

Grant Expands High-Speed Network to Two-Year Colleges

LITTLE ROCK – Arkansas public two-year college students will benefit from a grant awarded to the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in partnership with the Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges (AATYC).



Funded by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the grant expands the current Arkansas Research & Education Optical Network (AREON) to the 22 public two-year colleges in the state. The network will improve the colleges' ability to deliver distance learning. Two-year colleges will also have new opportunities to collaborate to expand course and program offerings by sharing curriculum and other resources that benefit students.

**Arkansas Association of
Two-Year Colleges**

To manage fiber construction and connectivity at the two-year colleges, UAMS will grant a subaward to AREON, the state's only publicly owned fiber optic network currently serving four-year universities. Spending from the grant will include \$41.2 million for equipment and construction of fiber optic network routes to serve community colleges. The project is expected to be completed in three years.

“This grant provides Arkansas two-year colleges with high-speed internet access that most other states don't have,” said Dr. Ed Franklin, Executive Director of AATYC. “This increases our capacity to deliver educational services to students and to improve our collaboration with business and industry partners.”

Arkansas two-year colleges will serve more than 60,000 students in the 2010-2011 year - nearly half of whom are nontraditional and/or first-generation students. Nontraditional students typically work while attending college, and they are likely place bound, meaning they are not able to relocate due to family and/or work responsibilities. Improving distance education through high-speed internet access will provide rural and working Arkansans with new opportunities to pursue higher education and skills training.

Broadband internet access will improve the ability of two-year colleges to meet the training needs of businesses/industries in their communities, and well as attract new businesses/industries. Annually, more than 50,000 Arkansans take noncredit courses through two-year colleges to upgrade workforce skills directly related to local business/industry needs.

Arkansas has four regional two-year college consortia located in the northern, central, eastern and southwestern areas of the state. High-speed internet access will help these consortia better coordinate to offer classes together and serve the individualized needs of their regional businesses/industries.

The Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges (AATYC) will coordinate staff development activities to expose faculty and staff to the benefits of high-speed internet access. AATYC will also serve on the project's management and steering committees.

Key partners in the project include the Arkansas Research and Education Optical Network, Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges, Arkansas Department of Health, Arkansas Department of Human Services, Baptist Health, Arkansas Hospital Association, Arkansas State Library and Community Health Centers of Arkansas.

The Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges (AATYC) is a private, non-profit higher education membership organization serving the educational needs of two-year college students and the business/industry needs of the State. AATYC represents all twenty two (22) public two-year colleges in Arkansas. The Association facilitates the sharing of ideas, resources, and opportunities among its members, and advocates on behalf of members' students.