

OPINION & ANALYSIS

Let's Broaden the Concept of Workforce Development

Christina Drale Commentary

by **Christina S. Drale**

Monday, Jun. 26, 2023 12:00 am 2 min read



The dominant framework for workforce development in Arkansas traditionally has been focused on the trades and entry-level technical and manufacturing jobs. While these employment pathways are certainly important to the state's economy and should be supported, this restricted view overlooks the equally important need for professional-level workforce development.

Continually, the business community is telling us they need professional workers. They are in dire need of more accountants to manage company finances, engineers to lead construction growth, and cybersecurity professionals to keep company data safe. We hear from legislators and community leaders that more nurses and teachers are needed to support the health and education needs of our citizens across the state. If we only invest in the narrower concept of workforce development, we are only growing half of our economy. We're missing out on the part of the economy that depends on advanced professional skills.

It's undeniable that Arkansas needs more graduates with professional degrees. Research by the Federal Reserve recently found that among the 50 states, Arkansas ranked 48th when it comes to the percentage of residents with

THIS IS AN OPINION

We'd also like to hear yours.
Leave a comment below, tweet

bachelor’s degrees. A broadly educated workforce is fundamental to attracting new businesses and growing a diversified economy. The more students we can put on these pathways, the more capacity this state will have to create a promising future that will serve Arkansans for generations to come.

to us at [@ArkBusiness](#) or [email us](#).

But it’s not just about the numbers. At the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, we’re committed to smart, targeted workforce development that listens to industry partners when they talk about what they need from our graduates. By seeking feedback from those who will hire the students we graduate, our programs and curriculum are continually evolving to meet the changing demands of our economy.



However, we know that access to an affordable college education is one of the largest challenges that threaten the success of students in Arkansas. We are tackling that head-on at UA Little Rock with efforts designed to boost college affordability and support student success.

That includes the Half-Off Scholarship, which pays 50% of tuition and fees for most incoming freshmen for up to two full years, a robust on-campus work program, and a comprehensive suite of free student success initiatives.

Across the nation, regional public universities like UA Little Rock are the workhorses of higher education. Collectively, they are where the majority of students go to college, and they do the lion’s share of professional workforce preparation. Our efforts show the pivotal role that institutions like ours play in encouraging more students to seek advanced-level career pathways that meet the needs of our state. I believe the time has come to embrace a broader view of workforce development that nurtures all parts of our economy and improves our potential for growth.

At UA Little Rock, we’re committed to producing the workforce of the future that meets the needs of Arkansas’ current employers as well as the employers the state would like to attract. Supporting the broader view of workforce development helps us all contribute to an Arkansas future that is robust, innovative and resilient.



Christina S. Drale has been chancellor at UA Little Rock since 2019. She was previously interim executive vice chancellor and provost, and oversaw the administration and coordination of all academic functions of the university.

In This Story

[health care](#), [construction](#), [Education](#), [Workforce Development](#), [University of Arkansas Little Rock](#), [Christina Drale](#), [Government and Politics](#), [Banking and Finance](#), [Technology and Telecom](#)