

***Applied Science faculty hit the road to confer degrees
on distance-learning grads.***



“WE TOLD THEM they’d never have to come to campus for anything, and we hold to that promise even through commencement,” says Dr. Leroy Cox of students earning the Bachelor of Applied Science degree from UA Fort Smith at campuses throughout the state. “Plus, we feel it’s important to honor them in their own communities.”

To that end, Cox, hits the road at the end of each semester with Dr. Georgia Hale, dean of the College of Applied Science and Technology, and Stacy Loseke, program coordinator in the Delta region, for a multicity commencement tour, showing up at one graduation ceremony after another to confer degrees on their students. “It’s kind of like ‘have robe, will travel,’” says Cox, who directs the BAS program.

This May, the two visited East Arkansas Community College in Forrest City, the U of A Community College at Batesville, Mid- South Community College in West Memphis, and Phillips Community College of the U of A in Helena. (UA Fort Smith also offers the BAS degree in partnership with seven other colleges in the state.)

In many instances, UA Fort Smith’s unique “completer” program represents the only realistic shot at a baccalaureate degree for working adults bound by jobs, families, or finances to places without four-year colleges nearby. “When you live in Helena, Arkansas, the closest university is three hours up the road, and you know you can’t do that,” says Cox. So UA Fort Smith brings the university to the student, through a combination of online courses and “attending” classes in Fort Smith via live videoconferencing.

The downfall of previous attempts to offer degrees at Arkansas community colleges—particularly in the Delta—was that there often weren’t enough students on a given campus for classes to “make,” leaving students idle. But with new distance-learning technologies and smart administration, remote BAS students—even if there’s only one of them on a given campus—can progress steadily through the program.

Most BAS students—both remote and in Fort Smith—are working adults who already have an Associate of Applied Science degree. They've typically gone as far as they can with the AAS—a technical degree that doesn't dovetail well with traditional B.A. and B.S. degrees—and found themselves professionally stalled for lack of a baccalaureate, while less experienced employees with freshly minted four-year degrees get supervisory positions.

The success stories are numerous— graduates going on to law school and other graduate programs, moving to managerial positions within their companies or more lucrative positions in other organizations, even one who called Cox recently to report that she'd just accepted a new six-figure job.