Academic Program Proposals for July 24, 2026

The following is a list of academic program proposals being reviewed for possible consideration for approval at the July 24, 2026, Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board meeting. The summary contents are subject to change. The finalized version of the summaries will be available in the board book.

The institution's name, program title, and program summary are listed below. Contact ADHE for a copy of the proposals.

If you have concerns, objections, questions, or comments concerning a specific proposal, please send them to **Mason Campbell, Assistant Commissioner of Academic Affairs** (mason.campbell@adhe.edu) no later than July 1, 2026.

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Associate of Applied Science in Surgical Technology

The administration and Board of Trustees of Northwest Arkansas Community College (NWACC) request approval to offer the Associate of Applied Science in Surgical Technology, effective Fall 2027.

NWACC is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, and the proposed program is within the role and scope established for the institution. The Northwest Arkansas Community College Board of Trustees approved the program on August 4, 2025.

Program Description

The proposed Associate of Applied Science in Surgical Technology degree will prepare students to function as key members of a surgical team in hospitals and outpatient surgical centers. The 63-credit-hour curriculum requires the completion of 30 credit hours general education prerequisites prior to program admission. Once admitted, the remaining 33 credit hours include specialized surgical technology coursework delivered through classroom instruction, hands-on laboratory training, and supervised clinical experiences.

Students will gain competencies in aseptic technique, surgical instrumentation, perioperative patient care, and operating room procedures. Upon completion, graduates will be eligible to sit for a nationally recognized certification exam, enhancing employability within Arkansas and beyond. The program will be housed within NWACC's School of Health Professions and supported by dedicated laboratory space in the Center for Health Professions, including a simulated surgical suite which will be renovated pending approval.

The college plans to staff the program with a program director and clinical coordinator (two full-time faculty), along with adjunct instructors as needed. Instructional delivery will be supported through existing institutional infrastructure, including learning

management systems and simulation technologies. The program will also benefit from donated equipment from a recently closed surgical technology program in the region, allowing NWACC to establish instructional capacity efficiently while maintaining program quality.

Program Need

The proposed program is designed to address a sustained workforce demand for surgical technologists in Northwest Arkansas. Current data indicate approximately 532 surgical technologist positions in the region, exceeding the national average for an area of comparable size and confirming the region as a hub for employment in this field. Surgical technology provides a viable, middle-wage career pathway, with median annual earnings of approximately $60,393 in the region.

Employment is projected to grow to 552 positions by 2031, with additional demand driven by workforce attrition, including a significant number of employees approaching retirement age. Job posting activity further demonstrates ongoing demand, with consistent monthly hiring needs and participation from major regional healthcare employers, indicating continued recruitment challenges.

Despite strong demand, access to training remains limited in Northwest Arkansas. The combination of strong employment demand, projected growth, and limited educational access indicates a clear supply-demand gap. The proposed program at NWACC is expected to help address this gap by expanding access to training and producing graduates prepared to meet regional workforce needs.

Program Expenditures and Funding

The proposed Associate of Applied Science in Surgical Technology program will require both initial capital investment and ongoing operational expenditures. Personnel costs involve the hiring of two full-time faculty members, including a program director and clinical coordinator, as required for accreditation. Total personnel expenditures, including salaries and benefits, are estimated at approximately $225,000 annually, with three-year costs exceeding $675,000. Additional instructional support will be provided by adjunct faculty.

Facility costs include the renovation of existing space within the Center for Health Professions to create a surgical technology laboratory and simulated operating room environment. Renovation costs are estimated at approximately $129,543 and include installation of surgical lighting, sinks, cabinetry, and related infrastructure.

Ongoing program expenses include laboratory supplies, equipment maintenance and replacement, accreditation fees, professional development, and administrative costs. Annual ancillary costs are estimated at approximately $41,100 and include consumable surgical supplies, sterilization and equipment maintenance, biohazard disposal, and recruitment expenses. Accreditation-related costs associated with ARC/STSA and CAAHEP standards will also be incurred.

Funding for the program will be derived primarily from student tuition and fees, including differential tuition for technical coursework, laboratory fees, health professions technology fees, and required insurance fees. Revenue projections are based on an initial cohort of 20 students annually. The college has committed to supporting the program through its institutional budgeting process beginning in fiscal year 2027-2028, with no reliance on state general revenue increases.

Additional support will be provided through in-kind contributions, including donated surgical technology equipment from Northwest Technical Institute, as well as anticipated donations and partnerships with local healthcare providers and industry. These combined funding sources will support program implementation and long-term sustainability.

Program Duplication

Seven public institutions offer a similar Associate of Applied Science in Surgical Technology.

- Arkansas State University Newport
- North Arkansas College
    - Also offered off campus at Washington Regional Medical Center in Fayetteville, AR
- Ozarka College
- South Arkansas College
- Southeast Arkansas College
- University of Arkansas Fort Smith
- University of Arkansas Pulaski Technical College

Program Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion, a student will be able to:

1. Demonstrate entry-level competency in the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective learning domains required of a surgical technologist.
2. Apply principles of aseptic technique and infection control to maintain a safe environment and reduce the risk of surgical site infections.
3. Integrate knowledge of anatomy, physiology, microbiology, and surgical procedures to anticipate the needs of the surgical team during operative cases.
4. Prepare, organize, and manage surgical instrumentation, equipment, and supplies for operative procedures in a variety of surgical specialties.
5. Perform the duties of first scrub, second scrub, and assistant circulator according to nationally accepted standards of practice.

6. Demonstrate effective communication and collaboration with patients, families, surgeons, anesthesia providers, nurses, and other members of the healthcare team.
7. Incorporate critical thinking and problem-solving skills when adapting to intraoperative emergencies and unanticipated events.
8. Exhibit professional and ethical behavior consistent with the Surgical Technologist's Code of Ethics and employer expectations.
9. Demonstrate patient-centered care by providing compassion, cultural sensitivity, respect for patient rights, and dignity throughout the perioperative experience.
10. Demonstrate readiness for national certification and entry-level employment by meeting or exceeding outcomes required by ARC/STSA and CAAHEP.

Program Enrollment and Graduation Projections

Academic Year	Projected Enrollment	Projected Graduates
2027 - 2028	20	19
2028 - 2029	20	19
2029 - 2030	20	19
2030 - 2031	20	19
2031 - 2032	20	19

Program Curriculum

Required Prerequisites – 30 credit hours
BIOL 2214 Anatomy and Physiology I
BIOL 2224 Anatomy and Physiology II
ENGL 1013 English Composition I
ENGL 1023 English Composition II OR
ENGL 1033 Technical Composition II
HIM 1403 Med Term for Health Sciences
HIST 2003 U.S. History to 1877 OR
HIST 2013 U.S. History since 1877
MATH 1023 College Algebra
MBIO 2014 Microbiology
PLSC 2003 American National Government
Professional Curriculum – 33 credit hours (*application and admission only)*
SURG 10003 Basic Operating Room Techniques
SURG 10001 Basic Operating Room Techniques Lab
SURG 10005 Wound Care
SURG 20002 Perioperative Practice
SURG 20005 Advanced Operating Room Techniques
SURG 20003 Advanced Operating Room Techniques Lab
SURG 21303 Surgical Pathophysiology
SURG 21503 Clinical Practicum I
SURG 22004 Clinical Practicum II

SURG 23002 Pharmacology for Surgical Technology
SURG 27002 Seminar
Italics – New Course

SOUTHERN ARKANSAS UNIVERSITY MAGNOLIA
Master of Science in Nursing in Nursing: Family Nurse Practitioner (Rural Health)

The administration of Southern Arkansas University Magnolia (SAUM) and the Board of Trustees of the Southern Arkansas University System request approval to offer the Master of Science in Nursing in Nursing: Family Nurse Practitioner (Rural Health), effective Fall 2027.

SAUM is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, and the proposed program is within the role and scope established for the institution. The Southern Arkansas University System Board of Trustees approved the program on November 21, 2025.

Program Description

The proposed, fully online Master of Science in Nursing program with Family Nurse Practitioner (Rural Health) concentration is designed to prepare registered nurses for advanced practice roles as primary care providers, equipping graduates with the knowledge and clinical competencies necessary to deliver comprehensive, evidence-based care across the lifespan.

The 44 credit-hour curriculum includes core nursing coursework and specialized Family Nurse Practitioner content, with an emphasis on rural health disparities, population health, healthcare systems, and policy. Instruction will be delivered through online coursework supported by 540 hours of in-person clinical training and simulation experience in areas such as women's health, pediatrics, adult/geriatric care, and primary care. The proposed program is purposefully designed to meet the needs of working registered nurses, providing flexibility while permitting clinical training to be completed at approved sites.

The MSN-FNP program builds upon SAUM's established Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program and leverages existing faculty expertise, clinical training infrastructure, and regional healthcare partnerships. One additional tenure-track faculty member will be hired to support program implementation, while current nursing faculty will contribute to both didactic and clinical instruction. Graduates of the program will be eligible to sit for national certification examinations and pursue licensure as Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs).

Program Need

The proposed program addresses need for advanced practice registered nurses in Arkansas, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Labor market data indicate that the state currently employs approximately 3,648 nurse practitioners, a figure that

exceeds the national average for a state of comparable size, demonstrating Arkansas' reliance on this occupation within its healthcare workforce.

Projected growth further underscores this need. Employment is expected to increase to 4,512 positions by 2034, representing a 23.7 percent growth rate, which significantly exceeds average occupational growth and reflects increasing demand for primary care providers. This growth is driven by several factors, including population aging, increased prevalence of chronic conditions, and expansion of healthcare services. The need is further intensified by workforce attrition, with a substantial number of nurse practitioners approaching retirement age.

This workforce need is particularly acute in rural South Arkansas, where multiple counties experience primary care shortages and limited access to healthcare services. Employer surveys conducted by SAUM confirm difficulties in recruiting qualified providers and highlight strong demand for Family Nurse Practitioners, particularly in family medicine, geriatrics, and chronic disease management. The proposed program's rural health focus directly aligns with these needs and is designed to prepare graduates to practice in underserved areas where access to care is limited.

Nurse practitioners represent a critical component of the healthcare workforce due to their ability to deliver high-quality, cost-effective care and expand access to services. Median wages of approximately $113,651 annually in Arkansas further demonstrate the value of the profession and support strong student interest in advanced nursing education. Despite this demand, access to MSN-FNP programs remains limited in southern Arkansas, and the proposed program will create a regional pipeline of qualified providers to help address ongoing workforce shortages.

Program Expenditures and Funding

The proposed MSN-FNP program will require a combination of personnel, instructional, and operational expenditures, supported primarily through tuition revenue and institutional resources. Personnel costs include the hiring of one additional full-time faculty member, with total annual compensation estimated at approximately $123,500. Additional administrative expenses include partial funding for an administrative assistant, graduate coordinator stipend, and department chair support.

Initial capital expenditures include approximately $115,000 for simulation equipment and diagnostic tools to support advanced clinical training. Ongoing annual costs include approximately $15,000 for library resources, $10,000 for telehealth and electronic health record software, $5,000 for distance education technologies, and $5,000 for faculty professional development. Accreditation costs are estimated at $2,000 initially, with recurring annual fees of approximately $600.

Funding for the program will be derived primarily from student tuition and fees. Tuition is set at $329 per credit hour, with projected revenue of approximately $209,500 in the first year, increasing to approximately $352,798 annually in subsequent years as enrollment

stabilizes. Additional revenue will be generated through application fees, lab fees, and course-specific fees totaling approximately $90 per credit hour. The university will also support the program through internal budget allocations and reallocation of existing faculty resources, allowing current faculty to transition into graduate instruction roles.

Program Duplication

Six Arkansas public universities currently offer master's degrees in nursing. Two of these universities, Arkansas State University and Henderson State University, offer programs most similar to the proposed program with an embedded concentration in Family Nurse Practitioner. Other institutions offer similar pathways to Family Nurse Practitioner through different award types and degree levels.

- Arkansas State University
    - Master of Science in Nursing in Nursing with Family Nurse Practitioner concentration (online)
    - Postmaster Certificate in Family Nurse Practitioner (online)
- Arkansas Tech University
    - Master of Science in Nursing in Nursing (online)
- Henderson State University
    - Master of Science in Nursing in Nursing with Family Nurse Practitioner concentration
- University of Arkansas Fayetteville
    - Master of Science in Nursing in Nursing (online)
- University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences
    - Master of Nursing Science in Nursing with Family Nurse Practitioner concentration
    - Postmaster Certificate in Family Nurse Practitioner
- University of Central Arkansas
    - Master of Science in Nursing in Nursing
    - Postmaster Certificate in Family Nurse Practitioner

Program Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion, a student will be able to:

1. Integrate concepts from nursing, biological, behavioral, and social sciences to develop and assess evidence-based care for diverse populations, including rural and underserved communities.
2. Employ advanced clinical judgment and decision-making, including health assessment, diagnostic reasoning, and therapeutic interventions in managing individuals and families across all ages, with inclusion of those in resource-limited rural areas.

3. Analyze social determinants of health, cultural influences, and health disparities to guide practice across rural health and underserved areas.
4. Translate and share evidence-based research findings to improve health outcomes, with a focus on rural health innovations and practice models.
5. Design, implement, and evaluate quality improvement strategies that enhance safety and patient-centered, compassionate care outcomes across diverse clinical settings, including critical access and rural health systems.
6. Integrate advanced communication skills, collaborative care principles, and system-based knowledge to foster effective interprofessional partnerships that improve care coordination, strengthen team-based decision-making, and optimize health outcomes across rural health and underserved areas.
7. Evaluate healthcare policy, economics, and regulatory environments to support rural health initiatives, workforce development, and healthcare access.
8. Integrate advanced informatics principles and emerging healthcare technologies to enhance clinical decision-making, optimize care delivery systems, and ensure the ethical management of data to improve health outcomes across rural health and underserved areas.
9. Incorporate ethical reasoning and professional values into evidence-based practice to provide culturally responsive care for vulnerable rural populations.
10. Synthesize advanced professional standards and leadership theories to guide lifelong learning, foster professional resilience and accountability, and advance nursing leadership within complex healthcare systems and across rural health and underserved areas.

Program Enrollment and Graduation Projections

Academic Year	Projected Enrollment	Projected Graduates
2027 - 2028	20	
2028 - 2029	38	18
2029 - 2030	38	18
2030 - 2031	38	18
2031 - 2032	38	18

Program Curriculum

MSN Core – 12 credit hours
NURS 6XX3 *Rural Health Disparities and Population Health*
NURS 6XX3 *Adv Nursing Concepts, Theory & Research Applied to Rural Health*
NURS 6XX3 *Health Policy, Leadership, and Advocacy in Rural Health*
NURS 6XX3 *Healthcare Economics and Systems Applied to Rural Health*
Family Nurse Practitioner Courses – 32 credit hours
NURS 6XX3 *Advanced Pathophysiology*
NURS 6XX3 *Advanced Physical Assessment and Diagnostic Reasoning*

NURS 6XX3 Advanced Nursing Pharmacology
NURS 6XX2 FNP Role Development, Certification, and Transition to Practice
NURS 6XX7 FNP Practicum I – Women's Health & Pediatrics (180 clinical hrs)
NURS 6XX7 FNP Practicum II – Adult/Geriatric Health (180 clinical hrs)
NURS 6XX7 FNP Practicum III – Primary Care (180 clinical hrs)
Italics – New Course

SOUTHERN ARKANSAS UNIVERSITY TECH
Associate of Applied Science in Environmental Management (Municipal)

The administration of Southern Arkansas University Tech (SAUT) and the Board of Trustees of the Southern Arkansas University System request approval to offer the Associate of Applied Science in Environmental Management (Municipal), effective Fall 2027.

SAUT is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, and the proposed program is within the role and scope established for the institution. The Southern Arkansas University System Board of Trustees approved the program on June 27, 2025.

Program Description

The proposed fully online Associate of Applied Science in Environmental Management (Municipal) program is a 60-credit-hour, workforce-focused degree intended to prepare students for careers in municipal utilities and environmental services, with technical emphasis in water treatment and distribution, wastewater treatment, industrial pretreatment, and solid waste management, along with supporting coursework in science, safety, and compliance. Graduates will be fully prepared to handle the operation and maintenance of municipal environmental systems, ensure regulatory compliance, assess performance, and deliver clear communications.

The proposed program directly supports the mission of SAUT by advancing workforce development, strengthening partnerships with industry, and providing accessible, career-focused education. Through its alignment with the Arkansas Environmental Training Academy's statewide training mission, the program promotes strategic initiatives centered on economic development, industry engagement, and expanding educational access, particularly through its fully online delivery format designed for working adults across Arkansas. Instruction will be provided by existing faculty who hold advanced industry licenses and certifications in water, wastewater, industrial wastewater, OSHA, hazardous materials, and solid waste.

Program sustainability is supported by minimal startup costs, reliance on existing faculty and institutional resources, and no requirement for additional facilities or major capital expenditures.

Program Need

Labor market data provided by ADHE indicate a substantial employment base and sustained demand in Arkansas for occupations that support critical public infrastructure functions, including water treatment, wastewater operations, distribution systems, industrial pretreatment, and solid waste management. The aligned occupations total approximately 2,867 jobs in 2026, with an estimated 258 annual openings projected by 2031. The largest related occupation, Water and Wastewater Treatment Plant and System Operators, accounts for 2,230 jobs and approximately 203 annual openings, aligning directly with the proposed program's municipal workforce focus.

Employer demand is further reflected in job posting activity. From February 2025 to February 2026, Arkansas employers generated 1,434 total postings (approximately 620 unique postings) across 199 companies. Frequently posted job titles, such as wastewater operators, water/wastewater operators, and sanitation supervisors, align with the competencies the proposed program is designed to deliver.

Finally, the data indicates a supply gap; there were zero education program completions in 2024 and no regional training providers producing completers under CIP 15.0506. Median wage earnings across aligned occupations are approximately $20.31 per hour ($42,200 annually), with higher wages available in advanced roles.

Program Expenditures and Funding

Since the proposed program is being offered completely online, minimal start-up and operating costs are anticipated. Existing instructional capacity will be leveraged through SAUT's training division, Arkansas Environmental Training Academy (AETA). Faculty currently employed full-time in AETA will teach program courses and receive additional compensation at the adjunct rate of $700 per credit hour, with estimated instructional costs of $10,500 in Year One and $23,100 in Years Two and Three as enrollment increases.

SAUT anticipates no new facility, equipment, or library costs, with the only additional expense being a one-time HLC desk review fee of $1,125. Program funding is expected to come entirely from student tuition and fees, with tuition of $118 per credit hour. Projected revenue for Year One is $32,530, $121,250 for Year Two, and $153,880 for Year Three, totaling $307,660 over the first three years.

Program Duplication

No similar active associate-level programs in Environmental Management (Municipal) are currently offered in Arkansas.

Program Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion, a student will be able to:

1. Operate and maintain municipal water, wastewater, and solid systems using appropriate treatment processes, distribution methods, disposal, and monitoring techniques.
2. Apply environmental regulations and compliance standards to ensure safe and effective operation of municipal and industrial systems.
3. Demonstrate safe work practices, including hazard recognition, use of personal protective equipment, and emergency response procedures.
4. Analyze and troubleshoot system operations using data, laboratory results, and process control methods.
5. Communicate effectively and perform professional responsibilities in support of public works, environmental compliance, and utility operations.

Program Enrollment and Graduation Projections

Academic Year	Projected Enrollment	Projected Graduates
2027 - 2028	10	
2028 - 2029	20	8
2029 - 2030	25	10
2030 - 2031	25	15
2031 - 2032	25	20

Program Curriculum

General Education – 27 credit hours
BI 2234 Microbiology
BIOL 1004 The Biological Sciences w/Lab
CHEM 1114 General Chemistry I
ENGL 1113 Composition I
ENGL 2023 Technical Writing
HIST 2013 U.S. History I OR
HIST 2023 U.S. History II
MATH 1023 College Algebra
PSCI 2003 American Government: National
Major Courses – 33 credit hours
ES 1003 Wastewater I
ES 1023 Environmental Management
ES 1033 Occupational Safety & Health
ES 2003 Wastewater I
ES 2013 Industrial Wastewater Treatment
ES 2023 Water Distribution
ES 2033 Industrial Pretreatment Technology
ES 2043 Hazwoper
ES 2103 Water Treatment I
ES 2113 Water Treatment II

ES 2203 Solid Waste Management
Italics – New Course

OUT-OF-STATE AND ARKANSAS PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS
The following applications may be reviewed by ADHE for possible consideration at the AHECB meeting in July 2026.

Carrington College, Sacramento, California
Associate of Science in Medical Assisting

Southern California University of Health Sciences, Whittier, California
Ayurvedic Health Counselor Certificate
Ayurveda Practitioner Certificate
Master of Acupuncture and Chinese Herbal Medicine
Master of Science: Physician Assistant
Master of Science in Genetic Counseling
Doctor of Acupuncture and Chinese Herbal Medicine
Doctor of Chiropractic
Doctor of Whole Health Leadership
Doctor of Occupational Therapy
Doctor of Physical Therapy

Southwest University at El Paso, El Paso, Texas
Associate of Applied Science of Business Management in Healthcare Support Systems
Bachelor of Science in Healthcare Leadership Management