PROPOSAL TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Establishing a School of Health Science and Health Innovation

Roanoke College

"We champion potential, providing essential learning and leadership through leading-edge academic programs and transformative educational experiences, giving students the mettle, mastery, and empathy to live lives of purpose, build meaningful careers, and meet our society's most pressing needs."

— Roanoke College Vision Statement

Executive Summary

This proposal asks the Board of Trustees to authorize the creation of a School of Health Science and Health Innovation at Roanoke College.

The case rests on these foundations, developed in the pages that follow.

- Mission. A school devoted to health and healing is a direct expression of who Roanoke College has been since 1842, and a direct fulfillment of the Imagine Roanoke strategic plan this Board approved in August 2024, which calls for the formation of transdisciplinary schools, deeper regional partnership, and the graduation of leaders of character.
- Students. Health science careers offer Roanoke students what they and their families increasingly ask of a college education: meaningful work, strong earnings, and durable demand.
- Region. Education and health services is the largest and fastest-growing employment sector in the Roanoke Metropolitan Service Area (MSA). Carilion Clinic alone reported more than 2,000 open positions in March 2026. The region's leading employers are asking, urgently and publicly, for the workforce Roanoke College is positioned to train.

Mission and Vision

The School of Health Science and Health Innovation at Roanoke College prepares students to improve human health and well-being through the integration of liberal arts education, clinical practice, and community partnership.

We educate ethically grounded, intellectually agile, and professionally skilled graduates who are equipped to serve diverse and underserved populations, advance health equity, and contribute to the transformation of rural and regional health systems.

In keeping with Roanoke's strategic commitment to purpose, character, and leadership, the School will graduate practitioners who lead with integrity, exercise sound judgment under pressure, and carry Roanoke's tradition of character formation into every clinic, hospital, and community health setting they serve.

Why Health Care Is a Natural Home for Roanoke's Mission

Roanoke College develops students as whole persons and prepares them for responsible lives of learning, service, and leadership. Few fields ask more of the whole person than health care. A nurse's integrity, a physician assistant's judgment at two in the morning, a public health professional's honesty with a frightened community: these are matters of character before they are matters of technique. The virtues Roanoke has spent nearly two centuries cultivating, and which Imagine Roanoke now names explicitly as a distinction of a Roanoke education, are the same virtues that separate an adequate clinician from a trusted one.

The liberal arts foundation matters here too. Health care increasingly demands practitioners who can communicate across cultural difference, reason through ethical ambiguity, interpret evidence critically, and adapt as science and technology evolve. These are the capacities a Roanoke education has always built. A School of Health Science and Health Innovation extends them into professions where they are needed most.

Call to Build: Our History, Our Moment

Roanoke College was founded in 1842 by two Lutheran pastors, David Bittle and Christopher Baughman, who believed that education was a form of service to a growing region. They moved the young institution to Salem in 1847 because they understood that a college flourishes when it stands at the center of a community's life, and when the community can see itself in the college's work. At the same time, they changed the name from the Virginia Collegiate Institute to Roanoke College, in honor of the community they intended to serve.

Nearly two centuries later, that founding conviction is asking something new of us. The community Roanoke serves has changed. The Roanoke Valley of 2026 is a health care economy. Its largest employers are health systems. Its fastest-growing jobs are clinical and health-adjacent. Its families increasingly build their livelihoods, and entrust their lives, to the health workforce. A college founded to serve this region cannot fully serve it in this century without preparing the people who will care for it.

The Strategic Plan Already Points Here

Imagine Roanoke, the strategic plan this Board approved in August 2024, anticipated this moment. Three of its imperatives converge on the School proposed in these pages.

- Imperative One calls Roanoke to become "the Roanoke Valley's most sought-after educational partner by industry, entrepreneurs, and community leaders." No industry in the Valley is seeking educational partnership more actively, or with greater need, than health care.
- Imperative Two calls for the formation of four transdisciplinary schools that promote integrated, career-connected learning. The School of Health Science and Health Innovation is that vision made concrete: a school that joins the sciences, the humanities, ethics, and clinical practice in service of a single human end.
- Imperative Three calls Roanoke to make "the exploration of purpose, the pursuit of character, and the graduation of leaders a distinction of a Roanoke College education." Health care is where purpose, character, and leadership are tested daily, and where the region will encounter Roanoke graduates at the most important moments of their lives.

Why Now

Timing shapes this opportunity in three ways.

First, the region's need is immediate and growing. Paul Hudgins, Carilion Clinic's Senior Vice President and Chief Human Resource Officer, told a public audience in March 2026 that Carilion has more than 2,000 current job openings that are difficult to fill. The Virginia Economic Development Partnership has stated plainly that the future of the Roanoke MSA is healthcare and advanced manufacturing. Every year the College waits is a year those positions go unfilled by graduates who could have been ours.

Second, the flagship program's runway demands an early start. A Physician Assistant program requires three to five years from launch decision to first enrolled cohort, driven by national accreditation timelines. A decision made today produces clinicians at the end of the decade. A decision deferred pushes that horizon further out while competitor institutions move.

Third, the College's physical and market foundations are freshly laid. The Shaun McConnon Discovery Center opens this fall, expanding undergraduate science capacity. Market demand analysis has identified a portfolio of eight high-demand programs.

The Student Case

Every student who chooses Roanoke College is making a bet: that four years here will lead somewhere worth going. Families weigh that bet against real anxieties about cost, debt, and employment. The College owes them programs where the path from classroom to career is visible, credible, and strong.

Careers of Purpose and Security

Health science careers offer an unusually clear answer. The table below shows current national median wages and projected demand for representative programs under consideration, drawn from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Career Path	National Median Wage	Demand Outlook
Physician Assistant	$133,260	20% projected growth 2024-2034, far above average

Registered Nurse	$93,600	Sustained national and acute regional shortage
Radiologic Technologist	$77,660	5% projected growth; ~15,400 openings per year nationally

These are verifiable current wages in fields with structural, demographic demand. An aging population, clinician retirements, and the expansion of care delivery guarantee that demand for these roles will outlast any economic cycle the Board can foresee. For a Roanoke student, a health sciences degree is among the most reliable investments the College can offer.

The Gap We Can Close

There are over 2,000 open positions at a single regional health system inside of an education and health services sector that added 800 jobs in the Roanoke MSA in the last year alone while manufacturing, trade, and government contracted. The opportunity surrounds our campus. What our students lack are the credentialed pathways into it. A School of Health Science and Health Innovation builds those pathways, for undergraduates who discover a calling in health care, for graduates who want to stay and serve the Valley, and for working adults in the region seeking career mobility through programs like the associate-level Radiologic Technologist pathway.

There is also a story here about student aspiration, not only student need. Interest in health professions among college-bound students has grown steadily for over a decade, particularly among young women, and applicant demand for accredited PA and nursing seats nationally far exceeds supply. Students want these paths. At Roanoke College, we have seen a trending decrease in enrollment by young women, likely due in part to our lack of health programming. Today, a student who wants an education in the health sciences cannot choose Roanoke. This proposal changes that.

The Regional Case

Education and health services is both the largest and fastest-growing employment sector in the Roanoke Metropolitan Statistical Area, employing 30,800 people as of February 2026 and growing 2.7% year over year, even as manufacturing (-1.1%), trade and transportation (-0.6%), and government (-3.0%) contracted.

The region's health systems have been explicit about what this growth means for them. Carilion Clinic's more than 2,000 open positions represent care delayed, beds unstaffed, and communities underserved. LewisGale faces the same structural pressures.

Partnership as Strategy

Imagine Roanoke's first imperative, and the Roanoke College-Roanoke Valley (RC-RV) initiative that grew from it, commit the College to deep, working partnership with regional industry. The School of Health Science and Health Innovation gives that commitment its most consequential expression. Clinical education requires partnership by design: every PA student needs clinical rotations, every nursing student needs preceptored hospital hours, every radiologic technology student needs imaging suite access. Each of those requirements is an institutional relationship with a regional health system, renewed every semester, deepening every year.

Those relationships compound. Health systems that train our students hire our graduates. Systems that hire our graduates advise our curriculum. Systems that advise our curriculum invest in our facilities and endow our programs. The School is the College's most direct available instrument for becoming what Imperative One envisions: the Valley's most sought-after educational partner.

Programs Under Consideration

Market demand analysis using GrayDI scoring (a 0-100 composite of regional and national program demand) identifies eight programs with strong justification. They are presented here as under consideration only. Launch decisions, including go/no-go, timelines, and sequencing will be recommended by the founding Dean through the process described in the next section.

Program	Degree Level	GrayDI Score
Physician Assistant (flagship)	Master's	100
Radiologic Technologist	Associate's	99
Registered Nurse	Bachelor's	99
Speech-Language Pathology	Master's	98
Public Health	Master's	96
Allied Health Services (General)	Bachelor's	93
Medical Informatics	Bachelor's	90
Biomedical Sciences	Master's	81

What the Board Is Being Asked to Authorize

This proposal asks the Board to authorize the creation of a School of Health Science and Health Innovation at Roanoke College.

The College deliberately refrains from asking the Board to approve a fixed multi-year build-out plan today. Sequencing decisions for the potential programs under consideration, which launch first, in what order, and on what timeline, should be led by the founding Dean once hired, informed by professional judgment and by consultant and accreditation input specific to each program. A detailed five-year roadmap approved before that expertise is in place would lock in decisions the Dean never had the opportunity to shape and would weaken the College's ability to recruit a Dean of the caliber this School deserves. The strongest candidates for a founding deanship are drawn to the chance to build; they are wary of inheriting a finished blueprint.

Phase One: Founding Dean and Discovery

- Recruit and hire a founding Dean for the School of Health Science and Health Innovation.
- Fund a discovery and planning budget for the Dean to commission market analysis, program feasibility studies, and staffing recommendations specific to each candidate program.

- Hire a Physician Assistant program director to begin the multi-year accreditation and curriculum development process in parallel, given the flagship program's long lead time.
- Engage consultants as needed to support facilities assessment, accreditation preparation, and program sequencing analysis.
- Deliverable: within six to nine months of the Dean's start date, the Dean presents the President and the Board with a recommended program sequence, staffing plan, facilities plan, and enrollment and revenue projections for Phase Two.

Phase Two: Program Build-Out

- Contingent on Board authorization of the Dean's Phase One recommendation.
- Funds additional program director hires, instructional content development, and early operating expenses necessary for accreditation and regional launch, sequenced according to the approved plan.
- Renovation and capital work proceeds in this phase as programs are sequenced and space needs are confirmed (see Facilities, below).

Anticipated Phase One Timeline

Period	Milestone
Fall 2026	Board authorization; national Dean search launches; search committee formed; create School advisory board with local health partners
Winter–Spring 2027	Dean finalists on campus; appointment announced; PA program director search begins
Summer 2027	Dean begins; discovery process commissioned; accreditation pre-work underway
Winter 2027–Spring 2028	Dean presents program sequencing, staffing, facilities, and revenue plan to the Board; Board considers Phase Two authorization

Investment Strategy

The College proposes to fund this initiative by leveraging the current strength of its endowment to make measured, strategic investments in the School's founding phase and eventual build-out, keeping the initiative structurally separate from the operating budget. The pace of investment increases over time: early years fund the Dean search, Dean compensation, and the discovery process; later years fund program director hires, curriculum and accreditation costs, and renovation work as it becomes necessary. Sequencing each investment against confirmed institutional need protects the portfolio from unnecessary market and redemption risk.

Return on Investment

The strategic upside of this investment runs through several channels.

- New tuition revenue. Health science programs, particularly PA and RN, consistently draw applicant demand nationally that far exceeds the number of accredited seats, which supports durable enrollment and competitive program pricing once accredited.
- Enrollment strength across the College. Health sciences pathways strengthen undergraduate recruitment, retention, and undergraduate-to-graduate progression within Roanoke's own pipeline, addressing the enrollment pressures at the root of the College's current operating challenges.
- Partnership capital. Clinical partnerships with regional health systems deepen over time into advisory, philanthropic, and programmatic support for the School and the College.
- Institutional differentiation. Among the College's realistic strategic options, few offer a clearer position in the regional market or a stronger alignment between mission and revenue.

The Dean's Phase One discovery work will include detailed enrollment and revenue projections to put specific numbers behind these channels before the Board considers Phase Two.

Facilities

The Shaun McConnon Discovery Center, opening this fall on time and on budget, has meaningfully increased the College's operational capacity for undergraduate science instruction, providing modern laboratory and classroom space that supports the early stages of health sciences coursework. The Discovery Center stands as recent proof that this College can conceive, fund, and deliver ambitious capital projects in service of its academic mission.

Expansion into a full School of Health Science and Health Innovation will likely require renovation of two additional buildings: Life Science (Jenkins) and Trexler, both of which need updates and were already slated for renovation in Phase 2 of the Science Center project. VMDO and PA consultants have been engaged, and their recommendations on suitable location, layout, and renovation scope are forthcoming. Renovation timing and sequencing will be informed by the Dean's Phase One program plan, so that facilities investment follows confirmed program needs.

Risks and Considerations

A proposal of this scale deserves a candid accounting of its risks.

- Timeline risk. The PA program, as flagship, will not enroll its first cohort for three to five years. The College will need to communicate interim progress to stakeholders throughout that period, and the phased structure is designed in part to give the Board and community visible milestones along the way.
- Accreditation risk. PA and nursing accreditation are demanding, multi-year processes with no guaranteed outcome. Early hiring of experienced program directors and consultants is the College's principal mitigation.
- Dean search risk. The School's quality depends on recruiting an exceptional founding Dean. The two-phase structure is itself a recruitment asset, offering candidates genuine authority to shape the School.
- Facilities scope and funding source for Life Science and Trexler renovations remain to be finalized (see Facilities, above).

Recommended Action

Nearly two centuries ago, two pastors built a college because they believed a growing region deserved educated people in its service. The region around this College is asking again. This time it is asking for nurses, physician assistants, imaging technologists, and public health professionals, and it is asking an institution that has everything required to answer: the mission, the strategic plan, the market demand, the facilities momentum, and the financial strength.

The proposal recommends that the Board of Trustees:

- Authorize the creation of a School of Health Science and Health Innovation at Roanoke College, with the Physician Assistant program as its flagship.
- Authorize an investment from the endowment in support of the School, to be released in phases as described in this proposal.
- Approve Phase One funding to recruit and hire a founding Dean, fund a discovery and planning process, and begin the Physician Assistant program director search and accreditation process.
- Require that Phase Two funding be brought back to the Board for review and approval, contingent on the founding Dean's program sequencing, staffing, facilities, and revenue recommendation, expected within six to nine months of the Dean's start date.