ASU designs a statewide pipeline for Arizona's anesthesia workforce

By Amanda Goodman, ASU News
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Every surgery, C-section, trauma case and cancer operation in Arizona depends on a clinician administering anesthesia and keeping the patient safe while the surgeon works. The state needs more of these clinicians.

As of September, the Arizona State Board of Nursing lists 1,759 certified registered nurse anesthetists, or CRNAs, in the state. In 2023, Arizona was short 732 nurse anesthetists, and the shortage is projected to reach 868 by 2033.

To meet that need and develop a pipeline of practitioners, Arizona State University's Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation is launching a new concentration of the Doctor of Nursing Practice in nurse anesthesia. The program is part of the Mayo Clinic and Arizona State University Alliance for Health Care.

"This is a natural expansion of our nationally recognized DNP program. From pediatric care to primary care, emergency care and now anesthesia care, ASU gives clinicians the opportunity to maximize their scope of practice," said Judith Karshmer, dean and professor at Edson College. "All of our programs are developed in direct response to real-world needs, and this is no different. By adding this program, we're taking a major step toward addressing a critical workforce shortage."

Rural communities are feeling the squeeze the most. According to the American Association of Nurse Anesthesiology, CRNAs make up more than 80% of anesthesia providers in rural U.S. counties.

Kendra Elliott is a CRNA, clinical associate professor and the program's founding director.

"I have seen how much Arizona's hospitals depend on nurse anesthetists and how quickly that demand is growing," Elliott said. "Clinicians who train here tend to stay here, so our students will rehearse complex cases in virtual reality and high-fidelity simulation, then complete their clinical training at sites across Arizona, ready to care for the communities that trained them."

The program is designed for registered nurses with at least one year of full-time critical care experience. Students will earn 92 credit hours over three years and are required to complete 2,000-plus supervised clinical hours.

“Our clinical network spans Arizona's largest health systems, specialty surgical centers, community hospitals and tribal health care facilities, and it continues to grow," Elliott said. "Every partner is helping build Arizona's future anesthesia workforce, and Mayo Clinic has invested in our students in ways that reach well beyond the clinical setting."

DNP anesthesia info sessions

Noon–1 p.m., Wednesday, Oct. 14

5:30–6:30 p.m., Thursday, Nov. 5

Register via Zoom

Mayo Clinic has been instrumental in bringing the program to this point, from providing access to its excellent faculty and simulation facilities to incorporating clinical rotations for future students.

Mayo Clinic's support of the program reflects a broader commitment to developing the health care workforce that Arizona and the nation will need in the years ahead.

“Ensuring patients have timely access to safe, high-quality care depends on having a strong and well-prepared health care workforce,” said Dr. Devyani Lal, dean of education at Mayo Clinic in Arizona. “As demand for surgical and procedural care continues to grow, nurse anesthetists will play an increasingly important role in caring for patients across Arizona and beyond. By bringing together ASU’s educational expertise and Mayo Clinic’s clinical learning environment, we can help prepare these professionals to deliver exceptional care across a wide range of settings, including complex surgical procedures.”

The ASU DNP Nurse Anesthesia Program is seeking initial accreditation from the Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs. The program will enroll nurse anesthesia residents only after COA accreditation is granted and Arizona State Board of Nursing approval is in place.

The first class is expected to start in the fall of 2027.

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Main image



Edson College’s nurse anesthesia program is part of the Mayo Clinic and Arizona State University Alliance for Health Care. Image courtesy of Envato