aspect of third-party endorsement credibility is honesty because an honest review will be better received than one written by someone who was paid to provide one. Several companies were fined for paying people to write positive reviews on Yelp for their companies, even if they had never used their products or services. Crum says, "According to the AG, Premier Retail Group solicited reviewers through ads posted on Craigslist to write positive reviews in exchange for free samples, vouchers, and other

compensation even if they hadn't visited one of their locations.” He continues, “One of the ads stated ‘Have a Strong Yelp account? Want to make money writing reviews?’ The company paid a penalty of \$50,000, \$30,000 of which is suspended assuming compliance with the settlement agreement” (Crum 1). Additionally, some Amazon reviews are known to be fake and intended to damage a company’s reputation, and Amazon has filed lawsuits against alleged fake reviewers. Amazon has an interest in protecting its customers and ensuring they have the most accurate reviews and information available (Rubin 1). On the other hand, there are some reviews on Amazon that are not real, but done in good humor. One particular product that went viral because of the humorous, but fake reviews is the banana slicer. The product experienced a surge in product orders after the banana peeler went viral based on the comments in the review section. One reviewer said, “For decades I have been trying to come up with an ideal way to slice a banana. ‘Use a knife!’ they say. Well...my parole officer won't allow me to be around knives” (Carlson 1). This product received thousands of reviews that are clearly facetious, so Amazon does not have an interest in removing reviews that are not harming a company’s reputation.

The problem with reviews is that sometimes consumers make decisions solely based on someone else’s opinion about the product or service. Aral suggests, “In the digital age, we are inundated by other people’s opinions. We browse books on Amazon with awareness of how other customers liked (or disliked) a particular tome. On Expedia, we compare hotels based on user ratings. On YouTube, we can check out a video’s thumbs-up/thumbs-down score to help determine if it’s worth our time. We may even make serious decisions about medical professionals based in part on the feedback of prior

patients” (Aral 1). Consumers rely heavily on the opinion of those who have previously used the product, even if the information is subjective.

In an article entitled “Deriving the Pricing Power of Product Features by Mining Consumer Reviews,” Nikolay Archak discusses the power behind a product review and how it affects consumer behavior when making a purchase. He says, “Online shoppers increasingly rely on alternative sources of information such as ‘word of mouth’ in general, and user-generated product reviews, in particular. In fact, some researchers have established that user-generated product information on the internet attracts more interest than vendor information among consumers. In contrast to product descriptions provided by vendors, consumer reviews are, by construction, more user oriented” (Archak 1485). Product reviews attract more interest than product descriptions because reviews are user generated, which makes them more relatable than the information a company would post about its own product. This also can be said for university marketing. Word of mouth sources often have a greater impact than traditional advertising because parents and potential students perceive reviews to be honest and fair.

Many people do not trust advertising because they feel that it is exaggerated or inaccurate. According to a study conducted by Lab 42, a research firm, 76% of respondents in a survey said ads in general were either “very exaggerated” or “somewhat exaggerated.” 87% think half or more cleaning ads are photoshopped, and 96% think half or more weight loss ads are photoshopped (Olenski 1). These figures demonstrate the public’s mistrust in the honesty of advertising, which is why third-party endorsements can be a useful tool because they add a dimension of credibility.

Credibility is a vital factor of public relations and marketing. If someone is endorsing a product or service but does not have credibility, the person's endorsement is ultimately useless. Third-party endorsements play a vital role in marketing and public relations because they add a level of honesty and relatability to an organization, particularly at the university level. When choosing which university to attend, students place a great emphasis on academic reputation (Morse 1). Morse's survey conducted in 2012 for UCLA students, highlights the factors students take into consideration when choosing a college. He says, "Students in the UCLA survey rated whether a college has a good academic reputation as the No. 1 factor that influenced their school choice, indicating their firm belief that reputation matters to a significant degree" (Morse 1). Thus, universities must work to create and maintain a good reputation.

Therefore, the way that a university presents itself and its reputation can be a make or break factor in a student's decision to attend. If the university has a stellar online presence that portrays its programs in a positive light, it is building a favorable reputation for all potential students to see. According to a 2014 Eduventures Prospective Student Survey, over a quarter of prospective students find certain social media sites "highly useful" for learning about colleges. Mark Rooney, a senior analyst, said, "In an age when every yielded student is harder to earn, this cohort deserves the attention of admissions officers. Perhaps more convincingly, a large group of this year's admitted students nationwide said that their chosen college's social media efforts had an impact on their decision" (Rooney 1). Students are using social media, and based on this survey, social media tends to have an impact on their college decisions.

In the article, “At the Core of Marketing Publicity Success: The Proven Techniques of Third-Party Endorsement,” Heather Metcalfe discusses the power of the most basic form of marketing on the planet—the third-party endorsement. She explains that the reason third-party endorsements are so effective is that they are objective and they “add up to a level of credibility that is difficult to achieve with other business to business marketing techniques such as advertising, which is viewed with a high level of skepticism” (Metcalfe 1). In other words, third-party endorsements add credibility because they are somewhat removed from the product or service. An advertisement for the company, or in this case a university, can be viewed with scrutiny because someone who works for the university has a stake in the university’s success. A third-party endorsement takes the bias out of the situation and adds a level of credibility, which is why many Amazon users jump straight to the product reviews instead of the product description.

She is not alone in seeing the power in these endorsements. The CEO of Power PR, John W. Elliot says, “These are the only marketing weapons powerful enough to drive products to the position of market leaders in their market category” (Metcalfe 1). Third-party endorsements can be powerful tools because they are believable and honest. Not only are third-party endorsements seemingly transparent and honest, but they also signal quality. Dean describes the theory behind a third-party endorsement, stating that “Compared with celebrity and typical consumer endorsements, a third-party endorsement is believed to be unique in its ability to signal quality and inform the consumer” (Dean 43). He continues, “The basis for internalization of a third-party endorsement recommendation is most likely the credibility (expertise, trustworthiness) of a source.

Third-party endorsements are believed to be superior to celebrity endorsements” (Dean 44). Because third-party endorsements come from regular people who are not paid to share their experiences, the focus is on the product quality.

## Branding

Branding is an important component for a university because it projects the image of the university and how it would like to be perceived as a reputable learning environment. David Bunzel states that universities have had to take on a strategic business mindset since universities across the nation have become increasingly competitive with one another. He says, “Greater competition among schools exists today to attract the best and brightest students. A university is no longer just an institution of higher learning but also a business. In a competitive marketplace, awareness of business metrics becomes more critical” (Bunzel 152). Because of this new competition, universities must evaluate how to attract the best students across the country and which outlet is the best to communicate with potential students.

A university’s brand is the “gut feeling” that a potential student gets while researching the school (Neumeier 2). Marty Neumeier’s book *The Brand Gap* erases some of the common misconceptions about a brand: it isn’t a logo, trademark, or a product (Neumeier 2). Essentially, people assume logo and brand mean the same thing, but Neumeier argues that a brand is the gut feeling a person gets about a product, service, or company because “in the end, the brand is defined by individuals, not by companies, markets, or the so-called general public” (Neumeier 2). By highlighting those individuals an organization can create a stronger brand that builds a positive gut feeling when a potential student is researching a university. He discusses that a brand gap is created

when there is a “rift between strategy and creativity, logic and magic” (Neumeier 15). Individuals comprise the brand, and they are what make a university competitive and unique from other schools. A brand is ultimately a lot deeper than the image it portrays. However, creating a brand is difficult because a company cannot tell others what to think about the brand. A brand is something that becomes naturally associated with a product.

Spotlighting a student thriving in the university’s environment is a way to build a more effective university brand by conveying student success through nonverbal, implied communication. Adding a student’s own words only makes the communication that much more powerful. The importance of implicit and explicit messaging in advertising is discussed in Dick Wasserman’s book, *That’s Our New Ad Campaign*. He says, “There is much evidence to show that it is the nonverbal implied communication that is much more often the effective one than the pure logical verbal form of communication” (Wasserman 16). This means that solely emphasizing facts or statistics associated with a school on the website may not be the best way to attract students. When an individual discusses how he or she has benefited from the school’s programs, the message goes deeper than simply pointing out numbers. This will help build a more effective brand. Body language and implicit messaging are valuable within the context of storytelling. A photograph can convey a certain message based on the environment the subject is in, what the subject is wearing, and the gestures the subject is making. Photographing is equally as important as interviewing because it conveys implicit, nonverbal communication that is essential for capturing a powerful story. This is important for third-party endorsements because effective implicit messaging will allow the storytelling to become more relatable and perceived as a credible source.

Wasserman also argues that it is important to “make sure [that those involved in the marketing campaign] are in agreement on every detail” (Wasserman 85). When everyone is on the same page, the content will be much more effective.

## **Humans of New York**

Humans of New York is a social media platform on Facebook and Instagram that highlights the diverse people who walk the streets of New York. Brandon Stanton, the project’s creator, walks up to random people on New York’s streets and asks them if he can snap a photo while also interviewing them about their backgrounds or stories. His project slowly evolved from a photography blog into a storytelling blog. At the beginning of his project, he hoped to photograph 10,000 strangers on the streets of New York, and toward the end, “Humans of New York” developed into a storytelling blog, where he interviewed subjects for about twenty minutes each to gather quotes and content for each photo (Stanton 2). His content is powerful and worthy of emulation because it captures the raw, unguarded story of each person he interviews, which makes his content very shareable and relatable. He asks questions that cause the interviewee to open up and share personal details that many of his followers can relate to, which is why his following has grown rapidly through the duration of his project. Humans of New York’s social media platforms have millions of followers, and it has created a sense of community and empathy for New York’s population.

Based on his blogging and social media success, Stanton created a book titled *Humans of New York*, published in 2013, in the midst of his work’s transition toward storytelling. In 2013, there were 145,000 copies in print, according to the *New York Times*. Bosman says, “After its first week on sale, the book landed in the No. 1 spot on



the *New York Times* hardcover nonfiction best-seller list” (Bosman 1). Two years later, he wrote *Humans of New York: Stories* in 2015, and he believed that the new book “included the in-depth storytelling that the blog is known for today” (Stanton 2).

In *Humans of New York: Stories*, Stanton compiles his work in photojournalism and storytelling from his blog and social media pages with a brief introduction about his story and how he began his journey with *Humans of New York*. He said that if he had waited to start *Humans of New York* until he had the idea for it, he probably never would have started it (Stanton 2). He thanks those who have followed his blog and created such a positive community behind his project. He reflects, “The greatest group of people in the world seem to follow Humans of New York” (Stanton 2). Perhaps the reason so many people follow is because the social media project and books are filled with creative content that is humorous, touching, and heart-warming. Stanton’s storytelling abilities make the subjects jump off the page, and the reader feels ultimately very connected to the cause, which for Stanton is capturing a compelling story. Mark Mann explained that what sets Stanton apart from other storytellers “is his ability to push through the first layer of the interview, when people speak their truisms rather than their truths, and draw out the honest revelations that actually matter” (Mann 1). The honest revelations that come together to form *Humans of New York* are why the content appeals to the hearts of so many people across the nation.

As an example of what *Humans of New York* presents, in one of the stories, a young woman looks in the distance with a half-smile and states, “We broke up in a Starbucks. A week later, I walked by and the place had been completely bulldozed to the ground. I always thought that was the Universe doing me a favor” (Stanton 67). In

another account, a young boy is photographed while carrying his school books in a black trash bag. He is asked who had been the biggest influence in his life. He replied, “My principal, Ms. Lopez. When we get in trouble, she doesn’t suspend us. She calls us into her office and explains to us how society was built down around us. And she tells us that each time somebody fails out of school, a new jail cell gets built. And one time she made every student stand up, one at a time, and she told each one of us that we matter” (Stanton 90). This particular story demonstrates the love a principal possesses for the future of New York. Her goal is to instill a sense of confidence and love into her students so that they will grow up to become good citizens of New York.

Brandon Stanton’s storytelling speaks to the heart because many of the stories are filled with emotion. Stories hold the immense power to create emotion, from happiness to sorrow, and everything in between. Chanee D. Fabius, in an article about storytelling within the African-American elder community, says, “Storytelling, a term often used interchangeably with oral tradition, oral history, and folklore, is a way to share family history, pass traditions onto the next generation, and raise children. Elders are viewed as storytellers, the advisors, and links between the past and the present. In addition, stories are means of preserving common characteristics of a culture and passing it on to subsequent generations” (Fabius 428). The stories Stanton captures in New York are documenting the current culture of New York, and one day future generations will be able to look back at how the previous generation of New York lived.

Brandon Stanton dedicated his life to sharing the stories of those around him, even if that was not his original intent. Through stories, photographs, blog posts and books, he is documenting the culture of New York and its history to pass down to future generations.

*Humans of New York* developed and became a platform millions of people follow each day. People rally behind stories because they are relatable and they speak to the heart, if captured with a touching photograph, which is evident in his Facebook photos that have many shares. In his photos, he includes people of all different walks of life. He photographs homeless people, successful businesspeople, children on their way home from school, and even the president of the United States. Brandon Stanton's model of *Humans of New York: Stories* is a powerful message of storytelling and how people will rally behind a positive message.

## Conclusion

Successful universities must act as a business and utilize public relations, marketing, and branding effectively to attract potential students. Students often go with their gut feelings about a brand, particularly a university, so it is important for a university's image to portray both a reputable learning environment and a positive campus culture. There is a need for third-party endorsements and storytelling to close the brand gap at a university for their marketing, public relations, and branding to be effective. The next section of this project will discuss the purpose of the creative project and include a user's guide to illustrate how to manage the Humans of MTSU social media accounts for the future vice presidents of marketing for the Student Government Association.

## Creative Project Purpose

The Humans of MTSU Facebook and Instagram pages were created in 2015. In the beginning stages, the people highlighted were those who were known and convenient to reach. Those people were also asked if they knew others with interesting stories to be featured on the page. The format followed that of Brandon Stanton's work, including trying to mimic his creativity. Given the success of the Humans of MTSU and the fact that the person who runs those pages, the SGA vice president of marketing, changes every year, it became obvious that a manual was needed. The creative project included in this thesis has the goal to create a manual for the next SGA vice president of marketing so the Humans of MTSU social media outlets can be consistently updated and maintained. The manual explains how to choose the students featured to represent the diverse population at MTSU, provides tips on how to utilize Brandon Stanton's creativity as a guide to the future vice president of marketing, and includes a strategic campaign for Humans of MTSU centered on the long term effectiveness.

## Humans of MTSU Manual

This manual provides a complete overview of how to manage the Humans of MTSU social media pages, including photography, interviewing, editing, and posting tips. This manual will ensure consistent style and content of the page and will make each SGA vice president of marketing's transition seamless. For actual examples of featured stories, see Appendix A.

### Photography

In fall 2015, the Student Government Association purchased a Canon EOS Rebel T5 camera with an 18-55mm lens for the continuation of Humans of MTSU in order to produce content that was high quality. Due to the high quality nature of the camera, the user must have some prior knowledge in order to utilize all the features. There are several



*Figure 1: Student poses at the True Blue Horseshoe in Walnut Grove*

tips and tricks to managing the camera that help to produce a higher quality photograph, and through utilizing this manual and featuring future students, teachers, and alumni, future SGA vice presidents of

marketing will be able to

return to this manual again and again to perfect their craft. Since the vice president of marketing changes every year during elections, the Student Government Association

needs a manual to ensure the overall style of Humans of MTSU remains consistent throughout the years.

The photographer can use the aperture setting on the camera to create a visually pleasing photograph because the subject is clearly in focus. The lens aperture on the camera adjusts the depth of field so the subject, or the object closest to the camera, is clearly in focus and the sharpest part of the image.

A well-respected photographer and blogger suggested that for portraits and headshots, it is important to focus on the subject's eyes. When the eyes are the sharpest part of the image, the viewer's eyes will be drawn right to it (Tellone 1). In order to create this visual element, switch the dial on the top right of the camera from auto to the creative auto (CA) mode. Next, press the quick control button and turn the setting all the way down. After changing the setting, click "set." This will increase the blurred background effect on the photo, creating an image similar to the one above.



*Figure 2: Student lights candle at Martin Luther King, Jr. Vigil*

On the same screen below aperture, press the down button to go to flash. The photo will always be better if flash is not used and natural lighting is utilized to the fullest. Sunset is the best times to capture photos. This is because of

the flattering light the sun creates around sunset called golden light. A professional photographer suggests in a tutorial that “The hour or so before the sun goes down is a wonderful time to shoot portraits. This golden hour is renowned among photographers for the qualities of its light and creative possibilities” (Rowse 1). The soft light creates a magical look, and Lim suggests, “With golden light, more of the blue wavelengths are scattered, and so the light naturally looks more red/yellow. Warmer tones are generally more flattering on people” (Lim 1). However, sunset may not always work with the vice president of marketing’s busy schedule or the students on campus. Because of this, if the photo must be taken at a time when there is no golden glow, try to find a shade tree or a building to block the harsh sun.

Most of the time, photographing a subject at night can be difficult, unless lighting is used to play up the lighting in the photo. Photo 1 B was captured at a Martin Luther King, Jr. vigil, and there is a greater emphasis on the scene and the message of the photograph than the subject. Photos that display action or the subject doing something are much more interesting than a simple headshot that is posed. Sometimes a posed photo is effective, but most of the time it is best to ask the subject to demonstrate something he or she is passionate about. If the person is an avid book reader, take him or her to the library to photograph a reading session.

This action provides an inside look at the values of the person you are photographing, so they help tell the person’s story much more effectively than a simple, posed photo. To capture a person’s facial expression that demonstrate personality, zoom in on the subject. To zoom in, turn the lens to the right. To zoom out, turn the lens to the left. Make sure the camera is in focus. If you cannot think of any action to ask the subject

to do for the photo, ask them to look away to the left or right, depending on which angle the subject is most comfortable with, and capture photos of the person smiling and then relaxed face, without smiling.

Make sure that the background is visually appealing. Generally, the most visually appealing places are outside, and not inside. Some of the best places on campus to capture photos are the Honors College, Walnut Grove, the brick wall outside the John Bragg Media and Entertainment Building, the Student Union Building Commons, and inside the College of Education Building.



*Figure 3: Students celebrate their graduation from Middle Tennessee State University by displaying their diplomas*

It can be difficult to carry around the camera to each event on campus, and sometimes you will run into people who would be perfect for Humans of MTSU, but you do not have any supplies with you or paper to write down notes from the interview. In those

circumstances, it is acceptable to take a photo on

your phone if the phone camera quality is good. In the photo attached, these two women graduated from Middle Tennessee State University in December and were headed back to Saudi Arabia to use the skills they had learned from their degree.





*Figure 4: Student poses outside the John Bragg Media and Entertainment Building*

Clearly, the interview could not have been rescheduled to a time when all supplies were available since the two women were leaving the country, but sometimes you have to make due with what you have available. In this instance, sacrificing photo clarity and quality for a heartfelt story and interview is worth it. By the same token, checking the camera out for

Homecoming Weekend or Student Appreciation Week may be the best

decision to be able to take quality photographs even when the interviews may be very spontaneous. By carrying the camera around and having a notepad to take interview notes, you are setting yourself up to get a story that is valuable and that represents the heart of what makes MTSU a top choice school in Tennessee.

## **Interviewing**

Interviewing people across campus for Humans of MTSU is a process that may take several hours. Because Humans of MTSU is best when the interviewer talks to random students and faculty across campus, interviewing may be intimidating to the vice president of marketing at first. To help overcome the potential nervousness, it is best to carve out a few hours during a day to go out on campus and complete several interviews

in a row. This decreases the intimidation of talking to a new, random person and makes the process less nerve-racking. When approaching someone, it is best to explain what the project is.

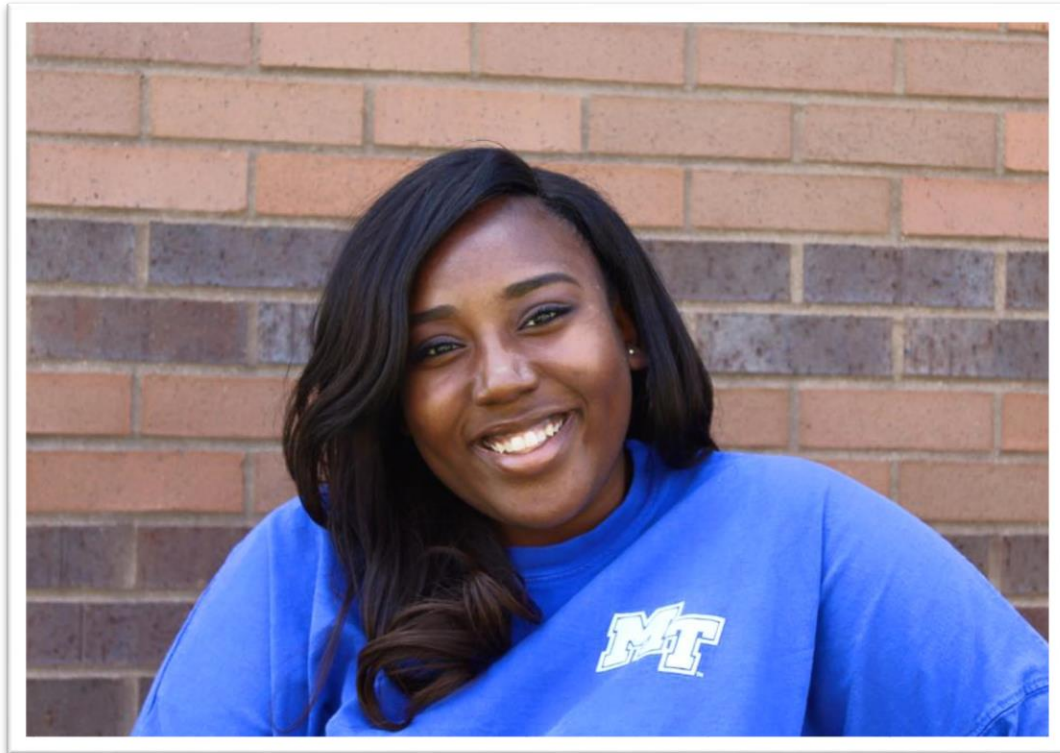
Your opening introduction can be as simple as, “Good morning. I am working on a project for the Student Government Association called Humans of MTSU. Basically, I go up students and faculty and snap a photo of them. Then I ask them to share their stories with me and why they chose to make MTSU their home. Would you be interested in participating?” See Appendix B for a sample interviewing script. Generally, people are excited to be part of the process, and if they are not headed to class, usually they will whole-heartedly agree to participate in an interview. Start by interviewing the person. Ask if they would mind if you recorded their answers and that you will not use it for any purpose other than composing their story accurately and it will be deleted later. Make sure you get their permission before recording.

Ask pinpointed questions that cause the person to reflect and share what makes the person unique. Ask them about their MTSU programs and why they chose MTSU. Ask about what their backgrounds and what are some experiences that molded them into the person they became. When closing the interview, direct them to the Humans of MTSU Facebook and Instagram page and ask them to share the page with their friends once the photo and caption are posted, which should generally be by the end of the day. In the future, printed cards may be very helpful in directing those students to the Humans of MTSU social media platforms. This will encourage more involvement with the content of the page.

The goal of Humans of MTSU is to garner positive attention for the university and attract potential students, so try to keep the stories positive. Ask questions like, “Tell me about your favorite memory at MTSU.” or “What do you like about your program?” When you ask positive questions, you will usually get a positive response. You may also ask deeper questions that cause the interviewee to reflect on college experiences, but also his or her background. This will lead to a better interview. You may also keep the interview questions light and humorous. This can be decided as you become more comfortable with the interviewee. Keep in mind that the vice president of marketing should not sugarcoat what the life of an MTSU student actually entails.

While this is a project that is in line with university marketing and under the Student Government Association, it is acceptable show some of the realistic aspects of being an MTSU student, which may include parking or some other things with which college students may struggle. An example of this may be a college student who had to go through many obstacles to be able to attend a university. While the goal is to highlight positive aspects of the school, also keep in mind that the student stories should be truthful. When typing out the interview, be sure to represent as accurately as possible what the person was trying to convey in the interview. Do not take statements out of context and make sure the wording comes across how the person intended. If there are some grammatical errors in the way a person conveyed their story orally or slang is used, it is acceptable to go back and clean it up to better convey the message in the caption. If you are unsure whether or not the wording is in line with what the subject intended, you may need to follow up with that person to make sure you worded the statement correctly so the person does not feel silly about the answers given. Interviews should last anywhere

from 15 minutes to 45 minutes. If you take the time to get to know the person, the caption will be stronger and more shareable.



*Figure 5: SGA vice president of campus relations poses outside the John Bragg Media and Entertainment Building*

## Editing

There are several software tools to use for photo editing. Many of the applications on the Android or iPhones decrease the photo clarity and quality. Do not edit the photo using the built in filters on Instagram and Facebook because this also decreases the photo quality. If viewed on a larger computer, the picture will be blurry and lower quality. High quality is important because the story will have more impact with a visually pleasing photograph that is in focus. Lightroom is a software program that can be downloaded on a PC or Mac. The software costs about \$10 per month, but the benefits and quality of the

final photo make the investment well worth the price. All students have access to Adobe Photoshop on the DMS, PCs and Macs in the MTSU Walker Library.

There are also several applications on the Android and iPhone that produce high quality editing. Aviary and Color Story are two of the applications that provide higher quality than many of the other options, so if Lightroom is not accessible, Aviary and Color Story are two good alternative options. Krita and Gimp are free software similar to Photoshop, so if the vice president of marketing cannot make it into the library, Krita and Gimp can be downloaded directly onto a personal computer. Because Instagram photos are all displayed beside one another, try to create a consistent pattern with the photos. This means that the exposure, structure, and fade of the photo should be fairly similar. Minimal editing is always better because if too much of a filter is used, viewers may miss the raw character of the photo and the person in the photo. If something looks like it may be overly edited, ask the fellow executive board members for advice about the quality before posting.

## Posting

The vice president of marketing should post two to three times per week on both the Facebook and Instagram platforms in order to maintain constant communication with Humans of MTSU's followers. When posting photos and captions to the Humans of MTSU Facebook and Instagram pages, the message should be consistent across all platforms. It is best to not reveal the identity of the interviewee, even if many students recognize the person and comment. Instead of identifying the interviewee, simply put the caption in quotes. The *AP Style Book* is helpful to double check grammatical technicalities. If something looks odd or the punctuation is questionable, look it up in the

*AP Style Book* or online. The *AP Style Book* is regularly to include current journalistic style rules, so a recent copy of the book will be the most useful and accurate. Because an Instagram user can only share a photo directly from Instagram to a personal Facebook page, not a managed Facebook page, the best way to post is to save the photo and post to Facebook and Instagram separately, copying and pasting the caption to both. The caption should be consistent on both Instagram and Facebook posts.

Watch the comments page to ensure that the responses are respectful. If in the comments, someone points out a factual or grammatical error, double check the validity of the claim and go back to edit the post on Instagram and Facebook. Do not censor the comments that may be negative, unless the comment is derogatory toward the subject photographed. Feel free to interact with those sharing the post by commenting or liking the post on the page. You can view the overall post reach on Facebook to see how effective each post is and how many views each post has. By using post reach data, you can decide which photos are the most shareable and what you can do to emulate that pattern with future posts.

## Conclusion

As demonstrated in the literature review and the manual for future SGA vice presidents of marketing, university marketing sometimes struggles with making personal connections with potential students. Humans of MTSU highlights stories of individual members of the True Blue Community, causing potential students to connect with their narratives and want to do further research on Middle Tennessee State University. The manual included will ensure that Humans of MTSU will continue through the years seamlessly and maintain its vital role in the recruitment process. Because the Student Government Association has a budget to work with each semester, the vice president of marketing should work with the president to add a budget line for Humans of MTSU for a Lightroom subscription in the future.

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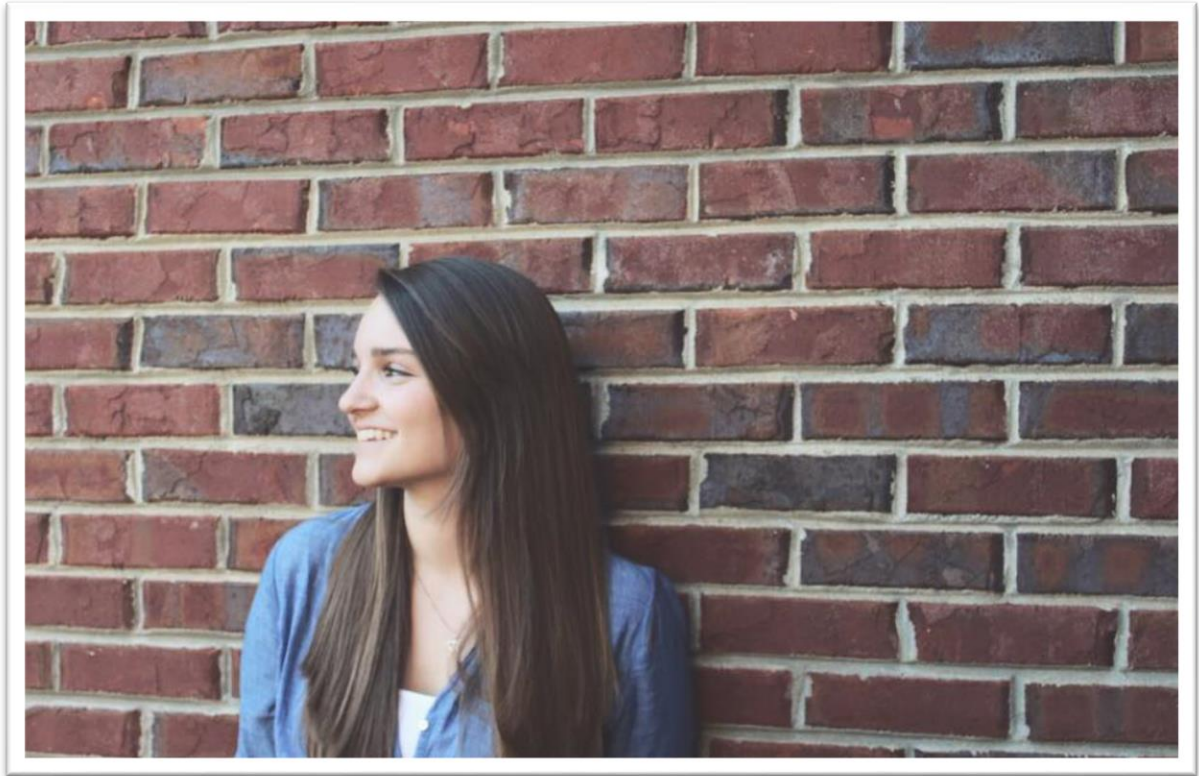
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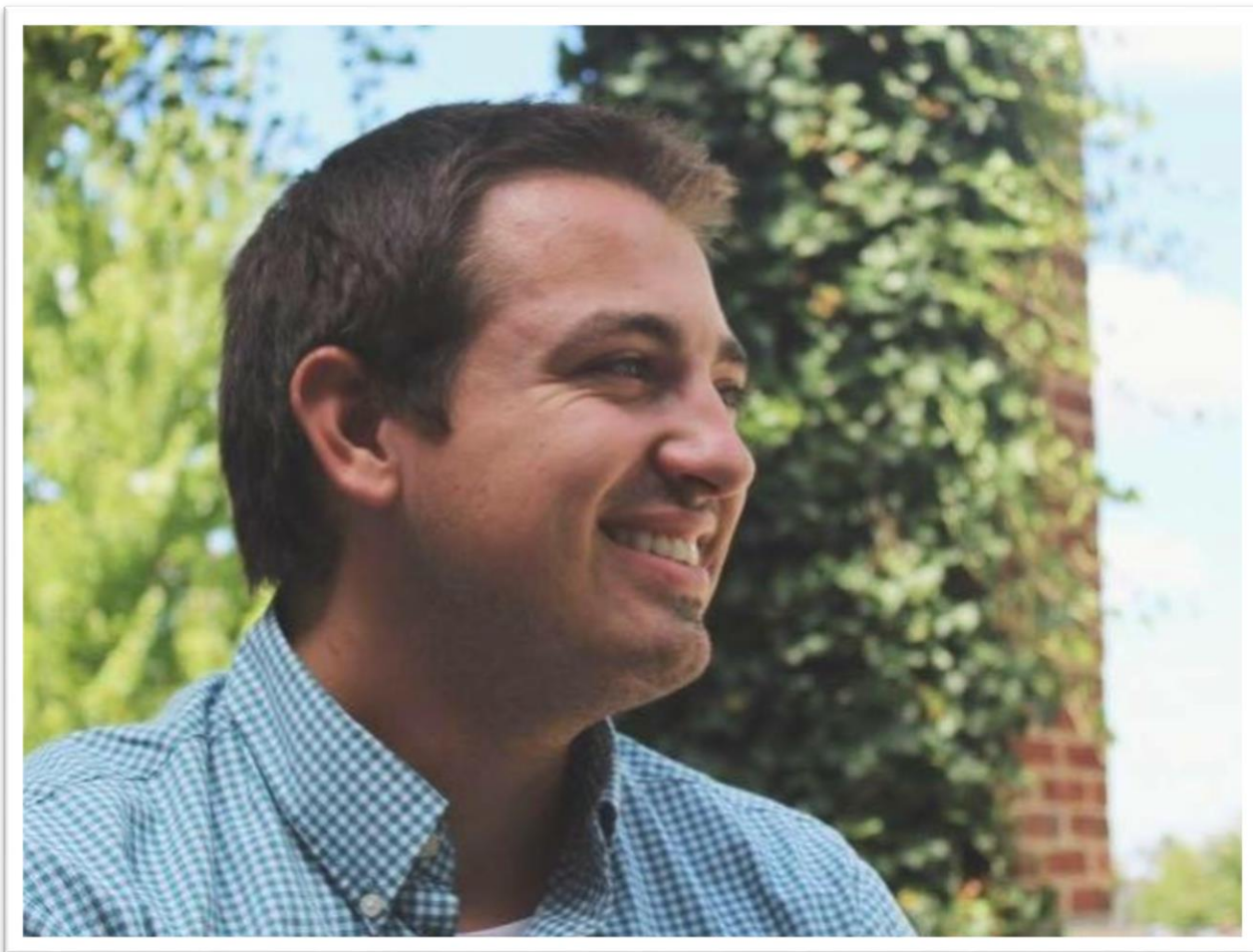
## Appendix A



“When I first began looking into which university I wanted to attend, I didn't know MTSU existed. I had lived in the small bubble that is UTK my entire life and didn't know much outside its realm. A couple of friends at the time were mentioning MTSU and as I researched it more, I realized how much I wanted to get away from my tiny little hometown and finally start living my life. Little did I know that during these years—world traveling, learning who God has made me to be, finding my soul mate, having so many opportunities to further my career during my undergrad, and so much more—deciding to be true blue was the best decision I've ever made.”



“Being the only male on my entire housing staff has its challenges, but I can say with certainty that it has prepared me to be a better father one day.”



“I always wanted to make a difference with my life. I grew up in a Christian home and at a young age felt God was calling me into third-world missions. It was also at this time I began flight training. Here at MTSU, I plan on obtaining my maintenance license and finishing my flight ratings. Once I graduate, I plan on going overseas to work in Papua New Guinea.”





“Five years in the Army and two in Afghanistan gave me a lot of time to see college from the outside in and reminded me how much I missed learning. Now that I'm finally here, I don't take a single day of it for granted.”



“I went into college thinking that I was undeclared. About halfway through my freshman year, I got an email saying that I was a plant and soil science major, which was news to me! Twenty major changes later, and I'm still undeclared. I guess choices are part of the beauty of college...[.]”

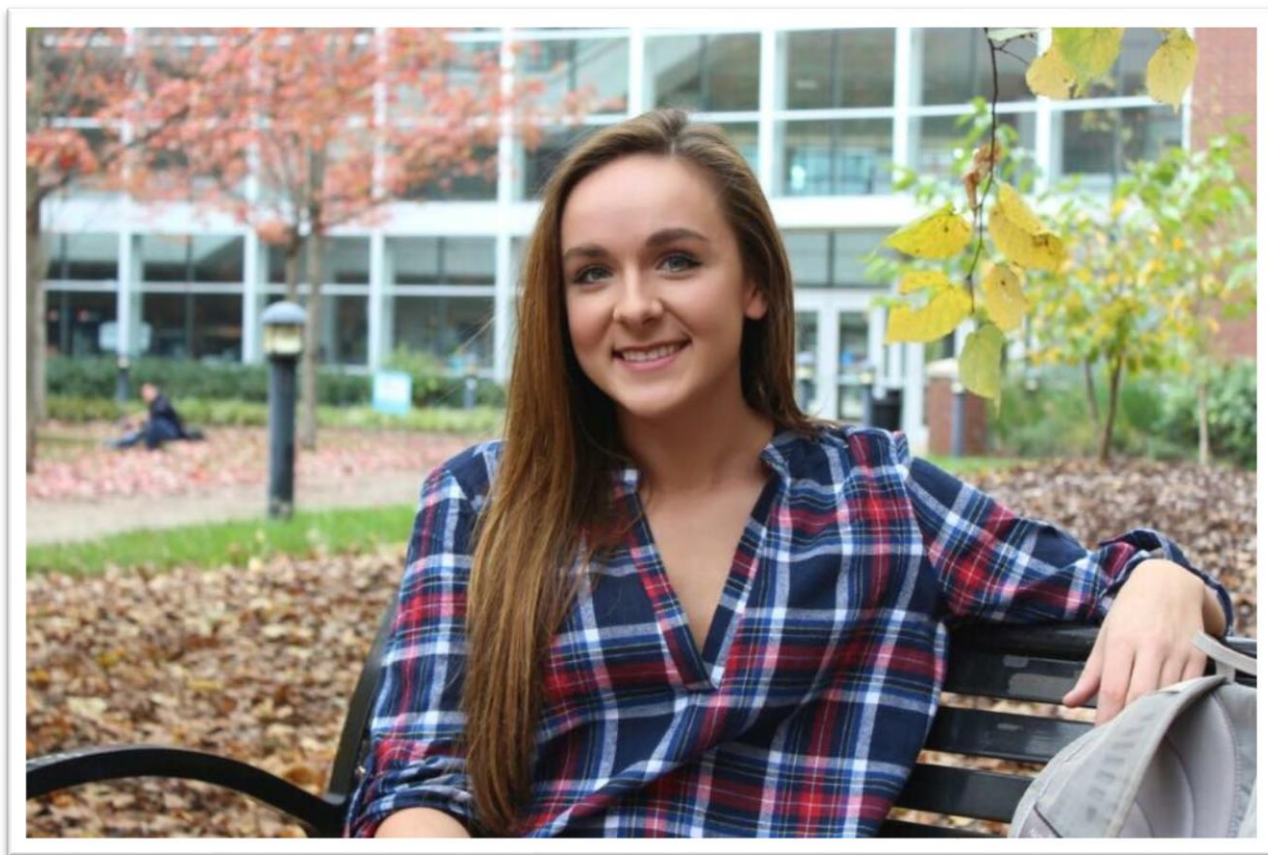


“Something I've been trying to live by is learning to be happy with myself, by myself. I've relied on too many others for reassurance or praise in the past; the truth is, the only thing that matters in the end is that I'm proud of myself. And you know what? I am. I decided I wanted to do something with my life, and I have accomplished just that. My only hope is that the people I care most about learn to live this happily and freely.”





“Growing up in a single-parent home, we experienced many hardships as well as homelessness. Out of all the bad hands I was dealt in life, it never took away my sparkle and drive to be great. Over the years, I’ve learned to appreciate the struggles that I’ve faced, and it has shaped the person that I am now and forever. I know I’ll be a great social worker because of my journey. No matter what situation you come from, know that you, too, can rise above if you believe.”



“I started an organization on campus to bring Children's Miracle Network Dance Marathon to MTSU. We'll be raising funds for Vanderbilt Children's Hospital throughout the year. I am passionate about this program because I used the resources of Children's Miracle Network when I was a child, and they helped me get better. That's why it's really important for me to give back. This is the national organization for the Miss America Pageant, of which I am a part, and my hope is to grow my platform even more by bringing CMN Dance Marathon to campuses across the nation.”



“Because I graduated from MTSU, I find it easy to relate to my own students. I’ve always lived in Murfreesboro and felt that this school was my home away from home. My father was a very influential dean at MTSU after starting as an English professor in 1970. My cousin teaches Political Science, and my brother is a fire inspector here. I’m familiar with the culture and the climate of the university. I have a good sense of where we want to be as a university and where I want my students to be. Although MTSU has doubled in size in the last 25 years, the sense of community on campus has continued. This is why I am a proud alum and professor of Middle Tennessee State University.”





“I came from Bolivia to the United States to follow in the steps of my father. I wanted to get away from my hometown and click the reset button in a place that had a great RIM program. I'm glad I did because I used to be shy, and coming here brought me out of my comfort zone. When I first toured MTSU, the warm culture impressed me. Like right now. Sometimes at MTSU, people will come up to you with a camera and ask you to tell your story, which is funny. Surrounding myself with positive people who are eager to learn brings me a lot of joy.”



“I never finished school, and one day I felt a calling to go back so I could become a nurse. Other students in my nursing classes have told me I should be a teacher because I try to help tutor everyone so they can learn in their own unique style. I kind of like that. I'm turning 40 this year and am only three classes shy of finishing my degree.”



“When I walk around campus, I usually have a big smile on my face. Today as I was walking into the SUB, I was smiling because I thought, 'Wow today is great. I got eight hours of sleep last night and life is good.' A guy was walking out at the same time and gave me a pity wave because he thought I was smiling at him. So that was a little embarrassing.”





“When I first started looking for a job in high school, I applied everywhere, and the first place to call me back was Wal-Mart. I took the job even though it was at the bottom of my list. One day while I was on break, there was this really cute guy at the water fountain. We started talking about the departments we worked in and really hit it off. Four years later, and I'm engaged to that same cute guy from the water fountain at Wal-Mart. It's crazy to me how the little steps you take in life can get you to the craziest places.”



“I transferred this semester from a smaller school in Alabama. I was intimidated coming in because I thought it would be scary to attend one of the biggest schools in Tennessee. My classmates here have been so kind and shown me the ropes. They all have different perspectives, and there's so much diversity. And I think that's really beautiful.”





“As a first-generation college student who came from low-income public housing, I came to MTSU to further my education in accounting in hopes of a better lifestyle. I’ve networked so much here that I chose to create an organization to teach incoming freshmen how to brand themselves to be successful in the professional world. Throughout my lifetime, I’ve realized that all things are possible and the opportunities are out there. You just have to find them. Know God and know yourself, and the rest will come.”



“Well, I suppose my story starts with a little girl named Cori. This little girl envisioned her future self to be a very specific type of woman. A type, of which, I have not been able to forget. In fact, every step I take I take because I firmly hope that it will lead me closer to this woman and I will continue to challenge myself and pursue my goals until I finally see her gazing back at me in the mirror one day. When I left home and went to Middle Tennessee State University to study that was when I first began to catch long-lasting glimpses of this woman in the mirror. The more organizations I joined and participated in, the harder I worked in my classes, the higher the goals I set the more I would see of this mysterious woman. Now as I've pursued these goals that once seemed unattainable and achieved what I have sought after through perseverance, hard work, and sometimes sweat or even tears, I have been able to see myself in this woman's eyes. After graduating from college and living abroad I can finally see her in the mirror with a tenacious smile on her face and I know that I am that much closer to becoming her—to becoming that woman that I have always hoped and dreamed I would one day become. It will continue to be a lifelong pursuit and I would not wish for it to be any other way.”



“When I first got to MTSU, I thought I just wanted to meet some new people and get through my four years here. Then I met people who made me fall in love with MTSU as a campus and student body. If it weren't for those in my fraternity, the organizations I'm involved in, and just the people I see every day, I don't know what path I'd be down today.”





“When I first got to MTSU, I was super shy and had big issues with making friends. I only hung out with two people and was scared of any social interaction, but becoming involved on campus really changed that for me. Ladies For A Change (LFAC) has been one of the organizations to really help me come out of my shell. I gained friendships and found a place where I could really be myself. It felt great to be in an organization of like-minded young women who made me feel like I was really a part of the family. They really let me know no matter how silly, shy or quiet I am, I will still be loved.”



“It hit me the other day that I am less than 45 days away from graduating. As I look back on my collegiate experience and my time within SGA, I am astounded at how much I have grown as a person and a professional. I understand more than ever who I am and what I am here for. I am planning a career in management consulting after I graduate, and I have my position as Executive Vice President to thank for that. It has taught me to run to problems and make every attempt to make things better. I am confident that my time at MTSU and in SGA has made me stronger, more capable and better at analytical decision making. I'm proud of what we have accomplished this year and can't wait to see what is to come for this organization.”





“By serving as SGA Secretary, I have been able to meet so many amazing people while also serving the student body. I chose to attend another university starting out my freshman year, but when I came back to MTSU the following year, I knew this school was where I belonged. Serving in this capacity has made me even more certain of my decision to attend MTSU as a transfer student. Transfer students: There is great opportunity for you on this campus. You just have to step out of your comfort zone because that's where tremendous growth happens.”

## Appendix B

The following sample script may be used as a guide to approach students on campus about including them on the Humans of MTSU social media platforms. Once the vice president of marketing is comfortable enough, he or she may use questions not included on this guide.

### Opening Statement

“Good morning/ afternoon. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I run the Humans of MTSU social media for the Student Government Association. We like to ask about student stories to be more in tune with campus culture so we can know how to best represent our student body. Would you allow me to take your photo and ask you a few questions?”

### Before Recording

“Would you mind if I record our conversation for my own use to ensure I accurately represent your story? This will only be used to get an accurate quote and will be deleted afterward.”

### Sample Questions

1. What is your major and how has it helped you professionally grow during your time at MTSU?
2. How long did you know MTSU would be your college choice?
3. What organizations are you involved in and what do you like about them?
4. What did you look for in your college search?

5. Is there anything from your background that made attending college a struggle for you?
6. If you could give one piece of advice to a large crowd, what would you say?
7. Once you graduate, what do you plan to do?
8. How do you want to make a difference?
9. What are you passionate about?
10. If you could go back in time to your freshman year, what advice would you give to yourself?
11. What are you thankful for?
12. In what ways does your family support you?
13. What makes you unique?
14. Tell me about your story.
15. Who is your role model?
16. Are you a student athlete?
17. What do you like about MTSU?
18. What are three challenges you face as a college student?
19. What is the most important issue you want SGA to tackle this year?
20. Have you studied abroad?

### **After Photo and Interview**

“Thank you so much for agreeing to share your story with me. I will post your story by the end of the day, and you can find it on Facebook and Instagram on the Humans of



MTSU pages. Feel free to share with your friends and family. Your story is what makes the MTSU Community unique, so thank you again for your participation.”