

UofA

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS SYSTEM



Workforce Action Plan



The UA System stands ready to support the statewide effort for improved workforce development

2024



UofA **WORKFORCE**
RESPONSE & TRAINING CENTER
University of Arkansas System

University of Arkansas System Workforce Action Plan

Review of UA System Policy Proposals in Support of State Workforce Development Goals

Through the University of Arkansas System Workforce Response & Training Center, comprised of seven two-year colleges, two regional universities and strategic partnerships that provide workforce education to their communities, the UA System boasts a wide range of career and technical education programs and capabilities that stand ready to support the statewide effort for improved workforce development. In support of Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders' leadership to expand workforce development across the state, the UA System has created the following Action Plan that identifies seven areas of focus for potential investment by the UA System and the state.



1

University of Arkansas System Workforce Response & Training Center

Enhance the effectiveness of the UA System Workforce Center as a single location where students, colleges and universities, and business and industry stakeholders have access to data on available employment opportunities, as well as available credit and non-credit workforce programs in each region of the state.



The Center will function as a clearinghouse and repository to provide information to prospective students about UA System workforce programs by careers and campus locations. The collection of this data in one location will lead to stronger partnerships and collaborative grant-writing among UA System campuses that will result in the delivery of needed programs across the state.

- * The UA System Workforce Center is currently funded by a \$900,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration. Funding is needed to enhance the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of the Center to serve the workforce development needs of business and industry.
- * The Center is currently working to expand its footprint to include non-credit workforce data.
- * Allowing K-12 schools to utilize the repository of information on workforce programs currently available will enable school districts to aid in the implementation of the career-ready pathways component of the LEARNS Act.



As a complement to the UA System Workforce Center, create a digital skilled worker identification card branded as the AR Pro Badge to serve as a history of training and internships completed, skills mastered, and credentials earned that follows a worker throughout his or her career.



Support the expansion of the UA System common course numbering system to non-credit workforce training courses.

- * Through the implementation of its new student information system, the UA System has created a common course numbering system to support the ease of credit transfer and registration across system campuses. In association with the UA System Workforce Center, the system is working to expand common course numbering to non-credit workforce programs. With administrative support from the Arkansas Division of Higher Education, this common numbering system has the potential to become a statewide initiative. Implementation of common course numbering statewide would be a significant benefit to students and parents, especially those who may transfer from one institution to another.

2

Credit for Prior Learning

Develop a robust evaluation of prior learning that maps to workforce and academic credit to award students for already acquired knowledge.



Individuals who have spent considerable time in the workforce or military often acquire skills through employer or military-sponsored training or on-the-job experience that is mapped to college credit. Asking a student to take a course that repeats knowledge they already have is deflating, as it doesn't recognize their acquired knowledge, is unnecessarily costly, and delays time to graduation. Ideally, this evaluation system would model work done by Champions of Working Adult Learners and be overseen and supported on a statewide basis.

3

New Statewide Funding Incentives for Workforce Training

Create a New Funding Formula for Non-Credit Workforce Training to provide higher education institutions with funding for already existing programs that bring value to their communities and incentivize institutions to further invest in career and technical education.

- The state should invest new money into a separate funding formula specifically for non-credit workforce training offered by the 2-year colleges and several universities.
- In 2019, a productivity funding formula was established to provide funding to institutions of higher education based upon certain metrics – effectiveness, affordability and efficiency for credit-bearing coursework. This formula does not address non-credit workforce training. Likewise, the cap that was placed on the Workforce 2000 funds during the 2017 legislative session has hampered institutions from accessing needed funds for non-credit workforce training.
- Campuses regularly work with business and industry to provide short-term, non-credit training ranging from employee retention, succession planning, professional development, prior learning assessment, aptitude testing to heavy equipment operation, welding, commercial truck driving and directional drilling, among others.
- Institutions continue to expand non-credit offerings and short-term customizable training requested by business and industry, yet these efforts are not incentivized or recognized as part of productivity funding because non-credit training does not result in a credential or degree.

Create a Revolving Loan Fund for Workforce Training to allow institutions of higher education to access start-up funds to purchase equipment, develop curriculum, and launch instruction to meet high-demand state workforce needs and attract future businesses.

- A workforce training revolving loan fund of \$20,000,000 should include business or industry partners; minimum and maximum loan amounts to cover most career and technical education programs assuming up to three years of salary and fringe benefits for faculty, equipment purchases and materials; loan terms of up to 10 years to enable sufficient time to establish the program and generate revenue for repayment; demonstrated long-term need for the program.
- While Regional Workforce Grants have allowed institutions to purchase equipment and supplies for specific programs, and there have been some opportunities to acquire equipment for programs at secondary technical centers through the Office of Skills Development (OSD) when unspent funds are available, there remain unmet needs for which a revolving loan fund would serve as a vital element for the development and expansion of non-credit offerings.
- Support for start-up costs would allow institutions to build complementary skills programs that support integrated work, thereby better serving both students and business/industry. This would allow institutions to focus on areas of work rather than on a single program. There is currently a built-in disincentive to start new programs, especially for small institutions, because of the front-end investment. If start-up funds were more readily available, complementary skills programs would be more likely to evolve from successful programs.

* **Example 1:** Truck driving programs align well with both large engine repair and lineman training; however, start-up costs for these programs are significant. Both large engine repair and lineman training are high-wage, high-demand occupations, and place-bound students could remain in their communities.

* **Example 2:** HVAC and heavy equipment are high-demand, high-wage programs, but simulators, equipment, hydraulics and electrical systems needed to provide general instructional delivery are costly.



4

Office of Skills Development (OSD) Grant Programs

Revise the grant process to ensure it meets the needs of business and industry and institutions of higher education



Build upon current best practices to enhance and support maximizing applications for all available grant opportunities; enhance criteria and guidelines to support stronger applications; incorporate a written rationale for a decision to accept or decline a grant application to all applicant partners; require all applications include both a business/industry partner and an institution of higher education partner; establish grant program to support institutions of higher education to acquire equipment, faculty training and additional support for existing or new, targeted training programs that support the local or regional economic development; and establish a committee or board with subject-area expertise to evaluate grant applications.



An enhanced process would further support the purpose of the grant program to maximize effective and efficient use of all Arkansas workforce development programs and funds.

EXAMPLES:

- * Alabama provides grants for two-year colleges with guidelines for different types of grants including equipment, training and special populations. The process and guidelines include an online portal for grant submissions, an equipment list and detailed score sheet.
- * New York sets clear expectations, eligibility rules and a defined structure for each type of workforce grant with guideline books, checklist, and a detailed budget template for each, including capital, operating and capacity building grants.

5

Secondary Career Centers

Increase funding for Secondary Career Centers overall and review funding tier priorities to ensure the current workforce needs of the state are being met, and incentivize programs of study that result in the earning of a higher education credential. Although funding tiers were created in 2019, no additional funds were provided.



Require all secondary career centers be affiliated with an institution of higher education to ensure students receive both high school and college credit.

- * Funding should be sufficient to reduce the financial burden on institutions subsidizing the cost of a Secondary Career Center.
- * Satellite locations should receive direct funds to prevent undue burden on the primary location for which they provide additional services.
- * Funding should address all careers listed on the AR Department of Workforce Services high-demand list.
- * Funds should be set-aside for innovative, cutting-edge programs that are too new to meet the current criteria.

Funding for non-credit workforce training should include a short-term supplement to offset the loss of an individual's income.

Institutions need support for maintaining up-to-date certifications.

Matching funds could help institutions pursue additional, external funding.

6

Perkins Funds

Review the percentage split of Perkins Funds between K-12 and higher education institutions to ensure funding is adequate to meet student and institutional needs. Perkins funding is vital for student access and success; however, the allocation at the higher education level is lacking.

- The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) of 2018 allocated \$1.4 billion annually to the states for career and technical education. Each state receives an allotment of Perkins funds based on factors such as population and per capita income levels.
- While the state does not control the amount of funding it receives, it does control the split it provides between secondary and post-secondary institutions. Arkansas currently provides 75 percent of its \$14.2 million in Perkins funds to secondary institutions and 25 percent to post-secondary institutions. Nearby states have adopted more equitable ratios, including, Mississippi - 57%/43%; Louisiana - 56%/44%; Georgia - 48%/52%; and Florida - 52%/48%.
- Revise the Arkansas Perkins Plan to allow a more equitable percentage of funds to post-secondary institutions, increase the effectiveness of workforce efforts by requiring secondary and post-secondary institutions to jointly partner and use funds for concurrent enrollment, including career and technical programs.



William is a University of Arkansas - Pulaski Technical College graduate now enjoying a rewarding career at Dassault Falcon Jet in Little Rock.

7

Workforce Challenge and AR Futures Scholarships

Adjust the Workforce Challenge and AR Futures Scholarship programs to better serve student needs and align award amounts with program costs. These programs provide vital support for career and technical education students; however, they need tweaks to better serve the goal of improving workforce development across the state.

- Increase the scholarship award for workforce training programs based upon actual costs of programs and required equipment. For most, a \$1,600 scholarship would be sufficient, but for other programs – CDL, heavy equipment, and some healthcare short-term credentials – an award up to \$2,500 would be more in line with expenses.

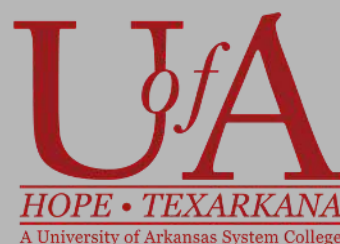
- Funds for these scholarships should be allocated in the same manner as the Concurrent Challenge scholarship. This change would remove a cumbersome process for students and institutions.



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The **University of Arkansas System Workforce Response & Training Center** includes:

- Cossatot Community College of the University of Arkansas
- Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas
- University of Arkansas Community College at Batesville
- University of Arkansas Community College at Hope-Texarkana
- University of Arkansas Community College at Morrilton
- University of Arkansas Community College at Rich Mountain
- University of Arkansas - Pulaski Technical College
- University of Arkansas at Monticello Colleges of Technology at Crossett and McGehee
- University of Arkansas at Fort Smith
- Arkansas Economic Development Institute at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock





About the University of Arkansas System

Since its inception, the University of Arkansas System has developed a tradition of excellence that includes the state’s 1871 flagship, land-grant research university; Arkansas’s premier institution for medical education, treatment and research; a major metropolitan university; an 1890 land-grant university; two regional universities serving southern and western Arkansas; seven community colleges; two schools of law; a presidential school; a residential math and science high school; a 100 percent-online university and divisions of agriculture, archeology and criminal justice. As the premier higher education system in the state, it enrolls more than 70,000 students, employs more than 30,000 employees, and has a total budget of more than \$4 billion. An intrinsic part of the texture and fabric of Arkansas, the UA System is a driving force in the state’s economic, educational and cultural advancement.



Thank you

- Photo contributions: UA Hope Texarkana and UA Pulaski Technical College
- UA System President Dr. Donald R. Bobbitt | Board of Trustees of the University of Arkansas