

A-B Tech EDUCATION Journal

FALL 2025



A-B Tech Everywhere: Bringing Education to Our Community

Engineering Alum Finds
Asheville Music Tools

The Sky's the Limit for
Female Aviation Graduate

ABTech
Community College

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Publisher
President John Gossett

Managing Editor
Kerri Glover

Writers
Kristin D'Agostino
Kerri Glover

Graphic Designer
Don Perkins

Photography
Don Perkins
Josh Weaver
Kristin D'Agostino

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Student Government Association President
Robert Uhren

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A Message from the President



Dr. John Gossett

A year ago, I probably would not have imagined that this fall would be one of our best yet. We were dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, assisting the community, and reopening the college. But in only a year, with Helene in the rearview mirror, I'm proud to say A-B Tech is thriving.

In October, A-B Tech was named one of the nation's top 200 community colleges by the Aspen Institute, which means we are among the top 5 percent of 4,387 U.S. community colleges! We're now eligible to compete for the 2027 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the nation's premier award for two-year colleges. The Aspen Institute looks at a variety of student outcome data, such as retention, completion, transfer, bachelor's degree attainment, and job placement. We are moving forward with phase two of the Aspen Prize process but are honored to have made the initial list because it recognizes our efforts on behalf of our A-B Tech students, alumni, and community. We exist to serve them and improve their quality of life and economic opportunities. I'm also proud that it recognizes the efforts of our faculty and staff who do the work.

Earlier this fall, A-B Tech completed the most intensive phase of the 10-year reaffirmation of our accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) with "zero recommendations". That may not mean much outside of higher education, but it's rare that evaluators completed their assessment without giving us feedback on where we can improve on hundreds of compliance review standards. While we always strive to get better, I'm proud that peer reviewers found that A-B Tech is doing a great job of serving our students. The reaccreditation process will be finalized this spring.

Looking to the future, A-B Tech partnered this fall with the Land of Sky Regional Council, Buncombe County, and others to apply for an Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant to fund a 70,000 square foot facility called the "Futures Factory" at Biltmore Park West. The education and research facility will provide on-site education and workforce training and research in support of manufacturing throughout western NC.

Finally, this issue of the Education Journal showcases our efforts to provide outreach and educational opportunities throughout our service area of Buncombe and Madison counties. A-B Tech has something for everyone, from high school students earning free college credit to adults seeking degrees or workforce training to retirees taking community enrichment classes. We hope to see you at one of our locations soon.

Sincerely,

John Gossett
President



RISE Culture of Service Statement

A-B Tech commits to demonstrating an inclusive and welcoming culture of respect, integrity and support for everyone.



A-B Tech's Geomatics Technology Program Offers Students a Chance to Help Rebuild the Local Landscape

When Hurricane Helene hit Western North Carolina, floodwaters rose high above riverbanks and streams, shifting long-established waterways and land. In the aftermath, an increased demand for land surveyors led to the revival of A-B Tech's Geomatics Technology program, which had been closed a few years ago due to declining interest.

The Geomatics program is training local students to re-establish property boundaries as they existed before the storm. Whether studying for a certificate or a two-year degree, students acquire on the job skills they can immediately put to use in the community.

Geomatics instructor Chris Milan described this exciting field as one that combines public service with evidence-gathering and map-making. The terms "geomatics" and "surveying" are interchangeable. Surveyors, he said, are experts at measuring points on, above and below the earth's surface. They may be part of a crew that includes engineers, landscape architects and urban planners. Surveyors perform many tasks, including protecting property boundaries, creating subdivisions, and performing surveys for construction planning.

"One thing I love about this field is our allegiance to protect the public," Milan said. "We get called if two neighbors are fighting about a property line. But, if I'm surveying for my client, I'm also working for the neighbor. Our job isn't to determine ownership. It's to protect the property and welfare of both parties."

There currently is a great need for surveyors because many local properties were defined by rivers and streams that were shifted by Helene floodwaters. From highways to residential projects, Milan said surveyors in western North Carolina face a unique challenge.

"If you go to bed the night before and then the river moves 20 feet over, does the boundary line move with it?" Milan asked. "No; a surveyor's job is to place the boundary back where it was before Helen hit. We look at aerial photography and physical evidence like deeds and we fit the puzzle pieces back together."

A-B Tech offers a Geomatics Technology AAS degree and a short-term certificate program. The Geomatics Technology and Land Surveying certificate offers students five classes and a mix of experience both with surveying and AutoCAD design software. After completing the certificate, students are qualified to work as surveying technicians or instrument operators in the public and private sectors. Surveying technicians perform fieldwork under the supervision of a Professional Land Surveyor (PLS).

A-B Tech's Geomatics degree prepares students for licensure and to become crew leaders or survey CAD technicians. After five years of working under a PLS, they must pass one state exam and two national exams before being eligible to work as a PLS, which oversees employee training, processing data, field work and research. According to Milan, every firm needs at least one PLS at the helm and many have 10 to 15.

A-B Tech student David Turner, 54, recently enrolled to get his degree after more than three decades working in the field. He currently runs land survey services in the southeast region for Resource Environmental Solutions (RES) and serves as a volunteer for the North Carolina Society of Surveyors. The degree will qualify him to receive his licensure in states with more stringent requirements. At RES, Turner works with his wife, Lissa Turner, an A-B Tech geomatic technology alum who is a PLS.

A-B Tech student Rachel Zaiken, 25, said she found her way into surveying unexpectedly, while at a career crossroads. She was taking a gap year when friends told her about a surveyor they had hired to help establish boundaries on their land. She shadowed an A-B Tech surveying class and was instantly hooked.

To apply, students need to take English and Math placements tests, which they can do at any time before spring semester classes start in January. Scholarships also are available through the N.C. Society of Surveyors. Learn more at abtech.edu/geomatics.



Purpose in the Storm: Small Business Resilience After Helene

In the year since Hurricane Helene, we have all been inundated with unsettling adjectives used to describe its impact. Words like devastation, catastrophic, debilitating, crippling, and violent haven't done a lot

to put us at ease. We all know someone who has been impacted by Helene in some way.

But we've also witnessed an outpouring of community support in epic proportions. People have been forced out of their comfort zones and tried things that have been foreign to them, sometimes out of curiosity and many times out of necessity, allowing them to acquire new skills and gain confidence.

Small business owners were no different. Helene forced them to address infrastructure issues, scrutinize their financials, and learn how to budget.

At the **A-B Tech Small Business Center**, we see hundreds of clients each year and almost all of them were impacted by the storm. Some didn't survive, but the ones that prospered had several things in common: vision, a clear mission, and resilience.

Asheville Tea Company owner Jessie Dean, a long-time SBC client, put it this way: "I don't think that frustration is my 'go to' emotion. For me, I was in crisis management mode. I was trying to figure out and strategize what we needed to do to move forward as a brand. I felt an overwhelming amount of support from our community."

Asheville Tea had lost its brand-new building and equipment that still had debt on it and the company was in no position to repurchase, but Jessie didn't panic. Profoundly, she spoke of doubling down on the company's mission and vision. Jessie and her team pressed forward and continue to support sustainability and reducing the negative impacts of climate change. She said now there is an even greater sense of urgency to forge ahead. The storm has also made Jessie see the need to continuously advocate for larger scale state and federal funding. Her company was able to survive because it has a much deeper purpose: selling tea is the mechanism for accomplishing a much larger goal.

Another Small Business Center client in Black Mountain also was able to weather the storm. Mary Beth Benton, founder of **Auntie M's Pet Care**, has had a love for animals her entire life. Caring for and protecting animals is in her blood and, academically, she earned an Animal Science degree from Ohio State University. Initially, Mary Beth thought that she would have to pivot her business to address a shift in community needs. She felt that she owed it to her community, but also was concerned that no one would need pet care at that time; and I agreed. Boy, were we wrong!

Mary Beth soon started getting calls from clients who had left their pets and livestock behind. She even got a phone call from someone who needed help with their chickens. We spoke about

grant opportunities and other forms of capital. Just as she did during the Covid pandemic, Mary Beth forged ahead and was able to push through without any subsidies. The business had its challenges. The difference is that Mary Beth and her team are a family, and they do the work because they have a deep love for animals.

By the end of the year, Mary Beth had regrouped and was able to add dog training to her scope of services. We both learned that Auntie M's Pet Care provides an essential service that was granted essential status in our state. Events like COVID-19 and Hurricane Helene can actually provide a boost to an essential business, as they did for hers.

Quetzal Jordan's **Skills Academy for Women (S.A.W.)** is another example of a business that leads with purpose. Quetzal utilizes her business as a mechanism that, as her website states, "bridges the gender gap in trade skills by providing women the tools and opportunities they need to succeed." It is a hands-on educational initiative focused on empowering women and marginalized communities through trade skill training and community engagement.

Quetzal's background includes prior work for an initiative providing a different menu of trade skills. Particularly focusing on earth skills, permaculture and natural living. S.A.W.'s model is different in that it reaches a different target audience using a different training format. From day one, Quetzal's vision was clear. I knew she was going to do her business, with or without me.

Prior to the storm, Quetzal had some struggles finding community partners and space, but it didn't stop her. She continuously spoke at community events, met with resource providers and community leaders, registered for and participated in programs, reached out to potential sponsors, and explored ways to access capital.

Once the storm hit, S.A.W. had to regroup and lean into doing more philanthropic work. Since they had necessary skills that were now critical, they were put on the front end of helping local communities with clean up – not because they were told to do so, but because Quetzal knew it was the right thing to do. As a result, people were able to realize how useful these skills are to those who haven't had access to them. Giving even more credence to the saying, "People don't know what they need until they need it."

Quetzal didn't know that Helene would provide the impetus for folks to seek personalized training in skills like chainsaw and power tool operation and safety. S.A.W. has since added personalized trainings delivered at the client's location.

As we reflect on the year since Hurricane Helene, it's clear that resilience, purpose, and community have been the cornerstones of recovery. These success stories remind us that adversity often reveals the strength and depth of our commitments – not just to our businesses, but to the people and values that drive them.

Duane Adams is the Associate Director of the A-B Tech Small Business Center and host of the college's No Limits radio show on WRES 100.7 FM. Learn more at abtech.edu/SBC.

New Student Government Leaders Aim to Build Campus Collaboration



Student Government Association (SGA) leaders for the 2025-26 academic year have prioritized building an in-person student community after years of remote meetings during the Covid pandemic and aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

SGA President Robert Uhren, who already has three A-B Tech degrees and is working on a fourth, said although his current program is made up of mostly online classes, he is a big proponent of face-to-face connection on campus.

"I grew up with in-person classes. You can't talk about ideas and learn about each other online. When you have in-class conversations, you can build potential references or meet people you could collaborate with," he said.

SGA Vice President Barbara Garcia-Martinez agrees. She feels the best way to reach students is through campus activities that provide space for unwinding and socializing after class. Events like these, she said, are a great way to get to know fellow students. Her goal is to create a welcoming and vibrant environment on campus, where students can get the most out of their college experience.

"You can take the time to talk to them and see if they have struggles to overcome or suggestions for improvement," she said. "Based on that shared space and doing something mindless, you get an idea of what people are going through."

Both Uhren and Garcia-Martinez are energetic, serious students who see their SGA roles as a way to help their fellow students. Just a few months into their tenure, attendance at SGA meetings and events is increasing and students are forming new clubs and organizations.

When the pandemic ended, Uhren was at a crossroads. He'd been working as a financial manager for Tiltworks, Inc., an Arden-based firm that provided costumes and apparel to companies like Disney and Warner Brothers. But his remote job had become predictable, and he was tired of working alone at home. Craving a new career that would draw on his love for computers and video game modification, Uhren enrolled in A-B Tech's Software and Web Development program. He previously graduated from A-B Tech in 2018 with degrees in Electrical Engineering Technology, Computer Engineering Technology, and Electrical Systems Technology.

In his SGA role, Uhren also hopes to introduce a new online chat app that would allow students to chat with each other or to contact an SGA representative directly with questions or ideas. It's still in the planning stages, but Uhren hopes to test the app soon with SGA members.

Garcia-Martinez is a second-year student studying Chemical Engineering. After graduating high school, she took several years off to decide what she wanted to do and, during that time, worked as a tile setter for her father's business, Rosas Marble and Tile in Asheville. The flooring experience she gained there has helped in her current part-time position at Lowe's, where she works in sales in the flooring department.

After considering interior design and architecture, Garcia-Martinez ultimately chose to major in chemical engineering because she'd like to transfer to a university to study medicine. Both her sister and her cousin have Cystic Fibrosis, a genetic disorder that results in a compromised immune system. "I would like to research medications to be able to help people who have this (disease) lead an easier life," she said.

Garcia-Martinez also works to keep the campus food pantry and clothing donation closet stocked and said it's important for students to know about the many great resources that are available to them on campus.

Learn more at abtech.edu/SGA.



A-B Tech's Health and Fitness Program Prepares Graduates for Varied Careers

From teaching Zumba classes to coaching people on health and exercise, A-B Tech's Health and Fitness Science degree prepares graduates for an array of careers, especially for people who value autonomy and an active lifestyle. The program's graduates own their own businesses and find work in settings including youth camps, fitness clubs and physical therapy clinics.

Graduates of the program also sit for a personal training certificate through the American Council on Exercise (ACE). As of this fall, graduates also earn a certificate that enables them to teach group fitness classes including Zumba, aerobics or spinning.

The two-year program includes an internship in the community as well as hands-on training in classes where students work with individual clients or a group of volunteers in a fitness setting.

According to Health and Fitness Science Chair Rhonda Davidson, the program also offers a new pathway to Appalachian State University's Bachelor's in Exercise Science, which is designed as a basis for a Doctorate in Physical Therapy.

Many students enter the program hoping to become personal trainers, a flexible job for people who enjoy the autonomy of working for themselves. Though some choose to own their own fitness studios, most personal trainers contract with gyms where they rent space. Hours are typically in the morning or evening to accommodate clients' work schedules.



"You can pick the population you work with," Davidson said. "You don't have to work with body builders or heavy weights. You could also work with mothers or the older populations."

The best personal trainers are empathetic and enjoy helping people reach their full potential. They are good at identifying clients' strengths and motivating them to change unhelpful habits.

The U.S. Department of Labor projects a 14 percent increase in personal trainer jobs from 2022 to 2033. Glassdoor.com lists the current salary range between \$56,000 and \$96,000. Stacking other credentials such as yoga or Pilates certification, healthy aging specialist or certified strength and conditioning coach help to boost salary potential.

Nadja Simon, a 2017 graduate, obtained most of the credentials and presently uses them in her own fitness studio, North Asheville-based Allon Health and Wellness.

Simon said A-B Tech's program gave her the confidence and experience she needed to venture out on her own after a couple years working for a local fitness facility. "You come out of the program ready to train clients and work with people," she said.

Learn more about A-B Tech's Health and Fitness Science program at abtech.edu/health-and-fitness or call 828.398.7900..



Asheville Music Tools Embraces Analog Sound in a Digital World

As a boy growing up in Minneapolis, A-B Tech electronics engineering alumnus Rick Shaich, who goes by the name “Hawker”, loved playing guitar and tinkering with electronics. He found the perfect mix of both when he built his first guitar pedal from salvaged TV and military surplus parts at age 12 and began shaping his own musical sound.

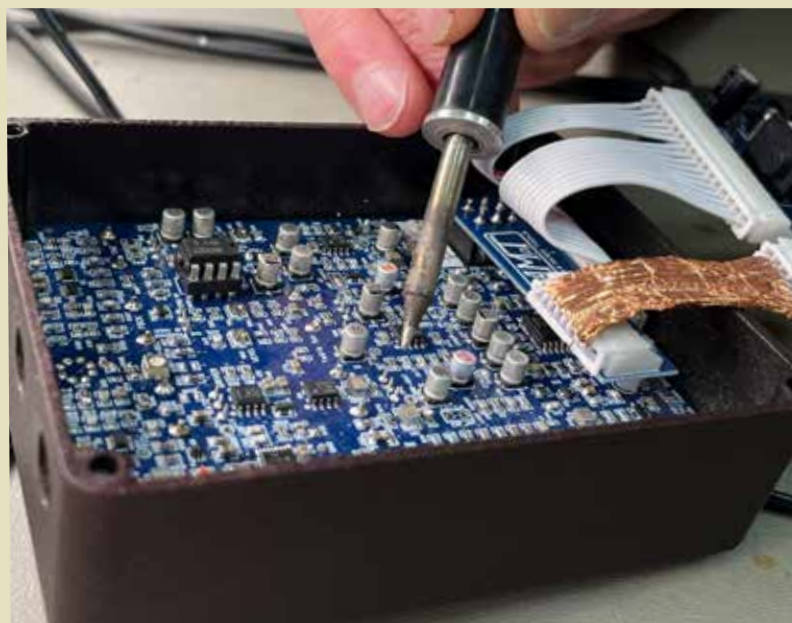
“I knew I wanted to do that for a living,” Hawker said. “I just didn’t know how.” More than four decades later, Hawker, the founder of Asheville Music Tools (AMpT), has crafted a life grounded in his childhood dream: building guitar pedals that allow musicians to contort traditional sounds into echoes, gritty fuzz and other effects.

The sound engineer moved his business into the A-B Tech Small Business Incubation Program in Candler last July.

As a young adult, Hawker tried his hand at college, but dropped out, believing it was overpriced and impractical. Then he heard about A-B Tech’s electronics engineering program, which offered hands-on experience with instructors working in the field. He enrolled in 1991 and thrived in his classes. After graduating, he moved to southern Vermont while his partner attended law school. After a brief job search, he landed a position as engineering technician for Allied Electronic Services, a company that made control boards for large industrial equipment.

“With my two-year engineering degree, I was more capable than (other job applicants) from Georgia Tech and MIT because I had more real-world industry knowledge,” he said. “Those MIT guys learned theoretical stuff, not the important stuff.”

After three years in Vermont, Hawker returned to North Carolina and settled with his partner in Wilmington, where he worked for a music industry consulting business designing circuit boards and electronics. It was





the late '90s, and the musical landscape was changing as musicians began to experiment with a wider range of new digital effects. By the early 2000s, the trend shifted toward a warmer organic sound created by analog effects pedals, with Asheville's Bob Moog and his commercial synthesizer at the heart of the movement. Hawker had an interview with Moog in the early '90s, but at the time the job wasn't a good fit. After several years of consulting, he tried again and it paid off. "They needed someone for a product with my background in manufacturing and engineering," he said. "I made less than I had consulting, but I had my dream job."

Hawker worked for Moog Music from 2007-2016. During

gave a shoutout to the pedal's creator, "one of Bob's contemporaries", and seemingly just like that, Asheville Music Tools was born. "It was enough credibility for us to sell enough pre-orders and launch the business," Hawker said.

To build a stronger base, he joined forces with friend and fellow design engineer John Snyder of Electronic Audio Experiments. The two merged their businesses and began swapping marketing and engineering skills under the name Hyper Triangle, Inc.

Launching during the pandemic also helped the business succeed. "When people are forced to stay at home and quarantine, they apparently buy more stuff," Hawker said. "And when they are musicians, that 'stuff' is cool guitar pedals."

Hawker, who was building his pedals in a West Asheville friend's basement studio, soon began selling them faster than he could make them. It was time to move to a larger space. Hawker heard about the Small Business Incubator Program from a friend and applied. His current setup offers space for a manufacturing and design lab, shipping and receiving area, and offices for four staff who previously worked remotely.

Business has been building steadily. AMT sells most products wholesale to shops and dealers around the world, with online sales accounting for a smaller percentage. Pedals are sold locally at Heyday Musical Instruments and Repair on Lexington Avenue. AMT also has built a loyal fanbase among musicians, including The Pixies, A-ha, and The War on Drugs.

David Hartley, lead guitarist for The War on Drugs and a West Asheville resident, said the world of guitar pedals has come to resemble the craft beer aisle at a supermarket. With strange, attention-grabbing names and esoteric packaging, it's hard to tell what the pedal itself delivers. But AMT pedals are different, he said.

"Sonically, these pedals are really reactive and deep. They can go in so many different directions ... and are stuffed to the gills with analog circuitry. What I'm saying is: most pedal companies spend their time and money on what's on the outside of the pedal. Hawker and the gang are working on what's going on inside."

To see a video of Hawker and his workspace, visit abtech.edu/asheville-music-tools.

KEEP CURRENT: Learn more about the A-B Tech Small Business Center and Incubation Program at abtech.edu/SBC.



this time, he designed and built both synthesizers and guitar pedals, including an analog delay pedal, the Moogerfooger MF-104M, which soon became an industry standard. Though Hawker admired Moog's classic analog aesthetic, at times he found it constricting. "I had to confine my designs to the Moog format as well as Bob's way of doing things," he said.

In 2016, Hawker left Moog Music and returned to consulting work, but finding consistent work had grown more difficult. Meanwhile, he envisioned branching off to design his own music products. In 2020, he finally took a leap and built a website advertising his first pedal: the ADG Analog Delay.

"I took a big risk," he said. "I built a prototype. And I gave those prototypes to influential people I knew."

One of those people was synthesizer expert and former Moog Music marketing manager Chris Stack. Stack used the pedal while playing a Moog Foundation Fundraiser live streamed on YouTube. At the end of the show, he



Sandra Brown, Andrew McKinney and Sherri Davis with the Trailblazer Express bus meeting Local prospective students in Madison County.

A-B Tech Everywhere: Bringing Education to Our Community



A-B Tech's designated service area in the NC Community College System covers a vast expanse of western North Carolina that includes 660 square miles and 281,631 people in Buncombe County and 451.49 square miles and 21,640 people in Madison County. Needless to say, it can be challenging to determine the best ways to conduct

outreach and deliver education throughout the area, which includes Asheville, many smaller cities and towns, and remote, rural communities.

"A-B Tech's footprint spans mountain city neighborhoods, river valleys, and ridge-line communities, each with unique needs such as transportation, connectivity, housing, and work-schedule realities," said Vice President of Student Services Fairley Patton. "Being of service to every member of our area and being everywhere to assist that community means shifting from a single campus to a network of touchpoints: high schools, libraries, community centers, and mobile services."

Patton's staff is responsible for outreach, recruiting, advising, and other services that A-B Tech aims to provide at many locations in addition to the main campus in Asheville, which may not be accessible for people living in communities such as Hot Springs or Barnardsville. As a result, her team spends a lot of time on the road.

"Our recruiters and outreach staff attend college and career fairs, high school events, community festivals, and employer sites, in addition to hosting events," said Enrollment Services Director Sandra Brown. "We also partner with organizations such as NCWorks, MANNA FoodBank, and the SPARC Foundation, which allows us to connect with adult learners and families who might not otherwise engage with the college."

Last year, the college also converted a small passenger bus into a mobile enrollment lab dubbed the Trailblazer Express Bus.

"The Trailblazer Express bus has been transformative," Brown said. "It brings our enrollment services team directly to communities that face transportation or technology barriers. With laptops, iPads, printers, and Starlink Wi-Fi, we can help students complete their applications, residency determination, and FAFSA on-site."

"This effort is about building relationships in the community so that education feels approachable and local, not distant or intimidating. The bus makes higher education visible and accessible – people can literally see college coming to them. Our outreach model shows that community colleges are more than campuses, they're partners in every neighborhood. Whether





Sherri Davis with Plumbing instructor Greg Meadows by the Mobile Trades Academy Trailer

it's a high school cafeteria, a career fair, an open house, a downtown festival, or a rural market, we're showing that education can truly happen everywhere."

A-B Tech also seeks to understand what various communities want and need in terms of connection and education, Patton said.

"In truth, success across our area looks different by zip code," she said. "Some areas might need evening hours and quick onboarding, while remote areas might need transportation solutions, mobile admissions assistance, and stronger high-school pipelines. Opportunity doesn't live at a single address, so we focus on meeting our community where they are."

That may mean hosting FAFSA nights and Saturdays for working students, admissions assistance through the Trailblazer Bus, or education where

students need it – on location at a community center, in the evening, online, or through the Continuing Education and Workforce Development Division's Mobile Skills Trade trailer. The trailer was, in part, an outcome of listening sessions conducted in remote areas of Madison County that found residents wanted plumbing and other classes delivered in their communities.

Patton's team also includes college advisors and liaisons based at area high schools to assist with dual enrollment, admissions, financial aid, scholarship applications, and career-pathway mapping, along with school counselors and career development coordinators. "We know we're not just recruiting students; we're onboarding the region's future workforce, and that drives our work daily," she said.

As a result of embedding outreach and services in the community, Patton said,

"A-B Tech is starting to see higher FAFSA completion rates, faster turnaround from curious to enrolled, and stronger engagement overall with the members of our community because services are local and

familiar. Every stop is a promise: if you can meet us here, we can move you forward."

Brown also noted that A-B Tech has seen more bilingual and first-generation college students in recent years. "This diversity pushes us to make sure our staff communications, materials, and outreach efforts are accessible, culturally responsive, and bilingual whenever possible," she said.

Recruiter and high school liaison Becky Garland spends most of her time at high schools or in the community with prospective students, and she relishes her role.

"Driving into the far corners of Madison County aboard the Trailblazer Express Bus is always a joy," she said. "The people are as beautiful as the mountain scenery. At each stop, we meet folks of all ages, backgrounds, and interests. We answer questions about everything from enrolling in classes and financial aid to program options and personal enrichment courses. And often, we simply sit and talk about the community's rich history, the area's unique character, and the long line of families who have trusted A-B Tech to help them build their futures."

"Each time the Trailblazer Bus rolls into our mountain communities, it carries more than information. It brings opportunity, connection, and a heartfelt promise that even in our most rural areas, A-B Tech is here for you – present, committed, and ready to serve. That mission fuels our work every single day."

Learn more at abtech.edu/welcome.





Flight instructor Taylor Rice at the controls



Flight instructor Taylor Rice with her

The Sky's the Limit for A-B Tech Aviation Alumnus Taylor Rice

When aviation instructor Taylor Rice points her nose to the horizon, nothing can stop her from reaching her goals. Over the past four years, the 22-year-old has completed an Aviation Career Pilot Technology degree at A-B Tech, become a flight instructor, and been acquiring flight hours to qualify as a commercial airline pilot. Rice recently became the first female A-B Tech aviation graduate to receive a job offer from a major airline. She was conditionally hired by PSA Airlines, a subsidiary of American Airlines, subject to completing additional flight hours and is on track to become a First Officer in 2026.

Rice became interested in flying as a child watching a TV show with her dad that investigated plane crashes. At first, she wanted to be a flight attendant. Then, at age 16, a job at a local pet store changed her mind about working in customer service. "I had people yelling at me over cat food, (and) realized how mean they could be," she said.

Rice attended an A-B Tech Aviation open house as a high school student and enrolled in the program after graduating in 2021. At the time, she still wasn't certain she wanted to be a pilot, but an A-B Tech "Discovery flight", designed to let students experience flying a small plane, sealed the deal.

During that flight, the instructor performed some moves that won Rice's adventurous heart. "He brought the nose of the plane up to slow down, then pushed it forward real fast so you got the sensation of floating in your seat," she said. "I looked at my dad then and said, 'This is it!'"

Rice graduated from A-B Tech in 2023 and has earned both a FAA certified flight instructor license (CFI) and instrument flight instructor (CFII) license. She is currently a flight instructor for WNC Aviation, which is A-B Tech's flight instruction partner.

Rice said she enjoys teaching almost as much as flying. As an empathetic person and skilled communicator, relating to nervous first-time students is second nature. "I try to understand how my students learn best and then whatever we have to do to get their license, we will," she said.

Timothy Anderson, chair of A-B Tech's Aviation Department, said Rice is one of the most requested flight instructors. "She's calm, confident and always ready to go, just like you'd want your airline pilot to be," he said.

Despite the many joys of flying, being a female pilot in a male-dominated field can be challenging. Over the years, Rice said she's met a few men who feel that women shouldn't become pilots, though most men she's flown with have been supportive.

There also have been financial challenges. Rice, who was in her high school band, has had to sell three saxophones over the years to help cover the cost of flight training. A scholarship from A-B Tech also helped cover the cost of college.

Through the ups and downs of her journey, Rice has regularly leaned on her family for support. Living at home with her parents in Fletcher helped make college



student Satyavan Malpani



affordable. Her dad also has been an inspiration, encouraging his daughter's passion and accompanying her on a flight to Gastonia to get her initial instructor license.

"My dad loves planes as much as I do," she said. "He understands what I'm talking about when I come home and say, 'Guess what happened today?' We are similar personality wise, and I've always looked up to him."

"I have poured my entire life into aviation as a student pilot," Rice said. "Hours of study, flight instructor training. It's reassuring to know I've got a job lined up."

Learn more at abtech.edu/aviation.



Hannah Strubberg in the pilot seat and private pilot Brittani Austin as co-pilot in new flight simulator.



A-B Tech Introduces Sports Management Program

From coaching community sports to planning events and managing concessions, businesspeople are the driving force behind sporting events. A new two-year Sports Management degree at A-B Tech provides students with the skills needed to enter the field. The program also offers an online certificate that enables graduates to begin working in associate roles after completing only 18 credits.

Sports Management is not just about sports, said Business Administration Chair Brad Scott. Skills acquired in the program can be widely applied to Asheville's vibrant community, qualifying students to work as facilities managers, sports event planners, sports marketing specialists, and more.

"Everyone says 'I want to manage the Carolina Panthers,'" Scott said. "What we forget is that our community has bike trails and many events. When they leave, (graduates) will feel confident that they could design a 5K race, work with the YMCA to support community sports, or manage a basketball arena so it can bring in event revenue. This is having real world impact in [the things] we believe in here in Asheville."

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), entertainment and sports occupations could see up to 13 percent growth in the next few years, more than twice the average for all occupations. Convention and event planners may see an 18 percent increase, while coaches and scouts could see as much as a 20 percent increase.

Students in the program acquire a wide range of skills including accounting, business law, marketing, and facilities management. The curriculum also includes the growing field of e-sports and online gaming competitions.

Along with classroom learning, the program offers the chance to connect with people working in the field through job shadowing at local events, including basketball games at UNCA's Kimmel Arena and community events such as the Taste of Asheville, a culinary event organized by Asheville Independent Restaurants (AIR) that takes place on A-B Tech's campus.

Scott said graduates will be eligible to work in entry level roles in sports and recreation management or go on to study further in business or sports-related fields.

Learn more at abtech.edu/sports-management.



A-B Tech Instructors Use Campus Apiary to Teach and Protect Bees

Nestled in the heart of A-B Tech's campus, thousands of bees make their home in an apiary tended by English instructor and beekeeper Eric Moellering and Buncombe County Early College science instructor Tom Copeland.

Microbiology instructor Karly Sindy recently made a visit to the bee yard to collect microbe specimens for her pre-nursing and pre-dental hygiene students to analyze under a microscope. This marks the first time in about five years that an A-B Tech instructor has utilized the apiary for instruction. Moellering said he believes the last time campus bees were tied to student learning was when math instructor James Wilson taught a geometry lesson using the hexagonal shapes of honeycomb wax. Retired biology instructor Russ Palmieri also was a beekeeper and co-founder of the apiary who used it for lessons.

Sindy, who has been teaching at the college and managing the biology lab for a year, said she jumped at the opportunity to use the apiary after Moellering recently invited instructors to collaborate. In the past, she said, her students have drawn spore samples from campus buildings, including doorknobs and dining area chairs, so the apiary samples provided a welcome change.

Sindy swabbed three hives on a recent fall afternoon and prepared a slide show presentation of her results to show students in an upcoming class. She found a mix of bacteria and fungi spores, both inside and outside the hives, including yeast, the probiotic bacillus and penicillin. "We'll talk about this Monday in class. We're talking about microorganisms and comparing prokaryotes and eukaryotes," she said.



She had expected there would be more microbes living inside the hives. "The lack of diversity in the hive could be due to honey's antimicrobial properties."

Since ancient times, honey has been used to treat wounds because it provides a protective barrier for infection. Honey's antimicrobial properties also create a natural safe haven for bee colonies, enabling vulnerable larva to thrive.

Sindy hopes to do more lab lessons using the apiary, such as analyzing propolis, a resinous substance that bees make from plants and wax. The substance, she said, could be incorporated into a nutrition lesson where students experiment with growing yeast. "We could introduce propolis with sour dough and add in sugar, collagen and oil to see which molecule impacts growth the most."

Moellering said swabbing the apiaries on a regular basis might help protect campus bees from harmful disease.

"If I suspect 'foulbrood' (a bacterial disease), I can have Karly come and sample," he said. "But the (main) idea is to incorporate the apiary in some way with meaningful student work."

Moellering employs a "hands off" approach to beekeeping: He doesn't treat his hives to prevent disease and prefers to let the bees "be". He also prefers to leave the honey for the bees to feed on over the winter months, collecting only a minimal amount in spring.

Sindy's recent trip to the bee yard is symbolic of regrowth and resilience. Last January, the college's hives were all destroyed by bears who broke through the apiary's electric fence. "I had kept the bears at bay for nearly seven years with the fence," Moellering said. "But the system broke down in January 2024 and that's when (bears) got in and destroyed all the hives."

Moellering was able to replenish the hives in spring 2024 by catching swarms using "bait hives", artificial nests used to attract swarms on campus and near his West Asheville home.

Moellering said he hopes other science instructors will incorporate the apiary into field projects. Social sciences instructors could teach about colony communication and reproduction. And a humanities instructor might use the bee yard visit to spark a discussion on bee behavior.

"The honeybee colony is 'poetic' in the truest sense of the word," he said. "Thoreau wrote, 'the keeping of bees is like the direction of sunbeams'."

Learn more at abtech.edu/apiary.

News Briefs

Culinary Team Brings Home the Gold

A-B Tech's 2025 student culinary team won second place with a gold medal at the American Culinary Federation National (ACF) Championship in Las Vegas in July. This is the second year in a row that the team has won an ACF gold medal at nationals. Team members were Ezrahan Hanson (captain), Carolina Salas Montano, Jack Ramsey, Martin Deyman, and Joshua Jimison. The chef coaches were Michelle Bailey and Stephen Hertz.



A-B Tech's Future Business Leaders of America Prepare for a Year of Service

A group of 14 students have formed a new group new chapter of the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) and will compete at the state leadership conference in March in Charlotte, which will include competitive events, special-interest sessions, an awards banquet, and social activities.

Led by Artificial Intelligence student Kavic Carter, the group recently earned a Gold Star Award from the state after fulfilling eight required tasks, including publicizing their new chapter and conducting in-person planning sessions. They were one of eight chapters to receive the recognition out of 22 active chapters in North Carolina.

A-B Tech Madison Launches The County Line Radio Show

A-B Tech Madison's The County Line radio show launched in August in collaboration with wART 95.5 FM Radio. Hosted by Sherri Davis and Andrew McKinney, the show is broadcast bi-weekly at 8:00 a.m. on Thursdays. Listen on the radio or visit wartfm.org to listen live or download the wART app. Learn more at abtech.edu/county-line.



News Briefs

Faculty Senate and Staff Association Elect 2025-26 Officers

Faculty Senate officers are Cathy Horton, president; Jennifer Browning, vice president; and Caroline Diepenbrock, secretary. Mike Philbrick; Molly McKeown; Ani Volkan, Erin DeBruyn, Wesley Feight, Rachael Tipson, Deanna Littrell, Jennifer Picher, Tipton Dillingham, Whitney Joy, Audra Bassett-Touchell, and Veronica Dooley also serve on the executive committee.

Staff Association officers are Christina Spetz, president, Celina Uribe, vice president; and Sophia Lind, secretary/treasurer.



Cathy Horton



Christina Spetz



More Than a Job Team Honored with Resilience in Action Award

A-B Tech's More Than a Job-NC (formerly STEP) team received the "Resilience In Action Award" from the NC Community College System for demonstrating exceptional perseverance, adaptability, and strength in the face of challenges. Pictured (L to R) are Helen Jenny, Christi Cortese and Fabiola Cunningham. Learn more at abtech.edu/morethanajobnc.

Campus Events

Autumn in Asheville, October 16



Fall Festival, September 23



Campus **Events**

Calendar of Events

December 22 - January 2 **Winter Break**

January 12 **Spring Semester begins**

January 19 **Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday**

February 2 - March 13 **Allied Health & Nursing Application Period**

February 3 **Allied Health & Nursing Open House**

April 6 - 11 **Spring Break**

May 16 **Commencement**

Learn more at **abtech.edu/calendar**.



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