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### **Five Arkansas Two-Year Colleges Make Fastest-Growing List**

LITTLE ROCK – Five Arkansas two-year colleges were recently named among the “Fastest-Growing Public Two-Year Colleges” by *Community College Week*.

For colleges with fewer than 2,500 students, Arkansas State University-Newport ranked 9<sup>th</sup>, Arkansas State University-Mountain Home ranked 31<sup>st</sup>, and South Arkansas Community College ranked 36<sup>th</sup>. National Park Community College ranked 7<sup>th</sup> for colleges with enrollments between 2,500 and 4,999. NorthWest Arkansas Community College ranked 25<sup>th</sup> for colleges with enrollments between 5,000 and 9,999. The top 50 colleges were named in each size category. Rankings were based on percent change in headcount from Fall 2007 to Fall 2008 according to the U.S. Department of Education.

While this ranking was based on Fall 2008 enrollments, two-year colleges across the state experienced record enrollment for Fall 2009. Statewide, 59,696 students enrolled in Arkansas two-year colleges, an increase of 10% over the previous year.

“Two-year colleges in Arkansas have been growing steadily for over ten years,” says Dr. Ed Franklin, Executive Director of the Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges (AATYC). “Now, with the downturn in the economy, Arkansans are experiencing layoffs at a higher rate, and they are taking this opportunity to further their education or re-train for a different career.”

Dr. Franklin states that Arkansans are realizing that “education beyond high school is essential to being successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” Two-year colleges offer state-of-the-art programs to prepare people for the jobs of the future. They have some of the lowest tuition rates in the state, and they are located throughout Arkansas, making it convenient for students who are place-bound by family or other responsibilities.

Many of the industries that are projected to expand require a two-year degree or less. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 45% of job openings will be in these middle-skill occupations, such as health care workers, computer specialists, and skilled construction workers. Two-year colleges work closely with local business and industry to ensure they are offering cutting-edge programs to meet these projected demands.

Arkansas two-year colleges are collaborating with each other to develop regional and sectoral strategies for economic development in all areas of the state. One example is the newly formed AATYC Heart of Arkansas Training (HART) Consortium. The Consortium is a partnership between six central Arkansas two-year colleges to provide “green” industry training and to inject “green” methods into existing technical programs. Other consortium efforts include entrepreneurship, health care, and aerospace.

For more information, contact the Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges at 501-371-0404.

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