

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION**

NO.: BHE 26-48

BOARD DATE: April 7, 2026

**APPROVAL OF LETTER OF INTENT OF NORTHERN ESSEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO AWARD
THE ASSOCIATE OF APPLIED SCIENCE IN SURGICAL TECHNOLOGY FOR FAST TRACK REVIEW**

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education (BHE) has evaluated the Letter of Intent of **Northern Essex Community College** to award the **Associate of Applied Science in Surgical Technology** and has determined that the proposal aligns with BHE criteria. Accordingly, the BHE authorizes the Commissioner to review the program and to make a final determination on degree granting authority pursuant to the Fast-Track review protocol.

VOTED: Motion adopted by the BHE on 4/7/2026.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Section 9(b); AAC 18-40

Contact: Richard Riccardi, Sc.D., Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
2026
Northern Essex Community College
Letter of Intent
Associate of Applied Science in Surgical Technology**

DEGREE TITLE ABSTRACT ON INTENT AND MISSION OF PROGRAM

The purpose of the Surgical Technology Program at Northern Essex Community College is to educate and prepare diverse, professionally competent, and highly skilled Surgical Technologists to meet the needs of hospitals and surgical services within the Greater Lawrence area, southern New Hampshire and Central Massachusetts. However, the mission of Northern Essex does not end there. The student will be taught the Surgical Technology Code of Ethics, the Patient Bill of Rights, the principles of quality assurance, and the importance of safety and infection control associated with all the acquired skills.

The proposed Associate of Applied Science in Surgical Technology was approved by Northern Essex's Board of Trustees on December 3, 2025. The LOI was circulated on January 15, 2026. No comments were received.

A. ALIGNMENT WITH MASSACHUSETTS GOALS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Address Gaps in Opportunity and Achievement in Alignment with Campus-Wide Goals

The proposed degree program directly addresses institutional gaps in opportunity and achievement by expanding access to a high-demand healthcare career through an accelerated, workforce-aligned academic pathway. Designed to serve both traditional and non-traditional learners, the program supports students who are often underrepresented in higher education— including first-generation college students, working adults, and individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds—by offering a clear, affordable, and time-efficient route to employment.

Program or Department Supports to Ensure Student Retention and Completion

The proposed degree program is part of the Division of Health Professions at Northern Essex and is supported by faculty and staff dedicated to promoting student success across health professions programs. To ensure student persistence and completion, Northern Essex has hired a Program Coordinator specifically for the proposed degree program. The Program Coordinator provides individualized guidance, monitors student progress, and serves as a consistent point of contact to support students throughout their academic and clinical experience.

Students in the proposed degree program also have access to a comprehensive support network, including a Health Professions Advisor, academic coaches, and tutors, who assist with academic planning, skill development, and preparation for both coursework and national certification exams. These supports are integrated into the program structure to help students navigate program requirements, develop competency in clinical skills, and address any academic or non-academic challenges that may arise.

Additionally, the proposed degree program employs a cohort-based model, which fosters peer support, accountability, and a sense of community. Faculty actively engage with students through regular check-ins, early alerts, and individualized remediation plans to ensure mastery of required skills and knowledge. Clinical placements are coordinated and monitored closely, with faculty and preceptors providing guidance to help students successfully complete required clinical hours.

Alliances and Partnerships with PK-12, Other IHE's, Community Employers

The proposed degree program at Northern Essex maintains and plans to expand strategic partnerships across PK-12 education, higher education institutions, and the employer community to strengthen pathways, workforce alignment, and program quality.

PK-12 Partnerships

Northern Essex collaborates with local high schools, career and technical education (CTE) programs (i.e., Greater Lawrence Vocational High School and Whittier Vocational Technical High school, and early college initiatives to provide exposure to health professions careers, dual enrollment opportunities, and early college credit for students interested in surgical technology. These partnerships help create an informed pipeline of students who are prepared and motivated to enter the proposed degree program.

Higher Education Partnerships

The proposed degree program explores articulation agreements with other colleges and universities to support transfer pathways and stackable credentialing. These alliances allow students to continue their education seamlessly from certificate to associate degree programs and beyond, supporting lifelong learning and academic progression.

Employer and Clinical Partnerships

The proposed degree program will maintain strong relationships with local hospitals, surgical centers, and allied health employers to provide clinical placements, hands-on training, and direct pathways to employment. Employers also contribute to curriculum development, ensuring alignment with current workforce needs and competency standards. The Merrimack Valley hosts major healthcare providers (e.g., Lawrence General Hospital, Holy Family Hospital, and Tufts Medicine Lowell), all of which require trained surgical technologists to support surgical services.

Advisory Group

As an accredited program, the proposed degree program is required to convene a program advisory group composed of employers, clinical preceptors, and higher education partners. The advisory group provides guidance on curriculum relevance, emerging industry trends, clinical competencies, and professional standards. Feedback from the advisory group is used to refine course content, update skills labs and simulation exercises, and inform decisions about new clinical partnerships and professional certifications.

Use of Advisory Input

By integrating employer and professional feedback, the proposed degree program ensures that graduates are job-ready, meet industry expectations, and have the skills and credentials needed for immediate workforce entry.

Relationship to MassHire Regional Blueprints

There is a critical need for Surgical Technologists nationwide. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the job growth for Surgical Technologists is 5%, 2024-2034. This is faster than the average job growth. There are approximately 8,700 job openings nationwide on average (bls.gov).

In Massachusetts, there are 2,380 jobs for Surgical Technologists with a Mean wage of \$70,760. In the regions of Boston-Cambridge, Nashua, NH, MA-NH, there are 1,740 employed Surgical Technologists with a mean wage of \$72,760 (bls.gov).

The proposed degree program will help to fill the positions available to meet the needs of the community. Northern Essex will prepare their students for entry-level Surgical Technologist positions within their communities.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2024, April 3). May 2023 National Occupational Employment and wage estimates. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. https://www.bls.gov/oes/2023/may/oes_nat.htm

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025, August 28). Surgical assistants and Technologists. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/surgical-technologists.htm>.

Duplication

Great Bay Community College (Portsmouth, NH) and North Shore Community College (Danvers, MA) both have full-time two-year Surgical Technology Programs. The proposed degree program will differ from the two programs listed. All of Northern Essex's general education requirements will be met during the first two semesters. Surgical Technology requirements will be met during the last three semesters.

Northern Essex has developed a comprehensive program that meets the ARCSTSA standards yet offers a work/life/educational balance for their students. The proposed degree program includes lectures that are hybrid, meeting in person, one day a week. The lab requirements are one eight-hour session each week in person. This puts their students on campus two days a week, providing them more time for family, work, and to meet their educational requirements.

Innovative Approaches to Teaching and Learning

The proposed degree program is intentionally designed to integrate hands-on, experiential, and simulation-based learning approaches to prepare students for real-world surgical environments. Students engage in extensive simulation labs where they practice surgical procedures, sterile techniques, instrumentation, and patient safety protocols in a controlled, supervised setting. These labs provide multiple opportunities for repetitive practice, immediate feedback, and skills mastery before entering clinical rotations.

Clinical Rotations

Students participate in full-scale clinical rotations at local hospitals and surgical centers, applying classroom knowledge and lab skills in authentic surgical environments. These rotations expose students to a variety of procedures, patient populations, and team-based care models, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Integration of Digital and Innovative Tools

The proposed degree program incorporates simulation technology, such as virtual surgical simulations and to enhance learning and allow students to visualize procedures, track progress, and receive data-informed feedback. These innovations increase engagement, support self-paced learning, and prepare students for the technology-driven healthcare environment.

B. ALIGNMENT WITH CAMPUS STRATEGIC PLAN AND MISSION

Goals and Objectives (Form B)

Students will develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to practice as a certified surgical technologist by acquiring fundamental capabilities. Upon completion of the program the Graduate Surgical Technologist shall:

- Correlate the knowledge of medical terminology, anatomy, physiology, pathophysiology, and microbiology to their role as a surgical technologist.
- Demonstrate a safe and professional level of practice and knowledge in their role as a surgical technologist.
- Acquire the ethical, legal, moral, and medical values related to the patient and the surgical team during the perioperative experience.
- Correlate the elements, action, and use of medications and anesthetic agents used during the perioperative experience.
- Value the professional attributes of the surgical technologist.
- Demonstrate the theoretical and practical proficiency in surgical aseptic technique, sterilization methods, surgical procedures and safe patient care practice techniques (including patient transportation, positioning and emergency procedures). (Cognitive, Psychomotor)
- Define the specific uses of equipment, supplies, and instrumentation used for surgical procedures. (Cognitive)
- Display eligibility to sit for the national certification examination for surgical technologists.

C. ALIGNMENT WITH OPERATIONAL AND FINANCIAL OBJECTIVES OF INSTITUTION

Enrollment Projections (Form C)

Northern Essex has set a maximum enrollment capacity (MEC) of 20 students. In Fall 2026, Northern Essex expects lower than the MEC since it will be their first academic. Each subsequent year Northern Essex expects to meet their MEC of 20 students.

The proposed degree program will have a positive impact on enrollment at Northern Essex. Students will be taking prerequisite and general education requirements. Students will utilize the services provided by Northern Essex.

Resources and Financial Statement of Estimated Net Impact on Institution

(Form D, Appendices)

After an initial, one-time investment in materials and facilities, the proposed degree program marginally makes money in its first year, netting approximately \$90,000 for Northern Essex. This lower amount is also due to limitations in first-year enrollment. Once the program reaches its maximum enrollment capacity in year 2, profits substantially increase, with revenues exceeding expenses by a factor of three over the next four years of the proposed degree program.

STAFF REVIEW AND VALIDATION

Staff thoroughly reviewed the **LOI** proposing full degree granting authority for the **Associate of Applied Science in Surgical Technology** program submitted by **Northern Essex Community College**. Staff validate that the **LOI** includes all data required by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education. Staff recommendation is for BHE authorization for the Commissioner to review the program pursuant to the Fast-Track review protocol.

Form A: Curriculum Outline

Required (Core) Courses in the Major (Total # courses required = 16)		
Course Number	Course Title	Credit Hours
ENG101	English Composition I	3
HES102	Learning Strategies for Success in Healthcare Careers	3
BIO121	Anatomy & Physiology I	4
HES115	Medical Terminology	3
ENG102	English Composition II	3
BIO122	Anatomy & Physiology II	4
PSY101	Introduction to Psychology	3
HIS121	World Civilization I	3
SUR102	Microbiology for the Surgical Technology	2
SUR103	Surgical Pharmacology	1
SUR104	Surgical Technology I	5
SUR105	Surgical Technology I Lab	4
SUR116	Surgical Technology II Clinical	6
SUR106	Surgical Technology II Theory	8
SUR107	Surgical Technology III	8
SUR117	CST Review	2
	Sub Total Required Credits	62
Elective Courses (Total # courses required = 1) (attach list of choices if needed)		
MAT 114 or higher	MAT 114 or higher	3-4
	Sub Total Elective Credits	3-4
Distribution of General Education Requirements		# of Gen Ed
Attach List of General Education Offerings (Course Numbers, Titles, and Credits)		Credits
Arts and Humanities, including Literature and Foreign Languages		3
Mathematics and the Natural and Physical Sciences		11-12
Social Sciences		3

<i>Sub Total General Education Credits</i>		17-18
<i>Curriculum Summary</i>		
Total number of courses required for the degree	17	
Total credit hours required for degree	65-66	
<i>Prerequisite, Concentration or Other Requirements:</i>		

Form B: LOI Goals and Objectives

Goal	Measurable Objective	Strategy for Achievement	Timetable
<p>Correlate the knowledge of medical terminology, anatomy, physiology, pathophysiology, and microbiology to their role as a surgical technologist</p>	<p>By program completion, students will apply medical terminology and principles of anatomy, physiology, pathophysiology, and microbiology to perioperative practice, achieving 80% or higher on exams, skills assessments, and clinical evaluations.</p>	<p>These objectives will be achieved through an integrated curriculum that combines classroom instruction, simulation labs, and supervised clinical rotations. Students will demonstrate applied knowledge through case-based learning, surgical simulations, and clinical performance evaluations emphasizing anatomy, disease processes, and infection control.</p>	<p>Ongoing throughout the Surgical Technology Program</p>
<p>Demonstrate a safe and professional level of practice and knowledge in their role as a surgical technologist.</p>	<p>By program completion students will demonstrate safe and professional surgical technologist practice by achieving satisfactory or higher ratings on all clinical performance evaluations and 80% or higher on safety, professionalism, and competency-based skills assessments.</p>	<p>These objectives will be achieved through structured simulation labs, competency check-offs, and supervised clinical rotations emphasizing aseptic technique, patient safety, ethical behavior, and professional communication skills. Student performance will be evaluated using standardized rubrics, skills checklists, and clinical preceptor evaluations.</p>	<p>Ongoing throughout the Surgical Technology Program</p>
<p>Correlate the elements, action, and use of medications and anesthetic agents used during the perioperative experience</p>	<p>By program completion, students will accurately identify and correlate the classification, action, and perioperative use of common medications and anesthetic agents, achieving 80% or higher on medication-related exams, simulation</p>	<p>This objective will be achieved through integrated pharmacology instruction, case-based learning, and perioperative simulations. Students will apply knowledge during lab activities and clinical rotations by recognizing medications and</p>	<p>Ongoing throughout the Surgical Technology Program</p>

	assessments, and clinical evaluations.	anesthetic agents, anticipating their effects, and supporting safe medication practices , with performance evaluated using written exams, simulation rubrics, and clinical preceptor feedback.	
Demonstrate the theoretical and practical proficiency in surgical aseptic technique, sterilization methods, surgical procedures and safe patient care practice techniques (including patient transportation, positioning and emergency procedures)	By program completion, students will demonstrate proficiency in surgical aseptic technique, sterilization methods, surgical procedures, and safe patient care practices by achieving satisfactory or higher ratings on all skills check-offs and clinical evaluations, and 80% or higher on related written and simulation-based assessments	This objective will be achieved through hands-on simulation labs, competency-based skills check-offs, and supervised clinical rotations focusing on aseptic technique, instrument processing, patient transportation and positioning, and emergency response procedures. Student performance will be measured using standardized skills rubrics, simulation evaluations, and clinical preceptor assessments.	Ongoing throughout the Surgical Technology Program
Define the specific uses of equipment, supplies, and instrumentation used for surgical procedures	By program completion, students will accurately identify and explain the use of surgical equipment, supplies, and instrumentation for common surgical procedures, achieving 80% or higher on equipment identification exams, skills check-offs, and clinical performance evaluations	This objective will be achieved through hands-on laboratory instruction, procedure-based simulations, and supervised clinical rotations. Students will practice instrument identification, setup, handling, and troubleshooting in simulated and real perioperative environments, with competency assessed using skills checklists, simulation rubrics, and	Ongoing throughout the Surgical Technology Program

		clinical preceptor evaluations.	
Display eligibility to sit for the national certification examination for surgical technologists	By program completion, 100% of graduates will meet eligibility requirements to sit for the National Certified Surgical Technologist (CST) examination , as verified by program completion records and accreditation standards.	This objective will be achieved by ensuring the program meets all CAAHEP/ARC-STSA curriculum and clinical hour requirements , provides comprehensive exam preparation , and verifies student completion of required coursework, competencies, and clinical experiences. Eligibility will be documented through graduate audits and certification application approvals.	Ongoing: students will demonstrate one they have completed the

Form C: LOI Program Enrollment

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
New Full-Time	20	20	20	20	20
Continuing Full-Time		18	18	18	18
New Part-Time					
Continuing Part-Time					
Enrollment Totals	20	38	38	38	38

Form D: LOI Program Budget

One Time/ Start Up Costs		Annual Expenses				
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
	Cost Categories					
	Full Time Faculty <i>(Salary & Fringe)</i>	\$94,879	\$96,302	\$97,747	\$99,213	\$100,701
	Part Time/Adjunct Faculty <i>(Salary & Fringe)</i>	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
	Staff	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
	General Administrative Costs	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
\$25,000	Instructional Materials, Library Acquisitions	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000
\$150,000	Facilities/Space/Equipment	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
	Field & Clinical Resources	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
	Marketing	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$2,500
\$175,000	Expenses Total	\$114,879	\$116,302	\$115,247	\$116,713	\$118,201

One Time/Start-Up Support		Annual Income				
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
	Revenue Sources					
	Grants	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
	Tuition	\$16,250	\$30,875	\$30,875	\$30,875	\$30,875
	Fees	\$188,550	\$378,725	\$378,725	\$378,725	\$378,725
	Departmental	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
	Reallocated Funds	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
	Other (specify)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
	Income Total	\$204,800	\$409,600	\$409,600	\$409,600	\$409,600