BUILDING TALENT FROM WITHIN:

A Surgical Tech Extern Program

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Background

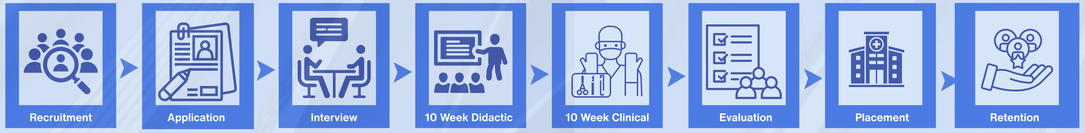
- Southern Illinois Healthcare (SIH) includes four hospitals with nineteen operating rooms.
- Memorial Hospital of Carbondale (MHC) is the main surgical hub for the region.
- Surgical Services covers many specialties across SIH.
- Local training programs are limited in Southern Illinois.
- National surgical technologist shortages continue to grow.
- The extern program creates a local training pipeline.
- It combines paid didactic teaching with clinical practice.
- The goal is to strengthen perioperative staffing.

Purpose

- Evaluate program outcomes related to readiness, completion, and retention.

Methods

- SIH implemented a structured externship with paid learning.
- Evaluated four cohorts from 2023 through 2025.
- Refinements were based on feedback from participants.
- Data included enrollment, completion, and interviews.
- Added more didactic hours and skills labs.
- Expanded recruitment efforts across the region.
- Enhanced preceptor support and educational resources.
- Assessed completion, employment, and recurring themes.



Results

Program Completion

- Eighteen externs enrolled across three cohorts.
- Thirteen externs completed the program successfully.
- Ten externs accepted Surgical Technologist (ST) roles at SIH.

Employee Retention

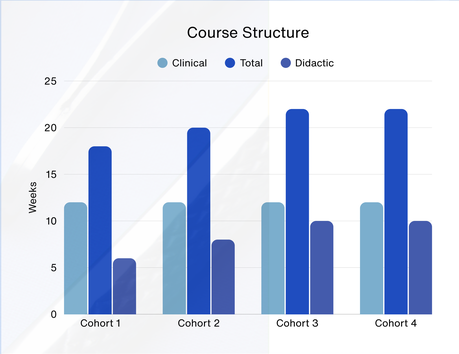
- All ten Surgical Technologist graduates remain employed.
- Three externs moved into perioperative support roles.
- One of the three later left the organization.

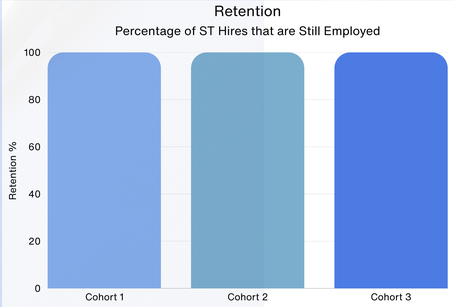
Program Improvements

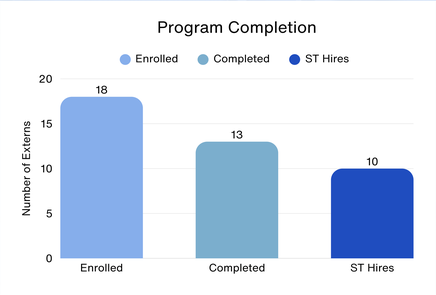
- Increased didactic weeks from six to ten.
- Student readiness improved with increased didactics.
- Program improvements decreased attrition.

Program Growth

- Participant interest increased with each cohort offered.
- Larger pool of candidates with each cohort.







Program Significance

- Addresses the national shortage of surgical technologists through internal workforce development.
- Creates a sustainable talent pipeline and improves OR readiness.

Certification Advancement

- SIH became a National Center for Competency Testing (NCCT) testing site in December 2025.
- Cohort 1 can test in 2027.
- Externs can complete testing on site at MHC.
- Remote proctoring remains available when needed.
- Certification access supports workforce development.

Conculsion

- The extern program strengthens SIH's surgical technologist pipeline.
- SIH's ST Extern program improves staffing stability and retention.

Next Steps

- Strengthen preceptor development and coaching support.
- Monitor retention and certification outcomes annually.
- Explore opportunities for formal program accreditation review.
- Continue refining curriculum based on participant feedback.

Challenges and Considerations

- Potential regulatory changes created early uncertainty.
- Some staff resisted due to workload concerns.
- Accreditation questions required careful planning.
- Communication improved overall program support.

Lessons Learned

- Early mentorship increases extern confidence.
- Longer didactic phases strengthen foundational knowledge.
- Structured feedback identifies challenges early.
- Collaboration supports timely job placement.

Acknowledgements

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SIH

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Scan the QR code for a sample schedule