

ARKANSAS HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD
Regular Quarterly Meeting
January 24, 2025

Minutes of Meeting

The January 24, 2025, regular meeting of the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board (AHECB) was held at Arkansas Tech University in Russellville. Chair Graycen Bigger called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m., with a quorum present.

Coordinating Board present:

Graycen Bigger, Chair
Dr. Jerry Cash, Vice Chair
Dr. Jim Carr
Dr. Katherine Dudley
Heather Maxey (via Zoom)
Lucas Pointer
Carolyn Rhinehart

Coordinating Board absent:

Dr. Kyle Miller, Secretary
Chad Hooten

Presidents, chancellors, institutional representatives, members of the press, ADHE staff and guests were also present.

Chair Bigger began by calling on President Russell Jones for a welcome. Dr. Jones welcomed Coordinating Board members, ADHE staff, and presidents and chancellors to the ATU Russellville campus. ATU is a public institution offering credentials at the certificate, associate, baccalaureate, master, educational specialist, and doctoral levels. It was founded in 1909 as the Second District Agricultural School and its Russellville campus conducted its first day of classes on Oct. 26, 1910. Dr. Jones noted that the name of the institution was changed to Arkansas Polytechnic College in 1925 and Arkansas Tech University in 1976. The former Arkansas Valley Technical Institute, now known as ATU-Ozark Campus, joined ATU in 2003.

Next, Chair Bigger introduced Arkansas' Secretary of Education Jacob Oliva, ADE's Chief of Staff Courtney Salas-Ford and Sarah Kemeny with the Governor's Office.

Agenda Item No. 1
Annual Higher Education Financial Condition Report

Nick Fuller presented the Annual Higher Education Financial Condition Report. The purpose of this report is to describe the financial condition as well as the difficulties and challenges experienced by Arkansas's Public Institutions of Higher Education. It is recommended that ADHE continue to work with institutions to monitor and refine the Productivity Funding Model policies to ensure adequate funding is available to meet student needs, innovation is encouraged, and that the policies continue to respond to attainment goals and priorities of the state. AHECB, ADHE and institutions of higher education work with the legislature toward alignment of institutional funding policies,

state financial aid policies, and tuition policies in a way that prioritizes higher education affordability.

There were no questions.

Agenda Item No. 2
Maintenance Report

The AHECB policy for maintenance of new facilities passed October 29, 2010, states that a report on the amount transferred to plant funds would be presented annually at the October Board meeting. This policy was proposed to ensure that in the future, all newly constructed or purchased facilities will have a source of funding for maintenance of the new facility. Institutions seeking approval of a loan or a bond issue for the construction or purchase of a new facility must provide for the maintenance of that facility by transferring annually to plant funds an amount as recommended by the Association of Physical Plant Administrators of Universities and Colleges (APPA). This is currently \$2.50 per gross square foot for an educational and general facility or \$1.25 per gross square foot for an auxiliary facility. A lower rate per gross square foot for a specific building/facility can be approved with appropriate justification.

There were no questions.

Agenda Item No. 3
Economic Feasibility for North Arkansas College

North Arkansas College (NAC) requests approval of the economic feasibility to issue bonds in the amount of approximately \$2.25 million with a term of twenty (20) years and an estimated annual interest rate of 5.0 percent. Proceeds from the issue will be used for educational and general (E&G) purposes. The North Arkansas College Board of Trustees will consider this financing at its January 16, 2025, meeting.

The E&G issue will be approximately \$2.25 million with an estimated maximum annual debt service of \$171,025 and a term of twenty (20) years. Proceeds from the bond issue will be used to construct a new Center for Robotics and Manufacturing Innovation instructional facility.

RESOLVED, That the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board considers economically feasible the plans for North Arkansas College to issue bonds in an amount of approximately \$2.25 million with a term of twenty (20) years at an estimated annual interest rate of 5.0 percent to construct a new Center for Robotics and Manufacturing Innovation instructional facility.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education is authorized to notify the President and the Chair of the Board of Trustees of North Arkansas College of the Coordinating Board's resolution.

Richard Stipe, Vice President for Finance and Administration, provided additional information.

Chair Graycen Bigger asked if NAC has secured the bonds at an interest rate of 5.0 percent. Nick Fuller said 5.0 percent is an estimated interest rate.

Carolyn Rhinehart moved to recommend the approval of Agenda Item No. 3 to the full Board for consideration. Dr. Jim Carr seconded, and the Committee unanimously approved.

Agenda Item No. 4
Associate of Applied Science in Medical Laboratory Technician
Northwest Arkansas Community College

The proposed Associate of Applied Science in Medical Laboratory Technician (MLT) program will prepare students for a dynamic career in clinical laboratories, where they play a crucial role in diagnosing and monitoring patient health. This program combines theoretical knowledge with hands-on training in laboratory techniques, including blood analysis, microbiology, hematology, and chemistry, blood banking, urine and body fluid analysis and immunology. Students learn to operate sophisticated laboratory equipment, perform diagnostic tests, and ensure the accuracy of results. Graduates are equipped with the skills needed to work in hospitals, clinics, and diagnostic labs, contributing to patient care through precise and reliable laboratory work.

The proposed 70-71 credit hour program will be taught by one full-time faculty member, who will also serve as Program Director. The program will also be supported by adjunct faculty. Existing resources and technologies will be utilized by the proposed program. Program-related equipment will be sought as in-kind donations from local industry as well as from industry vendors.

RESOLVED, That the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board approves the offering of the Associate of Applied Science in Medical Laboratory Technician (CIP 51.1004), at Northwest Arkansas Community College, effective Summer 2025.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Coordinating Board instructs the Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education to inform the President and Chair of the Board of Trustees of Northwest Arkansas Community College of the approval.

Dr. Diane Johnson, Senior Vice President for Learning, Dean Mark Wallenmeyer, and Chris Gilbreth with Children's Hospital Northwest, presented additional background information.

Chair Bigger asked Dr. Johnson to walk through the pathway for students in this program.

Dean Wallenmeyer said that the students in this program start out as Phlebotomists. Once they are certified as laboratory technicians, they can go into the field making an average of \$55 thousand per year. Next, they can move into the Medical Laboratory Scientist degree program.

Dr. Jim Carr noted that there are five additional institutions offering similar programs in the state. Dean Wallenmeyer said that is correct.

Chair Bigger said that if the students are paying a premium to go through this program, we need to make sure there are jobs waiting for them when they are finished.

Carolyn Rhinehart moved to recommend the approval of Agenda Item No. 4 to the full Board for consideration. Dr. Katherine Dudley seconded, and the Committee unanimously approved.

Agenda Item No. 5
Doctor of Philosophy in Forest Resources
University of Arkansas at Monticello

The proposed Doctor of Philosophy in Forest Resources will increase the state's forestry and natural resources scientific workforce, and importantly, do so through applied, in-depth education and research on Arkansas forestry and natural resource issues. Given that Arkansas has never offered a Ph.D. in forest resources, it has been entirely reliant on doctoral programs of other states. This doctoral program will be offered by UAM's College of Forestry, Agriculture, and Natural Resources (CFANR). The CFANR also houses the Arkansas Forest Resources Center of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture which provides funding for research that bolsters the ability of the CFANR to deliver the program.

The proposed Ph.D. in Forest Resources will require 72 post-baccalaureate credit hours, of which a minimum of 48 hours will be coursework and up to 24 hours of credit for research/dissertation preparation and defense. Additionally, the degree requirements include the completion of an entrance seminar, comprehensive exams, a dissertation, one semester of instruction of a lower-level undergraduate course or lab, and a dissertation defense. Over the first five years, UAM expects to enroll at least fourteen students into the proposed doctoral program.

RESOLVED, That the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board approves the role and scope change for University of Arkansas Monticello (UAM) to offer the Doctor of Philosophy in Forest Resources (CIP 03.0506), effective Summer 2025. Program continuation contingent on Higher Learning Commission accreditation/recognition of doctoral degrees at UAM.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Coordinating Board instructs the Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education to inform the Chancellor of the University of Arkansas Monticello and the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the University of Arkansas System of the conditions

of the role and scope approval for the offering of doctoral degree programs.

Chancellor Peggy Doss, Dr. Michael Blazier, Dean of the College of Forestry, and Dr. Mathew Pelkki, Professor/Director for the Arkansas Center for Forest Business, presented additional background information.

Dr. Jim Carr asked if any of the forestry businesses in the area are helping UAM financially with this program. Dr. Blazier said, yes. Some are research partners and others provide research funding.

Chair Bigger asked if the students coming out of the program are more geared toward research and teaching or towards positions in the private sector. Dr. Blazier said students can navigate the curriculum to focus on the career pathway that they want.

Dr. Katherine Dudley moved to recommend Agenda Item No. 5 to the full Board for consideration. Carolyn Rhinehart seconded, and the committee approved.

Agenda Items No. 6 & 7
Arkansas Public Institutions
Letters of Notification and Letters of Intent

The Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education approved institutional requests for new programs not requiring Board action unless further review is requested by the Board. During this period, the Institutional Certification Advisory Committee received notice of requests from Arkansas public institutions to offer degree programs. The program notice lists appear in the Arkansas Public Institutions Letters of Notification on pages 6-1 through 6-35 and in the Arkansas public institutions Letters of Intent on pages 7-1 of the agenda book.

There were no questions.

Agenda Item No. 8
Out-of-State and Arkansas Private Institutions

RESOLVED, That pursuant to A.C.A. §6-61-301, the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board grants initial certification to the institutions listed on pages 1 - 2 to offer the specified degree programs to Arkansas residents for a period of three years through December 31, 2028.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education is authorized to notify the administration of said institutions that the certification of the degree programs requires the institution to notify the Arkansas Division of Higher Education whenever any of the following occurs: (1) major reorganization of the controlling body; (2) changes in the charter or incorporation documents of the institution; or (3) changes in the method of operation of the institution's programs in Arkansas.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Coordinating Board instructs the Commissioner to notify the administration of said institutions that any advertisement or published materials using the name of the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board or the Arkansas Division of Higher Education must contain the following statement:

Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board certification does not constitute an endorsement of any institution or program. Such certification merely indicates that certain criteria have been met as required under the rules and regulations implementing institutional and program certification as defined in A.C.A. §6-61-301.

Initial Program Certifications – Distance Technology

Evangel University, Springfield, Missouri

New Institution – Initial Program Certifications – Distance Technology

Arizona Christian University, Glendale, Arizona

There were no questions.

Dr. Jerry Cash moved to recommend Agenda Item No. 8 to the full Board for consideration. Carolyn Rhinehart seconded, and the Committee unanimously approved.

Agenda Items No. 9 & 10
Out-of-State and Arkansas Private Institutions
Letters of Notification and Letters of Intent

The Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education approved institutional requests for new programs not requiring Board action unless further review is requested by the Board. During this period, the Institutional Certification Advisory Committee received notice of requests from out-of-state and Arkansas private institutions to offer degree programs to Arkansas residents. The program notice lists appear in the Letters of Notification on pages 9-1 through 9-5 and in the Letters of Intent on page 10-1 of the agenda book.

Dr. Jerry Cash asked if there is an increase in out-of-state institutions offering degree programs to Arkansas residents. Mrs. Colburn said, no.

Agenda Item No. 11
Approval of Minutes

Dr. Jerry Cash moved to approve Agenda Item No. 11. Dr. Jim Carr seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Agenda Item No. 12
Report of Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee (Dr. Jim Carr, Lucas Pointer, and Dr. Katherine Dudley) recommended the following slate of Board officers for 2025-2026.

Chair – Dr. Jim Carr
Vice Chair – Lucas Pointer
Secretary/Treasurer – Dr. Katherine Dudley
Finance Committee Chair – Lucas Pointer
Academic Committee Chair – Carolyn Rhinehart

Carolyn Rhinehart moved to accept the 2025-2026 nominations. Dr. Jim Carr seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Agenda Item No. 13
State Board of Higher Education Foundation
Election of Supervisory Committee

The State Board of Higher Education Foundation was established on May 2, 1992. Since the Foundation has officially been dissolved, there is no longer a need for officers and this agenda item will not be presented.

Agenda Item No. 14
Reimbursement of Expenses for
Members of the AHECB and ICAC

Although members of the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board and its Institutional Certification Advisory Committee (ICAC) by law serve without compensation, they may receive expense reimbursement for performing official board duties after following certain procedures set out by Act 1211 of 1995 (A.C.A. §25-16-901 et seq.).

RESOLVED, That the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board, by a majority vote of its total membership, authorizes expense reimbursement for each board member and member of the ICAC for performing official board duties.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the expense reimbursement shall not exceed the rate established for state employees by state travel regulations.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Coordinating Board instructs the Director of the Division of Higher Education to send a copy of this resolution to the Department of Finance and Administration to notify that agency of compliance with Act 1211 of 1995.

Carolyn Rhinehart moved to approve Agenda Item No. 14. Dr. Jim Carr seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Agenda Item No. 15
Commissioner's Report

Institutional Changes

The Board of Trustees of the University of Arkansas approved the selection of retired United States Air Force Lieutenant General Jay B. Silveria as the next president of the University of Arkansas System. Silveria, formerly served as the associate vice president and executive director of Texas A&M University and the Bush School of Government & Public Service in Washington, D.C. and former superintendent at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Co., is expected to start Jan. 15, 2025.

East Arkansas Community College Merger

ADHE received notice that, consistent with Higher Learning Commission approvals and the approvals of the Boards of Trustees, that the institution formerly known as East Arkansas Community College, now known as the University of Arkansas-East Arkansas Community College has become part of the University of Arkansas System.

90 Hour Bachelor's Degree Consideration

ADHE formed a Taskforce comprised of 12 chief academic officers to consider the impact of reduced credit hour bachelor's degrees. The Taskforce is in the process of writing a white paper for the commissioner's consideration.

We recognize the need to be innovative and continue to find new and more effective ways to serve students and meet workforce needs – however, if this type of credential is not done correctly, students could end up with credentials of no value and higher education cannot afford that misstep.

ROI

ADHE has wrapped up the early stages of determining the return on investment of higher education and will be sharing this information within the next couple of weeks.

Agenda Item No. 16
Fall Annual Enrollment Report

Nick Fuller presented summary information about annual student enrollment. He noted the total unduplicated headcount for the fall 2024 term in all sectors of Arkansas higher education, including public universities, public colleges, private/independent colleges and universities, and nursing schools were 155,446 students, representing an increase of 3.1% from the fall 2023 term. Fall headcount is slowly recovering from the considerable drop in headcount caused by the Covid-19 pandemic but still has not reached the pre-pandemic headcount of 156,066 reported in fall 2019. Of the 155,446

students enrolled in fall 2024, 1,495 students enrolled at more than one Arkansas college or university, which represents 1% of the total fall 2024 headcount.

There were no questions.

Agenda Item No. 17
Report on Fall College-Going Rate

Nick Fuller reported on the proportion of students enrolling in postsecondary education in the fall semester after finishing high school. Of the 32,654 public high school students graduating from an Arkansas public high school in 2024, 13,692 enrolled at an Arkansas public or private/independent institution in fall 2024 immediately following their high school graduation. This represents a College-Going Rate of 41.9%, which is a 0.2% decrease from the previous year of 42.1%.

There were no questions.

Agenda Item No. 18
Annual Report on Arkansas Enrollments in
Out-of-State and Private Institutions

Alana Colburn presented an update on the number of Arkansas residents pursuing academic degrees offered by out-of-state or private institutions certified to operate in Arkansas under Arkansas Code Annotated §6-61-301.

Boles reported that in 2023-24, 9 Arkansas campuses, 33 institutions with programs delivered only through distance technology, 5 institutions offering programs both on Arkansas campuses and through distance technology and 3 institutions offering programs only on an Arkansas campus, were certified under ICAC rules.

Dr. Jim Carr questioned the large increase in student enrollment from 2023 to 2024. Mrs. Colburn said to get a more accurate look at the student enrollment numbers, you would need to go to the SARA website.

Agenda Item No. 19
Report on Academic Program Viability

Mason Campbell presented a summary report on academic programs reviewed by the institutions for program viability purposes. ADHE staff annually identify existing certificate and degree programs that do not meet AHECB program viability standards. New certificates and associate degrees will be identified for program viability standards after three years, and bachelor's degrees and above will be identified after five years.

Dr. Ken Warden pointed out how the number of program deletions has decreased. He thanked ADHE academic staff for their diligence in cleaning up these programs.

Dr. Jim Carr said it is a great demonstration of good stewardship with state funds.

Agenda Item No. 20
Program Review Policy Updates

Arkansas law requires that the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board (AHECB) review existing academic programs. The existing policy establishes a process for the statewide review of academic programs and identifies certificate and degree programs not meeting minimum standards of quality and establishes schedules for either resolving these concerns or removing the programs for the AHECB approved program inventory.

The existing academic program review policies were adopted in 1988 and revised in 1995, 1998 and last updated in October 2008. ADHE staff has met with chief academic officers and has received extensive input on the proposed changes in the program review process.

RESOLVED, That the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board approves the revised Policy for the Review of Existing Academic Programs outlined in this agenda item, effective immediately.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Coordinating Board instructs the Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education to notify and to provide a copy of the amended policy to presidents and chancellors, academic affairs officers, students affairs officers, and institutional research officers at Arkansas state-supported colleges and universities.

There were no questions.

Dr. Jim Carr moved to approve Agenda Item No. 20. Carolyn Rhinehart seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Agenda Item No. 21
Rules Governing the Arkansas Academic Challenge
Scholarship Program

In compliance with Acts 413, 438, 539 of 2023, the rules for the Arkansas Academic Challenge Scholarship are presented to the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board (AHECB) for final approval. The following resolution is offered for the Board's consideration:

RESOLVED, That the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board reviews the rules presented in this agenda item for the Arkansas Academic Challenge Scholarship to be administered by the Arkansas Division of Higher Education.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education or his designee is authorized to make technical changes and corrections, when necessary, in the program rules for the Arkansas Academic Challenge Scholarship.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Arkansas Academic Challenge Scholarship rules be approved for final approval.

There were no questions.

Dr. Jim Carr moved to approve Agenda Item No. 21. Lucas Pointer seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Agenda Item No. 22
Rules Governing the Uniform Course Credit
for Institutions of Higher Education

In compliance with Act 237 of 2023, the rules for the Uniform Course Credit for Institutions of Higher Education are presented to the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board (AHECB) for final approval. The following resolution is offered for the Board's consideration:

RESOLVED, That the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board reviews the rules presented in this agenda item for the Uniform Course Credit for Institutions of Higher Education to be administered by the Arkansas Division of Higher Education.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education or his designee is authorized to make technical changes and corrections, when necessary, in the program rules for the Uniform Course Credit for Institutions of Higher Education.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Uniform Course Credit for Institutions of Higher Education rules be approved for final approval.

There were no questions.

Lucas Pointer moved to approve Agenda Item No. 22. Dr. Jim Carr seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Report of the Committees

Lucas Pointer presented the report of the Finance Committee and moved approval of Agenda Item 3. Carolyn Rhinehart seconded, and the board unanimously approved.

Dr. Jim Carr presented the report of the Finance Committee and moved approval of Agenda Items 4-5 & 8. Dr. Jerry Cash seconded, and the board unanimously approved.

Remarks by Presidents/Chancellors and Guest

The next quarterly meeting will be held on April 25, 2025, at Southern Arkansas University, at 9:00 a.m.

With no further comments, the meeting was adjourned at 11:11 a.m.

SUBMITTED BY:

Nichole Abernathy

APPROVED:

Dr. Katherine Dudley, Secretary