

2026-2029



STRATEGIC PLAN

SOUTHERN ARKANSAS UNIVERSITY TECH

Key Performance Indicators

HLC Criteria	Performance Indicator	Baseline AY25	AY26	AY27	AY28	Target AY29
Learner Community						
3G	Total Enrollment-Fall Semester (SSCH in parenthesis) (IR)	991 (9,428)	950 (9,077)			1,091
	• Core	576 (6,893)	560 (7,0145)			634
	• Concurrent	315 (1,403)	341(1,548)			347
	• AFTA & ALETA	100 (1,132)	49 (514)			110
3G	Fall to Fall Retention Rate (IPEDS)	FA23 to FA24 41.6%	FA24 to FA25 44%	FA25 to FA26	FA26 to FA27	FA27 to FA28 60%
	• Full-time, first-time degree/certificate seeking	14%	4%			15%
3G	Fall to Spring Persistence Rate (IR)	FA24 to SP25 76%	F25 to SP26 84%	FA26 to SP27	FA27 to SP28	FA28 to SP29 80%
	• Full-time, first-time degree/certificate seeking	9%	8%			10%
3G	Graduation Rate (150%) (IPEDS)	2021 cohort 62%	2022 cohort 61%	2023 cohort	2024 cohort	2025 cohort 65%
	• Full-time, first-time degree/certificate seeking					
3G	Transfer Rate (IPEDS)	5%	3%			10%
3G	Total degrees and certificates awarded (prior AY)	613	498			644 (5%)
3E	% of programs reporting general education assessment target met	100%				100%
3G	Licensure exam passage rate in required programs					
	• Aviation (FAA)	75%				80%
	• Practical Nursing	88.8%				90%
	• Registered Nursing	85.7%				90%
	• Cosmetology					
	• Cosmetology	51.72%				55%
	• Cosmetology Instructor	100%				100%
	• Nail Technology	100%				100%
	• Esthetics	-				
	• Barbering					
	• Barber	100%				100%
	• Barber Instructor	100%				100%
	• Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)	58%				80%
Taxpayer Community						
4B	Instructional expenses as percentage of total expenses	43.7%	39.37%			45%
4B	Primary Reserve Ratio*	.36 years				.36 years
College Community						
3C	Employee Satisfaction (Employee Opinion Survey-Overall satisfaction with employment)	75.51%	77.78%			80%
3C	Retention rate of full-time faculty and staff	100% (n=144)				85%
3C	% Minority full-time faculty and staff	37%				90%
3G	Student Satisfaction (Graduate Opinion Survey-Would recommend SAUT to others)	--	96%			37%
Pre-K through Grade 16 Community						
3G	Maintain the number of K-12 documented partnerships with individual schools within districts**	9				95%
3G	SSCH successfully completed by concurrent and dual enrolled students with grade of "C" or higher	2,297				9

Key Performance Indicators

HLC Criteria	Performance Indicator	Baseline AY25	AY26	AY27	AY28	Target AY29
Business and Broader Community						
1B	Adult Basic Education - Meet or exceed federal rates for: • Credential Attainment • GED Pass Rate • Gains • Outcome Measures • Enter employment after 2nd Qtr. • Enter employment after 4th Qtr. <i>Note: Federal rates are in parenthesis.</i>	83% (41.5%) 75% 69.94% (60%) 78% (47.5%) 58% (48.5%)				85% 77% 72% 80% 60%
1B	Total Number of Students Enrolled/Served • Arkansas Fire Training Academy • Arkansas Environmental Training Academy • Professional Skills Training (Workforce Training) • Adult Education	15,796 4,854 1,511 Enrolled: 325 Served: 462				2% increase 16,112 4,951 1,541 Enrolled: 332 Served: 472
1B	Total Number of Contact Hours • Arkansas Fire Training Academy • Arkansas Environmental Training Academy • Professional Skills Training (Workforce Training) • Adult Education	43,063 7,562 739 21,151				2% increase 43,924 7,713 754 21,583

*The **primary reserve ratio** helps institutions understand the affordability of its strategic plan. It provides a snapshot of financial strength and flexibility by indicating how long the institution could function using its expendable reserves without relying on additional net revenue generated by operations.

**Partnership: A formal relationship between SAU Tech and an external entity as documented by an MOU or other appropriate documentation for the purpose of collaboration in serving students and the community.

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Introduction and Background

In May 2023, SAU Tech Chancellor Dr. Jason Morrison departed from Southern Arkansas University Tech (SAUT), and longtime employee Gaye Manning was appointed interim chancellor. On January 2, 2024, SAU Tech welcomed its new chancellor, Dr. Jerry Thomas.

SAU Tech's previous strategic plan covered the 2020-2025 period, and development of the next plan was approaching. On December 9, 2024, the Executive Cabinet held a kickoff meeting to begin work on the college's strategic plan for 2025-2028. To allow additional time for thoughtful planning and broad participation, the current strategic plan was extended through 2026. The new strategic plan covers the period from 2026 through 2029.

Dr. Roger Guevara of Southern Arkansas University was contracted to assist with development of the new strategic plan, and a Strategic Plan Committee was established. The committee's initial charge was to review and revise the college's mission, vision, and core values. Input was gathered from the Executive Cabinet, Strategic Plan Committee, Faculty Senate, Administrative Staff Organization, and through a survey distributed to students and community members. This collaborative process resulted in the adoption of new mission, vision, and core values.

A SWOT analysis was conducted using feedback from the SAUT community, with results presented later in this document. In addition, four strategic initiatives were developed.

The Strategic Plan Committee and Conceptual Framework

Dr. Valerie Wilson, in collaboration with Chancellor Thomas and the remaining three vice chancellors, established the Strategic Plan Committee. The following individuals agreed to participate in the strategic planning process:

Dr. Valerie Wilson, Co-Chair

Vice Chancellor for Academics & Planning/CAO

Dr. David Mason, Co-Chair

Vice Chancellor for Workforce & CTE

Michael Armstrong

Vice Chancellor for Finance & Administration/CFO

Kit Dean

Registrar's Office

Frances Fridell

Faculty

Barbara Hamilton

Associate Vice Chancellor for Adult Education

Randy Harper

Director of Arkansas Environmental Training Academy

Courtney Haygood

Dean of Student Life & Housing

Dr. Velvet Henton

Faculty

Dr. Rickey Rogers

Vice Chancellor for Student Services

Ryan Taylor

Faculty

Grant Warner

Director of Arkansas Fire Training Academy

Nikita Minor, Recorder

Administrative Specialist III

The Executive Committee and Strategic Plan Committee engaged in extensive discussion regarding the focus of the college's new strategic plan. Through these discussions, consensus was reached to realign SAUT with the college's original mission—to provide workforce training for the numerous defense-related industries located in Highland Industrial Park, where SAUT is based. State and national priorities emphasizing training for high-wage, high-demand fields further helped shape the college's future direction.

In response to rapid changes in higher education—including enrollment trends, funding structures, policy shifts, and evolving employer needs—the decision was made to transition from a five-year strategic plan to a three-year plan. The three-year institutional plan guides the development and reporting of annual departmental plans, ensuring that all campus departments actively participate in the implementation of the strategic plan. The Strategic Plan Committee also determined that evaluating the plan's effectiveness after three years, rather than the traditional five to seven years, would allow for more timely assessment and adjustment.

Project Design

The project design centered on collecting evidence from stakeholders and campus data for a thorough internal and external analysis. The following is the timeline established for the project.

TIMELINE DECEMBER 2024 - JUNE 2026	
ACTION	COMPLETION DATE
Strategic Plan Committee formed	November 2024
Kick-off of planning process	December 2024
Executive Cabinet work with consultant	December 2024 thru May 2025
Collect feedback from stakeholders for vision, mission, and values	April 2025
Develop mission, vision, and values	September 2025
Chancellor approval of mission, vision, and values	October 2025
Community outreach (survey to faculty, staff, and community)	October 2025
SWOT analysis conducted	October 2025
Develop strategic initiatives	November 2025
SAU Board approval of mission, vision, values, and strategic initiatives	November 2025
Mission, vision, values, and strategic initiatives presented to college community	January 2026
Develop objectives and metrics for strategic initiatives	February 2026
Complete draft plan	March 2026
Collect feedback from faculty, staff, students, and community for draft plan	April 2026
Incorporate feedback into plan	April 2026
Assemble and print strategic plan	May 2026
SAU Board approval	June 2026
Develop/revise department plans	July 2026
Present to stakeholders	August 2026

Revised Mission

SAU Tech is a comprehensive community college that provides innovative, student-centered educational programs and technical training that empowers and encourages critical thinking required for today's dynamic workforce.

Revised Vision

SAU Tech strives to be a premier institution of higher learning, empowering students to achieve academic excellence, career readiness, and lifelong success.

Revised Core Values

Future - Preparing students to be workforce ready.

Accessible - Dedicated to removing barriers to aid students in achieving their education and professional endeavors.

Mastery - Providing a variety of opportunities for students to demonstrate excellence in their chosen career.

Integrity - Upholding strong ethics, principles, and trust in everything we do.

Leadership - Developing today's students to be tomorrow's leaders.

YOU - We put YOU first by prioritizing the needs of our students, partners, and community.

SWOT Analysis: Strengths

Close-knit personalized environment

- Family-oriented campus with faculty and staff who genuinely care about student success.
- Small class sizes allow for individualized attention and strong student-teacher relationships.
- Supportive environment for adult learners, GED students, high school concurrent credit students, and workforce training.

Location advantage for industry partnerships

- Situated between defense plants, industrial plants, and multiple high schools, providing opportunities for workforce development.
- Proximity to Highland Industrial Park and Arkansas' Aerospace & Defense industry hub.

Affordable, accessible education

- Lower tuition than four-year universities.
- Housing and meal plans available for students.
- Concurrent credit programs enable high school students to earn college credits affordably.

Hands-on, Workforce relevant programs

- Skilled trades programs, aviation maintenance, fire training and other workforce-aligned programs.
- Programs designed to meet the needs of local businesses and industry partners.
- Ability to prepare students for employment or transfer to four-year programs.

Community and student engagement

- Athletics, dormitories, adult education programs, and a focus on student support to create a “college experience with a hometown feel.”
- Emphasis on caring for the community and fostering student involvement in service projects.

SWOT Analysis: Weaknesses

Leadership and administrative challenges

- Weak leadership in some areas and top-heavy administration.
- Poor communication between departments and between leadership and staff.
- Inconsistent training and preparedness for administrators and their assistants.

Employee compensation and morale

- Low salaries and limited incentives make it difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff and faculty.
- Employee morale and engagement appear low in some departments.

Campus infrastructure and amenities

- Limited student housing, dorm issues, and outdated facilities.
- Lack of social, recreational, and extracurricular activities for students.
- Campus aesthetics and visibility in the broader Camden community could be improved.

Marketing and outreach limitations

- Low awareness of SAU Tech programs and opportunities outside Camden.
- Insufficient promotion of concurrent credit and specialized programs.
- Limited presence in local media and community events.

Program and service gaps

- Lack of certain skilled trades and healthcare certificate programs.
- Need for updates technology and equipment in some labs.
- Limited counseling and student support services in some areas.

SWOT Analysis: Opportunities

Expansion of academic programs

- Introduce new degree and certificate programs in high-demand fields such as healthcare administration, computer science, CDL, automotive mechanics, CNC, and production training.
- Expand online learning and flexible program offerings for working adults and lifelong learners.

Enhanced community engagement

- Increase participation in Camden community events, civic projects, and K-12 partnerships.
- Leverage student volunteer programs and internships with local industries.
- Develop a downtown student center or youth engagement facility to strengthen campus-community ties.

Workforce development partnerships

- Strengthen collaborations with local industries, small businesses, and defense contractors.
- Develop programs aligned with emerging technologies and industry needs (e.g., robotics, networking, instrumentation, PLC programming).
- Position SAU Tech as a career academy for high school students in the region.

Branding and marketing expansion

- Improve visibility across Arkansas through billboards, regional TV, social media, and outreach to lower-income communities.
- Showcase student success stories and ROI programs to attract new students.
- Market affordability, housing, and personalized learning as key differentiators.

Campus development and student life

- Enhance housing, dining, and recreational activities.
- Introduce clubs, social events, and wellness initiatives to improve student engagement and retention.
- Create a vibrant campus environment that attracts students from outside Camden.

SWOT Analysis: Threats

Financial and resource limitations

- Insufficient state funding and grants for program expansion and infrastructure upgrades.
- Budget constraints affecting employee pay, equipment updates, and facility maintenance.

Competition and enrollment challenges

- Competition from other community colleges, technical schools, and four-year institutions in the region.
- Declining local population and demographic shifts affecting enrollment.

Employee turnover and talent retention

- Difficulty retaining experienced faculty due to low pay and lack of career advancement opportunities.
- Part-time employees feeling disconnected, reducing institutional knowledge and effectiveness.

Campus perception and accessibility issues

- Limited visibility in Camden and surrounding towns leads to community perception challenges.
- Transportation difficulties for students on campus or in areas without public transit.
- Rural location limits access to entertainment, retail, and other amenities, potentially affecting recruitment.

Community engagement risks

- Limited involvement with the broader community reduces potential support for programs, events, and industry partnerships.
- Misalignment between administrative focus and community expectations could erode trust and reputation.

Strategic Initiatives, Objectives, Measurements, Criterion

Strategic Initiative 1: Student Access and Success

SAU Tech will expand educational pathways and enhance student achievement through strengthened outreach, academic support, and career opportunities that promote retention and completion.

Objectives:

1. Increase access to relevant programs across the service area.
2. Improve student retention, persistence, and completion.
3. Support student transitions into careers and further education.

Strategic Initiative 2: Professional Skills Training (Formerly referred to as: Workforce Training)

SAU Tech will enhance its professional skills training by aligning programs with industry needs, offering relevant short-term and credential-based training and strengthening employer partnerships.

Objectives:

1. Align programs with workforce needs.
2. Expand short-term training and industry-recognized credentials.
3. Strengthen strategic partnerships with employers.

Strategic Initiative 3: Employee Growth and Development

SAU Tech will strengthen its workforce through consistent professional development, improved internal communication, and cultivate a culture that supports employee success and retention.

Objectives:

1. Provide relevant, high-quality professional development for faculty and staff.
2. Strengthen internal communications and collaboration.
3. Cultivate a culture for employee success and retention.
4. Enhance hiring procedures, qualifications, and interview process.

Strategic Initiative 4: Sustainability/Effectiveness

SAU Tech will ensure long-term operational effectiveness through financial stewardship, improved infrastructure, and strengthened institutional effectiveness processes.

Objectives:

1. Strengthen financial stability and resource diversification.
2. Modernize operations and campus infrastructure.
3. Improve institutional effectiveness and data-driven planning.

Strategic Initiative 1: Student Access and Success

Objective 1.1 Increase access to relevant programs across the service area.

Measurement	Definition	Analysis Start Date	Analysis End Date	Criterion
New student enrollment	Headcount for enrollment of new students for SAUT, AFTA, AETA, and Adult Education	Fall 2026 Census (SAUT) Class start dates (AFTA, AETA, and Adult Ed)	Fall 2028 Census July 30, 2029	Increase student enrollment by 8%
Outreach and recruitment activities	Number of recruiting events and other activities used to increase student enrollments	Fall 2026	Summer 2029	Increase outreach activities by 10%
Alternative course delivery methods	Number of course delivery methods other than traditional face-to-face	Fall 2026	Summer 2029	Expand alternative delivery methods by 20%
Application-to-enrollment conversion rate	Rate at which students who submit admissions applications enroll in classes	Fall 2026	Spring 2029	Track application to enrollment conversion rate

Objective 1.2 Improve student retention, persistence, and completion.

Measurement	Definition	Analysis Start Date	Analysis End Date	Criterion
Student retention rate	Fall to Fall - Full-time, first-time degree/certificate seeking students - Part-time, first-time degree/certificate seeking students	Fall 2023	Fall 2028	Increase retention to 60% Workforce: Maintain 70% retention
Course success rate	The rate at which students complete credit-bearing courses with a grade of C or better	Fall 2026	Spring 2029	Increase average course success rate to 75%
Persistence	Fall to Spring First-time full-time and part-time degree/certificate seeking students	Fall 2026	Spring 2029	Increase persistence rate by 5%
Graduation rate (150%)	Full-time, first-time degree/certificate seeking students	2021 Cohort	2025 cohort	Increase graduation rate to 65%
Completion rate	Meet or exceed federal rates for credential attainment, GED Pass rate, gains and outcome measures	Fall 2026	June 30, 2029	Increase credential completion by 12% Workforce: Maintain 70% completion
Stackable credentials	Leads to industry credentials	Fall 2026	June 30, 2029	Increase number of stackable credentials by 10%
Short-term training	Anything ≥ 40 – 80 hours 2-15 weeks Adult Education	Fall 2026	June 30, 2029	Increase short-term training offerings by 10%

Objective 1.3 Support student transitions into careers and further education

Measurement	Definition	Analysis Start Date	Analysis End Date	Criterion
Internships and pre-apprenticeships	Students enrolled in AAS degrees that require the enroll in CE 2013 Internship	Fall 2026	Summer 2029	90% of AAS students will complete required internship hours
Job placement rates	Rates as specified by State and Federal entities	2026	2029	Maintain job placement at State and Federal benchmark levels
Transfer rates to four-year universities	Transfer-out rate for full-time, first-time degree/certificate seeking students	Fall 2026	Spring 2029	Increase transfer rates to 10%
Employer satisfaction ratings	Results for employer satisfaction survey for internship students	Fall 2026	Spring 2029	Achieve 90% employer satisfaction

Strategic Initiative 2: Professional Skills Training (Formerly referred to as: Workforce Training)

Objective 2.1 Align programs with workforce needs

Measurement	Definition	Analysis Start Date	Analysis End Date	Criterion
Programs aligned with high wage and high-demand fields	Programs that fall into these categories: science, technology, engineering, mathematics, accounting, finance, nursing, education, computer science, information technology, data analysis, and graphic design	Fall 2026	Spring 2029	80% of programs offered are high wage and high-demand fields
Labor market review	The systematic analysis of current and projected employment trends, industry demands, and workforce data to ensure programs align with regional and state workforce needs	July 1, 2026	June 30, 2029	Perform annual labor market analysis
Advisory committee participation	Advisory committees meet on agreed upon regular intervals	Fall 2026	Spring 2029	Maintain active advisory committees
Concurrent enrollment	High school students enrolled in college credit-bearing classes at SAU Tech	Fall 2026	Fall 2029	10% of concurrent students will enroll at SAUT the first fall after high school graduation

Objective 2.2 Expand short-term training and industry-recognized credentials

Measurement	Definition	Analysis Start Date	Analysis End Date	Criterion
Customized training	Training developed for a specific a business/industry	Fall 2026	Spring 2029	Increase customized training offerings by 10%
Industry-recognized credentials awarded	Successful completion of an exam/activity that leads to awarding an industry-recognized credential (i.e., NCCER, NCLEX-PN, NCLEX RN, FAA, Cosmetology, Barbering)	July 1, 2026	June 30, 2029	Increase industry credentials awarded by 10%

Objective 2.3 Strengthen strategic partnerships with employers

Measurement	Definition	Analysis Start Date	Analysis End Date	Criterion
Employer partnerships	Formal, ongoing collaborations between SAUT and businesses or organizations that support workforce development through activities such as hiring graduates, offering internships, and contributing to training or program development	Fall 2026	June 30, 2029	Increase employer partnerships by 5%
Customized training contracts	Written agreement between SAUT and business/industry	Fall 2026	June 30, 2029	Increase customized training contracts by 5%
Employer satisfaction	Evaluation of services/training by employer	Fall 2026	June 30, 2029	Maintain employer satisfaction at 90% or higher

Strategic Initiative 3: Employee Growth and Development

Objective 3.1 Provide relevant, high-quality professional development for faculty and staff

Measurement	Definition	Analysis Start Date	Analysis End Date	Criterion
Participation in professional development	Professional development opportunities provided by SAUT	January 1, 2026	December 31, 2028	Improve departmental participation in professional development
Completion of required annual training	Training required by SAUT	January 1, 2026	December 31, 2028	100% completion of required annual training
Professional development satisfaction ratings	Ratings from professional development report submitted to Human Resources each year during employee evaluation process	July 1, 2026	Review annually until June 30, 2029	Increase in professional development training budget (Review annually)
	Tracking of expenditures for professional development	Spring 2026	26/27 Budget	Implement budget tracking that distinguishes professional development from other travel budgets.

Objective 3.2 Strengthen internal communication and collaboration

Measurement	Definition	Analysis Start Date	Analysis End Date	Criterion
Communication satisfaction scores	Rating for this item on Employee Satisfaction Survey	Spring 2027	Spring 2029	Increase communication satisfaction scores
Cross-department collaborations	Rating for this item on Employee Satisfaction survey	Spring 2027	Spring 2029	Maintain consistent annual collaborative activities
Maintain consistent communications for required meetings (townhalls, convocation, email communication, website, publications, upcoming events, cross-department meetings, staff meetings, etc.)	Define established means of communication at the college	Fall 2026	Spring 2027	Identify communications methods

Objective 3.3 Cultivate a culture for employee success and retention

Measurement	Definition	Analysis Start Date	Analysis End Date	Criterion
Employee retention rate with less than 10 years of service	The rate at which employees remain at the college	July 1, 2026	June 30, 2029	Retain 90% of employees each year
Employee longevity	The defined length of employment by employee category	Fall 2026	Spring 2027	Track longevity and establish baseline
Internal promotions	Employee advancement within the college	Fall 2026	Spring 2027	Research implementation of internal promotion policy
Employee Opinion Survey	Response to survey question for overall employee satisfaction	Spring 2027	Spring 2029	Increase overall employee satisfaction to 80%

Objective 3.4 Enhance hiring procedures, qualifications, and interview process

Measurement	Definition	Analysis Start Date	Analysis End Date	Criterion
Implementation of updated hiring & interview framework	Process for interviewing and hiring potential employees	July 1, 2026	June 30, 2027	Research and propose policy changes for internal promotions

Strategic Initiative 4: Sustainability/Effectiveness

Objective 4.1 Strengthen financial stability and resource diversification

Measurement	Definition	Analysis Start Date	Analysis End Date	Criterion
Grant funding and/or private funding	Funds solicited from external sources	July 1, 2026	June 30, 2029	Increase grant funding by 20%
Non-tuition revenue generated	AFTA, AETA, and professional skills training	July 1, 2026	June 30, 2029	Increase non-tuition revenue by 15%
Cash on hand	The amount of cash on hand required by the State of Arkansas	July 1, 2026	June 30, 2029	Maintain minimum 120 days of cash on hand

Objective 4.2 Modernize operations and campus infrastructure

Measurement	Definition	Analysis Start Date	Analysis End Date	Criterion
Infrastructure upgrades	Modification made to physical property	July 1, 2026	June 30, 2029	Hit milestones on campus infrastructure Maintain ADA compliance Cost per sq. ft. for campus energy usage
Technology modernization	Improvement made to campus technologies	July 1, 2026 July 1, 2026	June 30, 2027 June 30, 2029	Develop technology plan Computer upgrades eligible plan

Objective 4.3 Institutional effectiveness and data-driven planning

Measurement	Definition	Analysis Start Date	Analysis End Date	Criterion
Program assessment completion	Assessment of academic programs by established schedule	Fall 2026	Spring 2029	Achieve 100% program assessment completion
Availability of institutional dashboard(s)	Data dashboard(s) available to staff	Fall 2026 January 1, 2028	December 2027 June 30, 2029	Create data dashboard(s). Publish institutional dashboard(s) annually

2026-2029

SOUTHERN ARKANSAS UNIVERSITY TECH

