

April 9, 2026

President Rick Gallot, Ph.D., J.D.
University of Louisiana System
627 North 4th Street, Suite 2-203
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

Dear President Gallot and Members of the Search Committee,

McNeese State University is at a meaningful moment, with an opportunity to continue building stability, growing enrollment, and deepening connections with local business and industry. These efforts are essential to strengthening confidence among faculty, staff, students, alumni, and donors. Our region is fortunate to be served by McNeese State University, SOWELA Technical Community College, and regional industry partners who work together to support economic growth and long-term prosperity. This mission is particularly vital as the energy sector continues to expand, creating demand for professionals in engineering, healthcare, business, education, computer science, and beyond. I am eager to contribute to these efforts, bringing both leadership experience and a practical approach to connecting academic programs with industry and delivering tangible results.

Therefore, I respectfully submit my application for the presidency of McNeese State University. My career aligns closely with the leadership priorities outlined in the Presidential Profile. As Chief Education and Training Officer for the Louisiana Community and Technical Colleges (LCTC) System, I support strategy, performance, and outcomes across multiple institutions. This role requires collaboration with system leadership, boards, elected officials, and campus stakeholders, preparing me to serve effectively as a university president within the UL System.

My interest in this role is deeply personal. Education has always represented opportunity and possibility. My journey began at the associate degree level so I could enter the workforce as quickly as possible while also pursuing and earning a bachelor's degree. While pursuing my Master's degree at McNeese, I was offered a position as a graduate assistant, opening a new world of service and leadership. That experience transformed the trajectory of my life, inspiring a career dedicated to student success and educational access. It was this commitment that led to earning a Ph.D., shaping a career spanning more than two decades

in higher education; as a faculty member, a dean, and now a system-level leader focused on expanding access and supporting student achievement.

The next president must bring a clear sense of direction along with the ability to execute strategies thoughtfully and accountably. Oversight of significant investments, such as Perkins funding supporting career and technical education, has required alignment across institutions (2-year and 4-year), state agencies, and industry partners. In addition, I lead initiatives within the state's five major workforce sectors: construction, information technology, healthcare, transportation/logistics, and advanced manufacturing. My approach emphasizes data-informed decisions, operational discipline, and continuous improvement to ensure priorities are not only identified but successfully achieved.

McNeese's continued success depends on growing enrollment and advancing student outcomes. Throughout my career, my focus has been on expanding access, removing barriers, and helping students complete their programs. During COVID-19, I worked at the state level to ease regulatory barriers, allowing students to finish early and enter the workforce when they were needed most. I have also supported the growth of dual enrollment, strengthened articulation agreements, and helped create more seamless transfer pathways that improve both access and completion.

My leadership journey began in healthcare as a dean, where I led one of the fastest-growing academic divisions, expanding programs, achieving accreditation milestones in record time, and maintaining 100% licensure pass rates. That success created opportunities to serve at a broader level, leading to an executive role at the system office. In this capacity, my reach extends well beyond healthcare, with responsibility for advancing academic and workforce initiatives across multiple sectors and institutions. This experience has allowed me to apply the same principles of access, quality, and student success at scale, while working across disciplines to meet the evolving needs of students, employers, and the state.

Aligning academic programs with workforce and industry needs is critical to Southwest Louisiana. Region 5's economy is anchored by a growing LNG sector, which also drives additional programming to support our region. My career has centered on creating these connections. I have led statewide initiatives linking education to high-demand, high-wage careers, helping ensure graduates are prepared to meet workforce needs in collaboration with Louisiana Economic Development Fast Start, Louisiana Works, and industry partners.

While my roots are in healthcare, and induction into the Louisiana Nursing Hall of Fame reflects that, this foundation is not a limit but a springboard. Leadership in higher education requires running complex systems, managing budgets, building partnerships, and aligning

programs with real-world demands. My experience ensures the ability to create and sustain systems that bridge education with workforce needs effectively.

Strong financial management is essential in the presidency. I have managed multimillion-dollar budgets and made efforts to secure state, federal, and private funding for education and workforce programs. This work requires building trust, demonstrating clear returns on investment, and aligning resources with strategic priorities. My approach treats higher education as both a public mission and an enterprise that must be well managed, balancing stewardship, investment, and measurable outcomes for students and the region.

Effective collaboration with governing boards, system leadership, and community partners is crucial. I have experience working with state agencies, elected officials, and institutional leaders to advance shared goals. Since joining the LCTC system office in 2019, I have had the privilege of being called upon to serve in key interim leadership roles. In these moments, I have stepped in as Interim Chancellor at Louisiana Delta Community College and other Interim Vice Chancellor roles, helping guide campuses through periods of transition while maintaining stability, trust, and forward momentum. Each assignment has required quickly assessing needs, supporting teams, and ensuring continuity of operations before returning to my system-level responsibilities. Throughout this work, transparency, communication, consistency, and commitment to shared governance have remained central to my leadership approach.

Athletics is an integral part of McNeese's identity and its connection to the community. My own early experiences in sports instilled the values of discipline, teamwork, and resilience, and those lessons continue to shape how I lead today. At McNeese, athletics goes far beyond competition; it brings people together, builds school pride, and serves as a visible symbol of the university's spirit and momentum. Programs such as football, basketball, baseball, softball, and track and field create meaningful experiences for student-athletes and the broader campus community, while also strengthening alumni engagement and donor support.

The investment in athletic facilities, including the basketball arena and football stadium, reflects the generosity and commitment of donors who believe deeply in McNeese and its future. These spaces are not only venues for competition, but gathering places that connect students, families, alumni, and fans. As president, I would be an active and visible supporter of Cowboys and Cowgirls athletics, recognizing its importance to recruitment, retention, and overall campus life. At the same time, I am committed to ensuring that athletics remains aligned with the academic mission, financially responsible, and positioned for long-term success. When thoughtfully supported, athletics can enhance visibility, strengthen community ties, and contribute to the overall momentum of McNeese State University.

My experience as a faculty member and academic leader provides a solid foundation to support McNeese's academic mission. I have taught at both undergraduate and graduate levels, contributed to curriculum development, and supported students' success. I have served as an Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) site visitor and team leader, providing insight into accreditation, assessment, and continuous improvement. In my current role, I lead a team that supports colleges in achieving and maintaining institutional and programmatic accreditation, ensuring compliance while fostering innovation and institutional growth.

My connection with McNeese is both professional and deeply personal. My husband, Kent, is a proud McNeese graduate and has taught in Beauregard Parish for more than two decades. His mother and brother are also alumni, giving our family a deep appreciation for the university. As a former faculty member, I understand the institution's culture, strengths, and opportunities.

Our family's life is rooted in this region, and our connection to McNeese continues through our eldest daughter, who is a leader in her own right. She recently completed her term as the Beauregard Parish Student Representative on the Beauregard Parish School Board, an experience that strengthened her commitment to service. She will begin college this fall through a co-enrollment pathway between McNeese and SOWELA as she pursues a career in nursing. She is especially excited to move into the dorms with her childhood best friend. Our youngest continues to thrive academically, and we look forward to seeing where her path leads. McNeese is not just an institution I hope to lead; it is part of our family's story.

McNeese State University has a strong foundation and a meaningful opportunity ahead. This moment calls for leadership that is steady, thoughtful, and focused on uniting people around shared goals. If given the opportunity to serve, I will lead with energy, empathy, and focus on execution, working in partnership with the Board, the UL System leaders, business and industry, and the McNeese community to ensure continued growth and meaningful impact.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Wendi Palermo".

Dr. Wendi S. Palermo

Dr. Wendi S. Palermo

Chief Education and Training Officer
Louisiana Community and Technical Colleges (LCTC) System

PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

A visionary higher education leader with extensive experience advancing student success, workforce alignment, and system-wide innovation across Louisiana’s Community and Technical Colleges (LCTC) system. As Chief Education and Training Officer for LCTC, leads transformative initiatives that strengthen academic pathways, expand dual enrollment, and align programs with high-demand industry sectors critical to regional and statewide economic growth. Recognized as a current higher education academician and a recognized leader in the state’s major workforce sectors. Brings a data-informed, student-centered approach grounded in access, completion, and workforce outcomes. Leadership reflects a deep commitment to community impact, strategic partnerships, and positioning institutions as engines of opportunity and economic mobility.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Louisiana Community and Technical Colleges (LCTC) System:

April 2022–Present	Chief Education and Training Officer
March 2025 –June 2025	Interim Chancellor, Louisiana Delta Community College
May 2021–April 2022	Executive Director of Academics and Workforce
May 2022–September 2022	Interim Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Central Louisiana Technical Community College
May 2021 –September 2021	Interim Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Louisiana Delta Community College
July 2019–May 2021	Executive Director of Nursing and Healthcare Initiatives

Currently serves as the LCTC Chief Education and Training Officer and provides leadership oversight in developing and maintaining high-quality training programs that meet the needs of the state's existing and prospective employers, including curriculum alignment between academic, workforce, and adult education units, through to employment or transferability of graduates. Direct oversight of a multimillion-dollar budget to support broadband, rapid response, and healthcare initiatives, along with other major workforce sectors. Works collaboratively with the La. Board of Regents, La. Works and LED-Fast Start to push initiatives forward to completion. Progressed through leadership at LCTC and was requested to step into interim roles at various institutions, including serving as Interim Vice Chancellor of Academic

Affairs and Interim Chancellor, demonstrating the ability to provide steady, strategic leadership during times of transition and institutional need.

SOWELA Technical Community College

Dean of Nursing and Allied Health (2015-2019)

Principal leader through planning, organizing, and directing the academic, faculty, and administrative duties of multiple program areas. Led a team spanning three campuses. Expanded four programs in 3.5 years and achieved programmatic accreditation for the Associate of Science Nursing (ASN) and Associate of Applied Science (AAS) programs. Expanded the high-fidelity simulation program, designed new labs, and increased funding to the School of Nursing and Allied Health via external grants and internal funding by approximately \$750K over three years.

Northwestern State University (NSULA)

**Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) and Master of Nursing (MSN) Adjunct Faculty (2019-2021)
Undergraduate and Graduate Level Full-time Faculty (2006-2015)**

Served on the Administrative Council, Recruitment and Retention Committee, and General Faculty Committee. Served as graduate nurse faculty, nurse leader on the Leesville-Ft. Polk campus, and the primary College of Nursing and School of Allied Health advisor. Regularly attended Fort Polk military briefings as a recruitment tool and to strengthen the partnership. Taught via telepresence, face-to-face, and online (RN-to-BSN and MSN). Traveled between campuses to teach across programs (RN-to-BSN and ADN). Served as Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) site visitor and team chair and nominated for ACEN Commission.

McNeese State University

Undergraduate Faculty (2004-2006)

Served as faculty for ADN and BSN programs. Successfully raised NCLEX-RN first-time pass rates in the ADN program within the first year of hire. Served as co-chair of the College Curriculum Committee and member of the University Curriculum Committee.

West Calcasieu Cameron Hospital

Registered Nurse (2001-2017)

Full-time employee (2001-2004), then PRN (2005-2017) in the following areas: Emergency Department, Clinical Education, and House Supervision. Served as an educational leader responsible for certifying healthcare providers with Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) and Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS) certification courses.

Natchitoches Parish Hospital

Registered Nurse (1999-2001)

Emergency Department nurse; earned Trauma Nurse Core Course (TNCC), ACLS and PALS certifications as a new graduate.

EDUCATION

2011	Ph.D. in Nursing (Research), Southern University, Baton Rouge, LA
2004	MSN in Nursing Education, McNeese State University, Lake Charles, LA
2002	BSN, Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, LA
1999	ADN, Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, LA

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- High Fidelity Simulation – Best Practices in Higher Education
- Safe Sleep among the infant population in Louisiana
- Utilization of Anatomage (Digital Cadaver Table) in pre-nursing biology courses to predict ATI TEAS exam success and admission into ASN clinical

SELECTED INITIATIVES

- 2008-2015 ACEN programmatic site visitor, Team Leader, Evaluation Review Panel member, and nominee for ACEN Commissioner. Contributory efforts led to the university employer being awarded eight years of continued programmatic accreditation.
- 2006-2015 Director: Cribs for Kids at NSU Leesville-Ft. Polk. Donated nearly 100 portable cribs to area-wide families and provided safe sleep education. Funding Source: Creighton Owen Endowed Professorship, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012.
- Strengthened program presence on military post for recruiting active duty and family members to university healthcare programs.
- Campus advisor for Nursing and Allied Health University Programs; formally acknowledged by university and campus leadership for advising 90% of all campus students and therefore growing overall campus numbers.
- Opened New ASN program in Lake Charles, LA at SOWELA Technical Community College. Earned programmatic accreditation in record time, prior to the first cohort graduating.
- Led efforts to create an LPN-to-RN program at SOWELA. First cohort entered in summer 2020.
- Entered a concurrent model with McNeese State University that allowed RN students to co-enroll to earn a BSN in two short semesters, post-ASN graduation.

- Led efforts to purchase the first digital cadaver (Anatomage table) in Southwest Louisiana to be utilized in the Anatomy and Physiology laboratory setting.
- Opened a New AAS in Surgical Technology and earned programmatic accreditation via ARC/STSA prior to graduating first class.
- Opened a New Certificate of Technical Studies in Sterile Processing (SOWELA)
- The SOWELA School of Nursing and Allied Health grew from one of the smallest schools to the largest student population at SOWELA Technical Community College in 3.5 years.
- 100% NCLEX pass rates among both Practical Nursing and ASN programs.
- Restructured the end-of-program learning outcomes for existing programs and developed a systematic plan of evaluation to meet programmatic and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges criteria.
- Successfully secured external and internal funding, approximately \$750,000, to support nursing and allied health programs at SOWELA Technical Community College.
- Awarded (three consecutive years) Health Works Commission (HWC) funding to support a Statewide Simulation Initiative to Discover, Share, and Lead Simulation Education.
- Co-led efforts and hosted a free Simulation Expo in 2019 with HWC funding to support statewide simulation.
- Entered into additional formal MOUs (NSULA and University of Louisiana at Lafayette) for ease of transfer for nursing and allied health graduates.
- In 2019, led efforts and was awarded more than \$1.2 million in capitation funds to support LCTCS nursing and nurse assistant programs
- Co-wrote the Medication Attendant Certified curriculum and led efforts through Louisiana rulemaking via the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH).
- During COVID-19, served as liaison between LCTCS and regulatory agencies to identify and remove barriers to allow graduates to both complete programs early (if able) and enter the workforce.
- Led efforts to obtain system-wide articulation agreements with Chamberlain University and Herzing University at a reduced rate for LCTCS nursing students.
- Led efforts to partner with LDH at a system level to certify LCTCS students as Nurse Assistants. This led to a record number of 330 certifications earned during spring and summer 2020 to meet workforce needs during the pandemic.
- Led efforts to partner with Ochsner to bring \$1M of telehealth to 11 LCTCS colleges. Students have 24/7 access to healthcare providers at \$10 per visit.
- In 2020, LCTCS awarded over \$1M in capitation funds to support LCTCS nursing and nurse assistant programs.
- In 2021 colleges were awarded \$50K to support Nurse Aide Prometric Testing.
- Supported La. Delta Community College entering into a system-wide agreement with the University of Monroe (ULM) and LCTCS.
- LCTCS awarded more than \$1M in capitation funds to support LCTCS nursing, nurse assistant, and allied health expansion.

- In 2022, direct oversight of the LCTCS awarded \$25M in appropriated dollars to support healthcare program expansion for completion of graduates.
- Also in 2022, direct oversight of the LCTCS, awarded \$10M in appropriated dollars to support broadband infrastructure training and education.
- In 2022-2023, served as Chief of Staff for House Resolution 155, a study group to evaluate and identify barriers to increasing the Louisiana healthcare workforce.
- Received the LCTCS Impact Award in 2023.
- Inducted into the LSNA Foundation Nursing Hall of Fame in 2023.
- 2023, 2024, and 2025, Direct oversight of the LCTCS Nurse Aide Capitation funds, awarded \$50K from the La. Board of Regents.

PRESENTATIONS

- 2026 – Leading at Scale: Maximizing Leader Growth in Complex Organizations; Ft. Polk
- 2024 – National Offshore Wind and Louisiana Community College Speaker; NOLA
- 2024 – Keynote Speaker, Caddo Career and Technology Center; Shreveport, LA
- 2023 – Bossier Parish Community College (BPCC) Guest Speaker, Professional Development Best Practices on How to Perform Program and Course Level Evaluations
- 2022 – Northwest Louisiana Technical Community College (NLTC) Commencement speaker
- 2022 – Bossier Parish Community College (BPCC); Commencement Speaker
- 2021 – LCTCS Annual Conference Co-Presenter with Allison Adams: Bridging the Gap – Linking LPN experience to RN practice via Innovative Virtual Learning
- 2021 – Hispanic Educational Technology Services Virtual Best Practices Showcase International Conference, co-presenter with Allison Adams: Bridging the Gap-Linking LPN Experience to RN practice via Innovative Virtual Learning
- 2020 – Deridder Junior Women’s Conference: Hope in the Midst of Pain - A Healthcare Provider’s Perspective
- 2020 – NWLTC: Transitioning 3 Nursing Campuses to 1 College; Closing the Gap on Assessment and Outcome Measurement
- 2020 – Bossier Parish Community College: Closing the Gap on Assessment and Outcome Measurement
- 2019 – La. State Surgical Technology Association: Closing the Gap on Assessment
- 2018 – Lake Charles Rotary Club: Nursing and Healthcare Education Opportunities in Lake Charles, LA; A community college’s response to industry needs
- 2017 – La. State School Nurses Association: Resiliency
- 2017 – La. Federation of Licensed Practical Nurses: Resiliency
- 2016 – La. Federation of Licensed Practical Nurses: Where are LPNs Now?
- 2015 – La. Federation of Licensed Practical Nurses: Infection in the Hospital Setting
- 2013 – Sigma Theta Tau Conference: Louisiana Infant Mortality

- 2012 – Poster Presenter, Barbara Bancroft Nursing Conference: An Examination of Factors Which Impact Infant Mortality Rates Among Louisiana Parishes
- 2011 – Northwestern State University Legal Ethical Conference: Professionalism in Healthcare

PUBLICATIONS

- Palermo, W (2025) Bridging the Gap: Leveraging Louisiana’s Community College Partnership to Address Healthcare Workforce Needs; *The Pelican*
- Palermo, W. (2023). Bridging the Healthcare Workforce Gap; How Louisiana Community and technical colleges are rising to the challenge. *Louisiana Hospital Association Publication*. lhaonline.org
- Jones-Thomas, T., & Palermo, W. (2019). 2019 Simulation Expo – Discovering, Sharing and Leading Simulation Education. *The Pelican News*: 75(4), 12.
- Palermo, W. (2011). An Examination of Factors Which Impact Infant Mortality Rates Among Louisiana Parishes; *Southern University and Agricultural and Mechanical College Dissertations*

AWARDS / GRANTS

2023	Louisiana State Nurses Foundation Hall of Fame Inductee
2023	LCTCS Impact Award Recipient
2009–2012	Creighton Owen Endowed Professorship
2015–2017	SOWELA Tech Fee Funding Recipient
2016–2021	La. Board of Regents Health Works Grant Co-recipient
2016–2018	HC Drew Grant Recipient
2018	Rapid Response Grant Recipient

MEMBERSHIPS / AFFILIATIONS

2004	Sigma Theta Tau National Nursing Honors Society Inductee
2015–2019	Louisiana Council of Administrators of Nurse Educators, Member
2017	Director at Large, Louisiana Council of Administrators of Nurse Educators
2018–2019	Vice Chair, Louisiana Council of Administrators of Nurse Educators
2018–2019	Chair, Louisiana Council of Administrators of Practical Nurse Educators
2018–Present	Louisiana State Nurses Association, Lake Charles District Vice Chair
2019–Present	Louisiana State Health Works Commission, Executive Member

2019–Present	Louisiana State Simulation Council, Executive Member
2019–Present	Louisiana State Nursing Supply and Demand Council, Member
2020–Present	Louisiana Nurse Policy Action Committee, Member
2021–Present	Louisiana Board of Regents Student Success Council, Member
2021–Present	Louisiana Board of Regents State Articulation Transfer Council, Member
2021–Present	Louisiana Agricultural Education Commission, Member
2021–Present	Louisiana Works Industry-Based Credential Council, Member
2022–Present	Louisiana Healthy State Board, Member
2022–Present	Louisiana State Board of Practical Nurse Examiners Advisory Council, Member
2022–Present	Ellevate Louisiana, Member
2023	Louisiana Board of Regents Dual Enrollment Taskforce

BOARD MEMBERSHIPS

2010–Present	Beauregard Parish Pregnancy Care Center
2020–Present	Southwest Louisiana Area Health Education Center
2020–2025	Louisiana State Board of Nursing, Member
2022–Present	Beauregard Memorial Hospital Board Member
2024–Present	Vice President, Beauregard Memorial Hospital Board
2022–Present	Louisiana Occupational Health Advisory Board
2022–Present	Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University, Bachelor of Business Administration Advisory Board Member
2022–Present	Healthy State Advisory Board
2024–Present	Workforce Development Board (Region 5)