

The 2015
Aspen Prize
for Community College Excellence



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE



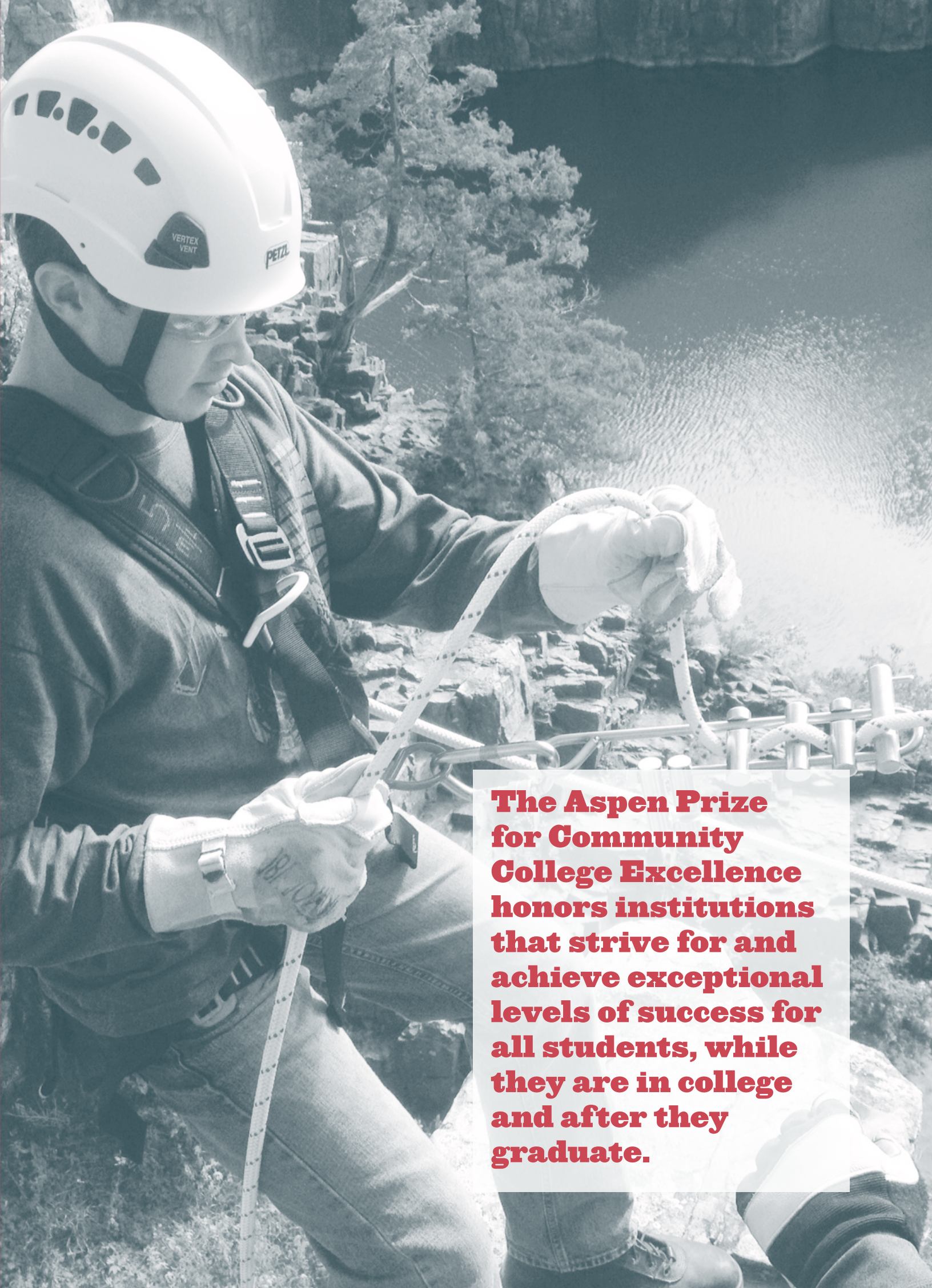
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The Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence honors institutions that strive for and achieve exceptional levels of success for all students, while they are in college and after they graduate.

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Community colleges have received remarkable attention this past year. Proposals for free community college tuition have come from Republicans and Democrats at the local, state, and federal levels. Whatever their chances of enactment, these proposals demonstrate just how central community colleges are to strategies for growing the economy and expanding individual opportunity.

This recognition should come as no surprise. State budgets are constrained and family earnings flat, making the low tuition offered by community colleges increasingly attractive. Employers are clamoring for more skilled workers, and community colleges have a long history of responding to emerging workforce demands. And our country is seeing rapidly growing numbers of lower-income and minority students, who disproportionately attend two-year colleges.

But it would be a mistake for any community college to allow this recognition to beget complacency. Community college students are often the first in their families to attend college, those who most rely on a college education to avoid poverty and low-wage work. Whether or not tuition is eliminated, much more work is needed to help them succeed. Most students start community college aspiring to a bachelor's degree, but fewer than one in five ever earn one. Trends in community college graduation rates reveal very slow improvement, certainly not fast enough to meet accelerating demands for a college-educated workforce. And while some community college students graduate into well-paying jobs, others flounder, having failed to receive the education needed for success in the job market.

This year's Aspen Prize honorees show just how much these outcomes can be improved.

- Prize winner Santa Fe College, in Florida, shows how a community college can help students transfer to a four-year school and receive a bachelor's degree at a rate more than double the national average.
- Finalist-with-distinction Lake Area Technical Institute, in South Dakota, achieves strong employment outcomes for its students, 73 percent of whom graduate or transfer, a rate higher than a vast majority of four-year colleges.
- Finalist-with-distinction West Kentucky Community and Technical College shows that it's possible to attain high graduation and transfer rates without an achievement gap for minority students.
- Rising Star Kennedy-King College shows how rapid reinvention can triple a community college's graduation rate in just a few years.

Too often, conversations about community colleges present a stark choice: Either support their mission of broad access or criticize them for low levels of student success. The fact is that community colleges enroll nearly half of all U.S. undergraduates; supporting these institutions is not optional if our nation is to fuel economic growth and enable social mobility. It is also true that community colleges must—and Aspen Prize winners show they can—achieve dramatically better student outcomes.

Congratulations to all of this year's finalists. By serving students exceptionally well, you stand for what is best and show what is possible for this vital sector of American higher education. Thank you for leading the way.



Joshua Wyner

Executive Director, College Excellence Program, The Aspen Institute

The Aspen Institute congratulates
the ten finalists for the
2015 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence:



WINNER:

Santa Fe College (FL)

FINALISTS-WITH-DISTINCTION:

Lake Area Technical Institute (SD)

West Kentucky Community and Technical College (KY)

RISING STAR:

Kennedy-King College, City Colleges of Chicago (IL)

FINALISTS:

Brazosport College (TX)

El Paso Community College (TX)

Hostos Community College, City University of New York (NY)

Indian River State College (FL)

Olympic College (WA)

Renton Technical College (WA)

PRIOR WINNERS:

Santa Barbara City College (CA)

Valencia College (FL)

Walla Walla Community College (WA)

PRIOR FINALISTS-WITH-DISTINCTION:

Kingsborough Community College, City University of New York (NY)

Lake Area Technical Institute (SD)

Miami Dade College (FL)

Walla Walla Community College (WA)

West Kentucky Community and Technical College (KY)

With the Aspen Prize, the Aspen Institute and its partners aim to further the national understanding of how community colleges can increase student success, no matter the challenges they face. The winning colleges profiled here have shown that what colleges do matters deeply to student achievement.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE?

Excellent community colleges provide students with a high-quality education that motivates them to excel and equips them with the skills and knowledge they will need to succeed in work and life. They continuously improve and demonstrate strength across four domains:

1

COMPLETION

High levels of student completion of workforce certificates, two-year degrees, and transfer to four-year colleges that results in bachelor's degree attainment, as well as institutional practices and policies that promote completion.

2

LABOR MARKET

High rates of employment and earnings for graduates, as well as institutional practices and policies aligned with labor market needs and student labor market success.

3

LEARNING

Evidence that students learn at high levels, as well as institutional practices and policies that result in strong and improving levels of student learning in courses, within programs, and college-wide.

4

EQUITY

High levels of access and success for students who are often underserved, including those from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups and from low-income backgrounds, as well as an institutional commitment to closing achievement gaps.



COMPLETION/ TRANSFER

Nearly two in three full-time students who begin at Santa Fe graduate or transfer within three years, a rate far above the national average.

62%

Santa Fe first-time, full-time students who graduate or transfer within three years

40%

U.S. first-time, full-time students who graduate or transfer within three years

LABOR MARKET

In 2013, people who graduated from Santa Fe five years earlier earned an average of \$40,820, comparable to the wages of all other workers in the region.

\$40,820

Annual earnings for employed 2008 graduates of Santa Fe

LEARNING

By offering high-quality professional development for faculty, Santa Fe has created a climate geared toward improvement and excellence in teaching. The college is developing a comprehensive system of general education learning outcomes to take this work to the next level.

EQUITY

At Santa Fe, minority students succeed at rates well above the national average.

49%

Santa Fe underrepresented minority students who graduate or transfer within three years

34%

U.S. underrepresented minority students who graduate or transfer within three years



SANTA FE COLLEGE

Gainesville, FL

21,809

Number of Students

Suburb

Location

37%

Students Receiving Pell Grants

20%

Underrepresented Minority Students

26%

Vocational/Technical Awards (out of all awards conferred)

For students who plan on community college as a stepping stone to university, there are few (if any) better places to start than Santa Fe College in Gainesville, Florida: Nearly two in three Santa Fe students who transfer complete a bachelor's degree.

Santa Fe students aiming for a degree at nearby University of Florida (UF) have an especially smooth road to travel, thanks to a clear state articulation system, a physical presence for UF on the Santa Fe campus, a joint engineering degree, and an enthusiastic welcome from the university, which takes as many as one-half of its transfer students from Santa Fe. It's not just because the colleges are five miles apart. Santa Fe's graduates "come out in a timely fashion, well-prepared, so we do not hesitate to accept them," says UF Provost Joe Glover, adding that they do as well academically as students who start at UF.

Some students need not leave the Santa Fe campus to get a bachelor's degree, as the college has added baccalaureate programs in several fields—such as nursing and industrial biotechnology—to address workforce needs that UF cannot meet alone. For example, the college has planned a bachelor's

in information technology in response to local companies that want to hire programmers and network specialists but cannot compete for UF graduates with the likes of Google and other major players.

Santa Fe students, whether they seek a university degree or a shorter-term professional credential, are kept on track by staff who respond nimbly and thoughtfully to challenges in the student experience, whether they're developing online systems to guide students through registration and monitor their education plans, adding critical-thinking coursework to every health field, or building supports for students no longer required to take remedial classes because of a new state law. The result is a graduation/transfer rate more than 50 percent higher than the national average for community colleges. And jobs follow: Local employers say Santa Fe is exceptionally

responsive and proactive in area workforce development—in a wide range of fields from the trades to high-tech, in north central Florida’s disadvantaged communities as well as its affluent ones.

Santa Fe’s excellence derives from a systemic approach to improvement. Four years ago, for instance, surveys and data analyses at Santa Fe College identified some roadblocks to student success: not enough personalized advising, attendance issues, low retention for students who took certain gateway courses. That the college settled on a solution of an early alert system and beefed-up advising isn’t novel. Santa Fe stands out, though, in the way it approached reform: collaboratively and comprehensively.

The committee planning the reforms represented all stakeholders—including students, who have a voice in all of Santa Fe’s policy decisions. A five-year budget included funds not just for software and personnel but for professional development, faculty stipends, and assessment each term of whether the system is improving outcomes. The college laid out clear expectations for what kind of issues will be flagged (not just low grades but also absences, incomplete assignments, and unpreparedness), when (early in the semester, and then again), and who will intervene. The professors engaged in the pilot took things one step further: They conducted research projects in class to measure the effectiveness of different pedagogical approaches to improving student engagement and success.

The early alert system is already paying off. In the first year, retention rates for the course sections piloting the program were 10 percentage points higher than the retention rate for all sections. For Amber Gayle, a 32-year-old education student, the benefits were immediate. Gayle was doing “horrible, horrible, horrible” on biology quizzes. The professor’s alert went to the two advisors assigned to work with Gayle—one who provides guidance to all those in student government and one who advises veterans. She met with both of them and the instructor, and they recommended she attend tutoring and study groups and stay after class to ask questions. “I got the situation figured out and ended up with a B in the class,” she says.

Santa Fe demonstrates an impressive commitment to educating students from disadvantaged areas, opening satellite sites, making sure high-needs high schools have thriving dual enrollment programs, and pushing for free buses that bring students to campus. The college’s student body reflects the racial makeup of its service area, and minority students earn credentials at a rate well above the national average.

Wallace Mazon, 20, says he “wasn’t the greatest student” in his Gainesville high school. “I didn’t even really think I was

going to go to college.” Nobody in his family had. In Mazon’s senior year, he was one of a large group of black male high school students from across the county Santa Fe invited onto campus. Mazon met several professors and was guided through the day by a college student who discussed political philosophy with him and gave him a pocket Constitution to keep. At his high school, Mazon says, “you don’t talk about Marx, you definitely don’t talk about Nietzsche. It was the most fun I ever had.”

Two years later, Mazon is president of the Santa Fe debate team; a student senator who wrote a bill, since adopted by college leadership, that protects transgender students from discrimination; and a philosophy and political science student headed to UF on his way to graduate school and a career in international development. With Santa Fe as his launching pad, Mazon is on a clear trajectory to success. ♦

Local employers say Santa Fe is exceptionally responsive compared to other postsecondary institutions and proactive in area workforce development—in a wide range of fields from the trades to high-tech, in north central Florida’s disadvantaged communities as well as its affluent ones.





COMPLETION/ TRANSFER

Nearly three in four full-time students who begin at Lake Area graduate or transfer within three years, among the highest rates in the nation.

73%

Lake Area first-time, full-time students who graduate or transfer within three years

40%

U.S. first-time, full-time students who graduate or transfer within three years

LABOR MARKET

In 2013, Lake Area graduates earned **49% more** than all other new hires in the region.

\$32,448

Annual earnings of 2013 employed graduates of Lake Area

\$21,744

Annual earnings for new hires in the region

LEARNING

Lake Area program faculty maintain strong relationships with employers and work unusually closely with general education faculty to ensure that everything students learn is aligned to workplace needs.

EQUITY

Lake Area's exceptional outcomes are particularly impressive given the fact that half of full-time students enrolled in college for the first time receive Pell Grants.

50%

Lake Area first-time, full-time students who receive Pell Grants

43%

U.S. first-time, full-time community college students who receive Pell Grants

FINALIST
WITH
DISTINCTION



LAKE AREA TECHNICAL INSTITUTE

Watertown, SD

1,703

Number of Students

Town

Location

50%

Students Receiving Pell Grants

5%

Underrepresented
Minority Students

81%

Vocational/Technical Awards
(out of all awards conferred)

Everyone at Lake Area Technical Institute in Watertown, South Dakota, has a single-minded focus on preparing students for careers in the region's high-needs fields.

Lake Area's graduation rate is among the nation's highest, partly because of the tight structure of the college experience: Students, most of whom attend full time, are guided into a technical program when they enroll, based on their aptitude, goals, and interests, and move with a cohort through a prescribed course sequence, every day seeing the same faculty members, who also serve as their advisors.

Area businesses are hungry for workers, and Lake Area has convinced them that the surest path to a steady stream of great employees is investment in the college. Employers provide equipment, scholarships, field experiences, and even faculty salaries. If industries want workers to have fresh skills, says Steve Hauck, the director of corporate education, "then they want to pass that technology down.... They'll just show up on the doorstep at times with the latest technology and say, 'Can you incorporate this?'"

Employers also help instructors make sure they are teaching the right things in the right way, and if surveys show employers aren't satisfied with graduates' skills, programs are required to make a plan to improve. But overall, satisfaction is very strong, and by Christmas, when there's still five months of classes left in the academic year, most of Lake Area's second-year students are already committed to a job. Six months after graduation, 98 percent of Lake Area graduates are employed or are continuing their education, and they outearn other new hires in the region.

The college also stands out in the personal commitment every faculty and staff member is expected to make to ensure students succeed. Kyle Steffensen, who is the med/fire rescue simulation coordinator and works as a paramedic, checks off skills on a list of national expectations for the field. If students don't meet every single standard, Steffensen says, "we'll do remediation all day long to make sure that they are prepared, that they're truly ready for the field, because it may be somebody that I work with some day." ♦



Six months after graduation, 98 percent of Lake Area graduates are employed or are continuing their education, and they outearn other new hires in the region.





COMPLETION/ TRANSFER

Within three years of entering, nearly half of full-time students graduate or transfer.

48%

West Kentucky first-time, full-time students who graduate or transfer within three years

40%

U.S. first-time, full-time students who graduate or transfer within three years

LABOR MARKET

In 2013, people who graduated from West Kentucky five years earlier earned an average of \$37,960, comparable to the wages of all other workers in the region.

\$37,960

Annual earnings for employed 2008 graduates of West Kentucky

LEARNING

West Kentucky has an exceptionally sophisticated and pervasive system for assessing and improving student learning outcomes. Faculty have developed common assessments for every section of every class and gather regularly to discuss results and how to improve practices.

EQUITY

At West Kentucky, minority students succeed at rates well above the national average.

48%

West Kentucky underrepresented minority students who graduate or transfer within three years

34%

U.S. underrepresented minority students who graduate or transfer within three years

FINALIST
WITH
DISTINCTION



WEST KENTUCKY COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Paducah, KY

10,291

Number of Students

37%

Students Receiving Pell Grants

Town

Location

62%

Vocational/Technical Awards
(out of all awards conferred)

9%

Underrepresented
Minority Students

Many community colleges have systems to measure student learning outcomes. But few have taken that work as far as West Kentucky Community and Technical College has. From the moment faculty arrive at the Paducah college, they are taught that it's their job to closely examine student outcomes and their own practices, and adjust instruction as needed.

Every section of every class has common assessments graded according to common rubrics. The learning outcomes process is one of constant improvement—English 101 faculty, for example, have tweaked their grading rubric five times in recent years. Other fruits of their collaboration: incorporating social issues, an element of the college's general education outcomes, in essay questions; calibrating grading so it's consistent across sections; and adding a research component to the required exit essay, to prepare students for English 102.

At some colleges, professors might resist that deep alignment. At West Kentucky, they embrace it. "The first semester I taught reading, it was, '[Give] your best effort, here's everything that we love about reading, go forth and try to recruit people into this love of reading.' You were kind of out in the wind," says developmental instructor Amelia Martens. When her course was redesigned, "everybody got on the same page. We started talking about the common assignments, we started talking about how you would prepare for those assignments in the classroom, we started talking about what we would use the computer lab for."



“The college is never satisfied with where they are. They’re always striving to get to the next level, and they bring the community with them.”

Sandra Wilson, Paducah Area Chamber of Commerce

The college is focused on external as well as internal improvement. West Kentucky is trying to build a college-going culture in an area with low academic attainment, through dual enrollment, an early college high school for first-generation students, and a program that provides tuition and supports for anyone who achieves good grades in two local high schools that serve substantial numbers of students in poverty. And as thousands of jobs have left the region, the college has seeded economic growth, by building a high-tech industrial training facility and adding programs in anticipated growth areas, including marine technology and logistics and operations management.

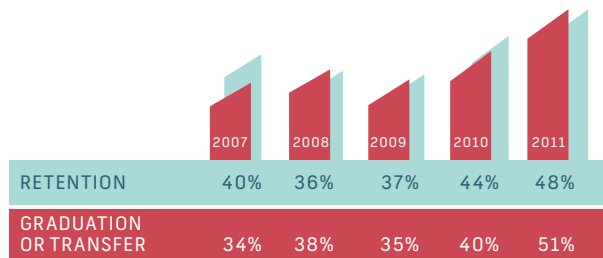
“The college is never satisfied with where they are,” says Sandra Wilson, president of the area Chamber of Commerce. “They’re always striving to get to the next level, and they bring the community with them.” ♦





COMPLETION/TRANSFER

In a five-year period, Kennedy-King increased the number of students who graduate or transfer by 50%.



44%

Kennedy-King first-time, full-time students who graduate or transfer within three years

40%

U.S. first-time, full-time students who graduate or transfer within three years

LABOR MARKET

In 2013, people who graduated from Kennedy-King five years earlier earned an average of \$36,036. In an impoverished community, these wages demonstrate that the college is advancing opportunity.

\$36,036

Annual earnings for employed 2008 graduates of Kennedy-King

LEARNING

Kennedy-King recently aligned its faculty tenure system with the goal of improving teaching and learning and is implementing a general education assessment plan for all academic programs.

EQUITY

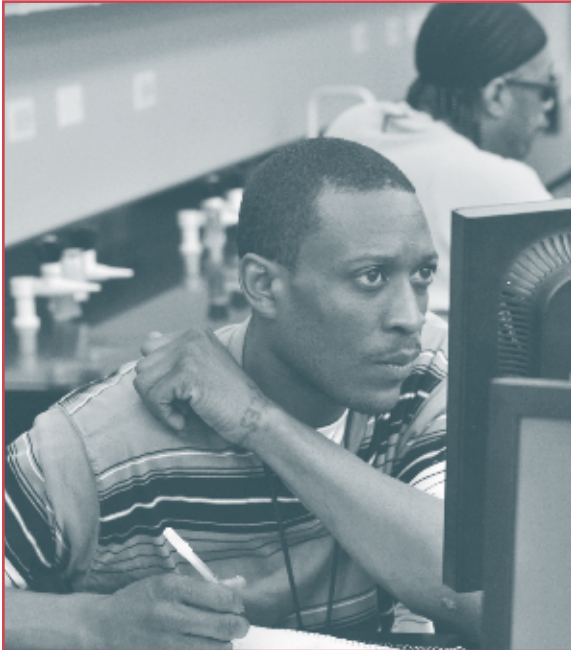
These outcomes are particularly impressive given the fact that 94% of full-time students enrolled in college for the first-time are minority, and nearly three in five students receive Pell Grants.

42%

Kennedy-King underrepresented minority students who graduate or transfer within three years

34%

U.S. underrepresented minority students who graduate or transfer within three years.



KENNEDY-KING COLLEGE

Chicago, IL

11,009

Number of Students

City

Location

58%

Students Receiving Pell Grants

94%

Underrepresented Minority Students

74%

Vocational/Technical Awards (out of all awards conferred)

Some people wouldn't expect dramatic improvement from a community college in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Chicago. But Kennedy-King College, a college where nearly every student begins with remedial needs, has tripled its graduation rate in recent years, proving that what happens outside a college need not stand in the way of student success.

Completion was not always the highest priority at Kennedy-King, one of the six City Colleges of Chicago. But the college's priorities, and its outcomes, have changed, thanks in large part to a citywide reform effort to point all students down a solid path to well-paying jobs.

The college narrowed its range of programs and created highly structured pathways for each, with a map laying out which courses to take each term. Students walk out of their first advising session with an education plan that at the very least

centers on one of ten focus areas—"undecided" is a thing of the past. It used to be that for the vast majority of students, "we did not know what their career intent was, and they didn't either," says Vernese Edghill-Walden, City Colleges' chief academic officer. "Now we start with the end in mind."

And the path to that end is now more closely monitored. Kennedy-King has gone from four advisors to seventeen, and to a system where every advisor is assigned students and tracks whether each of them, each term, remains on track with their

plans. Advisors monitor their students closely, but the college also targets outreach based on specific goals—for example, making automated phone calls to all students at 12 credits to see if they’ll register for a mini-semester or to all students with low midterm grades to encourage them to seek tutoring.

Advisors are held responsible for how many students they see and whether they are progressing. That’s indicative of a new sense of accountability that reaches all the way to the president, who meets twice monthly with the system chancellor to analyze quantitative progress toward student success goals.

The college has a ways to go; its graduation rate has not yet risen to the level of Aspen Prize winners. There is a consensus in Chicago, however, that Kennedy-King is not just granting more degrees than ever, it is providing proof that dramatic improvements in student attainment can be achieved even in the most challenging of environments. ♦

Students walk out of their first advising session with an education plan—“undecided” is a thing of the past.





A STEP FURTHER: PRIZE COLLEGES TAKE PROMISING PRACTICES TO THE NEXT LEVEL

How do Aspen Prize finalists achieve such excellent results? Ask anyone who works at the colleges, and they'll tell you, "We put students first." Yet across the country, community colleges are filled with administrators, faculty, and staff who care about students and work hard to help them succeed. They'd all say they put students first.

They'd all say, too, that they have productive relationships with employers. That they pay attention to what students are learning and strive to improve teaching. That they have structures in place to move students smoothly toward their certificates and degrees. But in practice, there are more effective and less effective ways to do so.

Through visits to the 10 finalist colleges for the 2015 Aspen Prize, as in prior years, we have sought to understand what distinguishes schools that achieve better outcomes for students. It's not just about adopting certain practices—it's about the underlying systems behind those practices, and the culture behind those systems. Excellent colleges consistently gather data figuring out where interventions are needed and whether they're effective, then act to expand what works and fix (or stop) what doesn't. They don't just offer supports for students but make sure they're being used by those who need them most. Understanding they cannot improve opportunity and outcomes acting alone, they work closely with educational, community, and industry partners. And they don't just say they put students first. They do so, by making the potential for student success the basis for every decision—whether it's about schedules or resources or the performance indicators staff are encouraged to strive toward. At these colleges, you never hear, "Students have the right to fail."

Putting students first can take the form of a policy change. Several Aspen Prize colleges have revisited longtime policies, asking, "Does this stand in the way of students completing?" Why do students eligible for graduation have to fill out cumbersome paperwork? Why do we make students go through innumerable steps to register for classes that end up not counting towards their degrees when technological systems can dramatically streamline that process? Changing old ways of doing business isn't always simple—overhauling registration and laying out a narrower range of classes both have complex repercussions—but some Aspen finalists have found that these reforms improve student outcomes and thus are committed to seeing them through.

Putting students first can be about who a college hires and what is expected of them. When a college is committed to engaging students who may not be comfortable in the classroom, attitude matters in addition to credentials. Is a faculty candidate committed to the challenge of teaching the full range of things underprepared students need? Will he or she have a rapport with students? While many colleges require a teaching demonstration for faculty candidates, Santa Fe College in Gainesville, Florida, is among the few that prefer that it happen in front of actual students. Bill Stephenson, the chairman of the humanities and foreign languages division, said that when looking recently for a music professor, it was important that the candidate have a "demeanor that was welcoming of student questions, that led to student engagement," and the interaction with students during the teaching demonstration allowed the search committee to determine that.

Putting students first can be about going well beyond teaching to help students. From the moment employees are hired at Lake Area Technical Institute in Watertown, South Dakota, they are told explicitly that student success is their responsibility. That may mean making a plan so that a student is protected from an abusive boyfriend, or giving a diabetic student who can't afford snacks free access to the kitchen, or contacting every student who's absent from your class. "Since the day I walked in here to become a student, I noticed what I call the invisible hand," says admissions representative Darren Shelton, who is also a graduate of the college. "It guides you from the day you walk in to take a tour to the day we help you walk down the ramp at graduation. ... We really try to help our students every minute of the day."

Putting students first might even mean reconsidering a college's mission. Sometimes, a college located in an impoverished area can be seen mainly as a community resource and a comfortable place for students, who amass credits but too often don't obtain degrees. Aspen Prize finalists have in recent years worked to focus and refocus the attention of everyone at the college on understanding that they are only really putting students first if

they prioritize academic progress above all. This is not an easy shift. “This may come as a surprise to people who knew us in the past as an institution that tried to be all things to all people,” says Arshele Stevens, president of Kennedy-King College in Chicago. “Today, when tough decisions need to be made, we don’t choose ‘all of the above’—we deliberately take the path that helps to ensure our students complete.” Hostos Community College in New York City is going through a similar transformation, centered on communicating the idea that serving as an anchor for community support and cultural pride—as it long has—and getting students to graduation aren’t mutually exclusive. Interim president David Gomez says the essential question behind decisions at Hostos used to be, “Is this important for the community?” Now it’s, “Does this work?”

Exceptional community colleges are always asking, “Does this work?” and adjusting what they do accordingly. While community colleges across the country are engaged in many of the same innovations, Aspen Prize finalists often find more success with them. Why? Because they approach those innovations with cohesion, collaboration, an inquisitive and analytical mindset, and above all a sense of urgency. It’s easy to say, “We do that.” Our research shows, though, that student success is not just about what a college chooses to do, but how.



**“WE CREATE
CLEAR
PATHWAYS.”**

Too often, community colleges think they do a good enough job creating pathways for students because they provide plenty of choices. What students

need isn’t simply choices, though, but the certainty that their choices will lead them to their goals. The Aspen finalists that do an excellent job in this area have structured programs with a clear trajectory to good jobs or transfer to specific four-year schools. They help students choose a program—the right program—early on and lay out education plans that guide them step by step to success.

Some colleges have always had clear, tight pathways built in. At Renton Technical College outside Seattle and at Lake Area, once students choose a technical program, nearly all their classes are prescribed—and they graduate at far higher rates than students at other community colleges, which often offer programs as an assortment of classes rather than as an integrated sequence.

At Kennedy-King College, on the other hand, developing pathways required a major, city-wide change effort, which is credited for the school’s rapid improvement in completion rates.

Planners examined labor market projections and designed programs for each of Chicago’s seven community colleges that led to careers, whether immediately after an associate degree or by way of a bachelor’s. The programs are structured in clear semester-by-semester pathways, and faculty and administrators work together to determine whether courses considered for inclusion are truly necessary for a student’s ultimate success.

Students in the liberal arts need clarity just as much as students in technical fields do, which is why all of Kennedy-King’s programs are structured into clear pathways. Those whose ultimate aim is a four-year degree are shown exactly which courses are needed—and which electives are recommended—for each of several transfer destinations.

Community colleges committed to a smooth transition for transfer students also build automatic connections to four-year schools. Some have guaranteed admissions arrangements, and some have brought the four-year schools onto campus. In some cases, state universities offer portions of selected bachelor degrees on community college campuses. For example, with the University of Florida filled to capacity, it now allows some students to take the first two years of a UF engineering degree at nearby Santa Fe—a model that’s considered so successful that it is being expanded to other fields as well.

Creating clear pathways isn’t enough—excellent colleges make sure students choose one as soon as possible, because lingering as undecided can harm a student’s shot at completion. Brazosport College in Lake Jackson, Texas, and West Kentucky Community and Technical College work with area high schools to make sure dual-credit students choose a pathway and take courses within it. So that students are matched to the right program, Lake Area admissions representatives spend lots of one-on-one time with students touring different departments and discussing the options; some students considering Renton’s allied health programs sit through a sample class, and instructors suggest they even attempt the homework.

While many schools have some students create education plans, some wait too long—a year or more. Several Aspen finalists make sure students create a plan right away, often as a first semester student success class, and that the plan incorporates not just academic courses but also financial planning and career connections. Kennedy-King students have to choose a pathway right away, and Santa Fe students are at the very least designated as “exploring” a certain broad field, like arts and humanities, or social sciences.

What happens to students who aren’t on a realistic path? One of the most common trouble points in community colleges is the interminable and often futile wait to be accepted into a selective admissions health program: hundreds of candidates for dozens of slots. At most colleges, when students land in that zone of uncertainty, their credits, and dollars, are wasted and

they fail to progress. To move these students along a productive trajectory, West Kentucky designed a health science technology degree less academically rigorous than the selective programs but aligned to high-demand jobs.

“WE KEEP STUDENTS ON TRACK.”

While it’s common for community colleges to offer a number of supports for students, schools that are most effective make sure that students use them. For the many underprepared students community colleges educate, it’s not enough to have advisors available—students need to have an ongoing relationship with a person who understands their pathway and connects them to the right people and resources.

Many colleges say their advising is “high-touch,” when in reality students who desperately need guidance can go months without it, and sometimes the advising amounts to little more than facilitating course registration. True high-touch systems set expectations for when advising should happen and consequences if it doesn’t, for the advisor or student or both. At Kennedy-King, advisors are held accountable for how many meetings they hold with students and whether students are following their education plans; advisors call students to make sure they are getting the tutoring they need or show up at their classes if they aren’t answering the phone.

The 18 “student success coaches” at CUNY’s Hostos Community College in the South Bronx see each student at least a few times a semester; if students fail to meet with their coach often enough, their ID card may be flagged until the situation is corrected. The coaches help students choose a major, make sure they aren’t taking classes they don’t need and can get a seat in the ones they do, connect them with financial planning and emergency resources, and contact professors on their behalf. Genesis Nova’s coach helped the 21-year-old choose a career, criminal justice; helped her understand an essay assignment; and talked to her professor when she wasn’t understanding his teaching method. The coaches ultimately teach students to advocate for themselves, but on the way they advocate on students’ behalf.

At Santa Fe and Renton, academic advisors are assigned to certain programs and pathways, so that they can become experts in the requirements and get to know professors. Renton’s advisors show up in classes at least weekly. They are considered part of the program team and work closely with instructors regarding individual students. “We make this imprint with the students right from the very start,” says Eugene Shen, an advisor who covers the pharmacy tech, automotive, and surveying programs. “From the very point they come in at orientation ... there’s this resource person who’s already built in toward their success. I’m going to be here—I’m not going to go anywhere.”



“I want these students to come out of my class with the communications skills their employers are looking for.”

Nicki Yackley-Franken, Lake Area Technical Institute

Faculty who advise may not have as much time for intense tracking of students, but especially in small technical programs they have the advantage of near-daily contact. Excellent colleges make the expectation clear to instructors: You need to know what’s going on in the lives of your students. In programs where students proceed in cohorts, the students keep tabs on each other too. This isn’t just possible in technical programs; at Indian River State College in Ft. Pierce, Florida, a few general education departments, including computer science and digital media, have created “institutes” where students progress together in block schedules.

Technology can be a crucial lever to move students forward—if it’s designed and used thoughtfully. A system that merely shows students what courses are available isn’t as powerful as one, like Santa Fe’s, that shows precisely what students need for graduation and flags courses as outside a student’s education plan or financial aid eligibility before a student registers for them. A system that files each student contact separately doesn’t help as much as one where any professor or student services professional interacting with a student can easily see all of the progress and challenges he or she has faced and how they’ve been addressed.

It’s also not enough to merely have an early alert system that signals when students are beginning to struggle academically, as many colleges do—faculty and student services staff must

work together to ensure that the system is used productively across the college. Some colleges say their early alert system is successful because, say, one-third of professors use it, but there are schools where all do. What's more, excellent colleges have built structures so that there is always follow-up—with student services and faculty—after an alert. Santa Fe instructors rolling out the school's new early alert system are reminded early in the term to flag not just students who got a bad grade on a quiz but anyone who is absent a few times, who hasn't completed assignments, or who doesn't come prepared for class. The system notifies several people engaged with a given student and lays out a clear system of who will intervene.

When an effective college gains knowledge about what will help move students toward completion, it makes sure that's what's being advised. West Kentucky created a central advising council, a committee of student services staff and faculty from each academic division that meets every couple of weeks to look at evidence and decide what to recommend in advising. Data showed that college-ready students had greater success when they took more credits per semester, so everyone who advises is encouraged to relay that message to students. "If a student is ready, get them through as quickly as they can," says Nate Slaton, interim dean of enrollment management. "There's no sense in them going a fifth semester if they can do it in four semesters [and get] into the job market sooner."

“WE WORK TO IMPROVE TEACHING AND LEARNING.”

It's more and more common for community colleges to have established student learning outcomes goals. It's less common for instructors throughout the college to measure against them systematically and regularly adjust instruction accordingly. Simply having faculty gather once or twice a year to talk about assessment results is not enough; at the most successful schools, improving teaching and learning is a constant effort.

At West Kentucky, every section of every course measures student learning outcomes through common assessments, projects, and grading rubrics. Faculty can look at results online to see how well their students have learned certain skills compared to students in other sections; they gather to evaluate the results and change their practice. English 101 faculty, for example, meet in the spring to jointly grade three exit essays from each instructor's class to assess progress in general education outcomes. Those meetings have prompted several improvements, including instructors, tutors, and the library staff all devoting more class time to properly integrating research in essays.

"It ultimately makes your life easier," says professor Britton Shurley. "A large portion of us who teach [English] 101 also teach 102, so if we can use this assessment to make sure we teach [skills] better in 101, I don't have to teach them again a semester later." That kind of collaboration happens across

levels too, with instructors in developmental and college-level courses getting together to make sure expectations are aligned.

Professors in the media design program at Hostos meet with each student every semester to look at not just how they have progressed toward graduation but which of a list of crucial skills they have mastered. The goal is to move artistic students into a vocation. Says Rees Shad, a professor in the program and chair of the humanities department, "We're constantly refocusing them on that trajectory and the viewpoint of, 'You should be out of here in two years, so you can still have the financial aid to go do your bachelor's'" —and, ultimately, succeed in their field.

Excellent colleges align professional development with identified teaching and learning needs rather than assembling a disconnected assortment of offerings. When the CUNY system, for example, introduced more writing-intensive courses, it assigned graduate student writing fellows to each campus. A Hostos faculty member who wants to develop a writing-intensive course is paired with a writing fellow who helps her create assignments, respond to student writing, and assess whether the reading level of the course material is appropriate for students. A Brazosport professor who wants to teach a student success course must take a three-day workshop during the summer and shadow an experienced teacher for a year. Hostos and El Paso Community College offer intensive programs for professors to learn "active learning" techniques for engaging students, and West Kentucky and Lake Area require new instructors to proceed together through a course—Lake Area for one year, West Kentucky for two—that includes teaching techniques, assessment, and other pedagogical skills.

At Renton, every technical instructor is considered a reading teacher, no matter their field. They receive training in teaching techniques for different types of learners as well as reading strategies—how to track words on a page, take notes, and more. John Campbell's appliance and refrigeration students, many of whom arrive with reading deficits, have to make their way through three textbook chapters in the first week of the refrigeration course. "We build the confidence by starting with small successes, and it begins to snowball and take off," he says. "And then most of the students will advance pretty rapidly."

Likewise, general education instructors at several successful colleges make it a point to tailor instruction to the needs of technical programs: science faculty asking allied health instructors which bones and muscles they want covered in anatomy class, English faculty teaching students how to read technical manuals and write the service reports they'll be required to complete on the job, communications faculty incorporating conversational speaking with patients when that's identified as an issue. At Lake Area, there is at least one general education faculty member on every technical program advisory board. Nicki Yackley-Franken, a communications instructor, serves on the boards for the computer information systems and human services programs. "I want these students to come out of my

class with the communications skills their employers are looking for," she says. "... I feel so good when I leave those meetings, because I have direction."

Another way excellent colleges improve student learning is through their approach to tutoring services. All colleges offer some sort of tutoring, but whether or not students use these services and whether the tutors are delivering support tailored to key student learning goals is another matter. Indian River students in the early stages of reading and math instruction take a diagnostic test, then are sent to tutoring with a personalized prescription based on their areas of need. "It's made a huge difference for students who have gone through their prescriptions in the first two or three weeks of the semester," says Pat Fitzsimmons, who teaches developmental math. "...You can see that they understand better."

In Brazosport's tutoring center, all course syllabi and assignments are in a binder for tutors to consult. The English faculty meet with tutors every week to find out what common troubles students are having. Many life sciences courses embed a student who was previously successful in the class as a regular tutor—as many colleges do—but Brazosport has one employee whose sole role is training those tutors and working with professors, and the tutors are required to meet with the professors weekly. Tutoring is pushed hard—Brazosport students are presented data that show that students who attend tutoring get A's while their classmates get B's. In some classes, tutoring is required. Once biology and environmental science students were required to visit the writing lab, the average score on their papers jumped more than 25 points.

"WE WORK WITH OTHER SCHOOLS."

The best community colleges understand that they are one piece of an educational ecosystem, and that their students are best served when institutions work together. This means working with K-12 systems to improve college readiness, ensuring that dual-credit students are taking classes equal in quality to those offered at the college, and partnering with four-year schools so that the transfer process is efficient and transfer students are well-prepared.

Several Aspen finalists go to great lengths to make sure dual-credit classes meet the same standards as traditional community college courses, with identical syllabi, learning outcomes, and grading rubrics, and the teachers are paired with college faculty and observed every semester or year. To make sure high school students are ready for college courses, Brazosport requires them to first take its student success class. A counselor in every high school—a joint employee of the school system and college—advises dual-credit students, and some high schools are staffed with college student mentors too.

While dual-credit can be an important way a community college works with K-12 systems, it shouldn't be the only way. Indian

River's developmental education faculty, for instance, created web modules that included all the skills taught in remedial math class, then trained high school teachers to deliver the instruction so that students could be prepared for college-level work once they arrive at Indian River. High schoolers can also access those lessons in free afterschool tutoring that the college provides, and school systems can use Indian River's repository of teaching tools and resources.

Learning can go the other way, too. Last year, eight Hostos professors and eight area high school teachers met in seminars so the college could have a better understanding of what students needed when they arrived right after graduation. "We were trying to learn from them ... what more do we need to think about as college faculty that we take for granted, that we need to address," says Kate Wolfe, who teaches behavioral and social sciences at Hostos. The high school teachers helped college instructors understand the importance of positive reinforcement, consistency in expectations and grading, and the pitfalls of stereotyping, among other things.

Few community colleges in the country exemplify the power of connecting with education partners as much as El Paso. There's a formal, longtime collaboration among the local K-12 systems, the community college, and University of Texas-El Paso. The leaders meet regularly, but so do teachers, to ensure curricular alignment whether they are teaching the same course or courses in a sequence. With such a cohesive system in place, hundreds of students have received their associate degrees before exiting high school, an impressive (and cost-saving) accomplishment in a community where most students' parents never went to college. And two-year students are connected to the university before they make the physical shift there—they are automatically enrolled in UTEP when they are enrolled in the community college, their information is stored in a database shared by both schools, and university advisors and other resources are available on all the community college's campuses.

Santa Fe and University of Florida have worked to make transfer smoother as well. Once someone declares intent to transfer to UF, he or she is immediately affiliated as both a Santa Fe student and a University of Florida "Gator," with dedicated UF advising, campus visits, and social events. "The students no longer feel like they're at one school or the other," says UF Provost Joe Glover. "They're here to pursue their degree in higher education."

"OUR PROGRAMS LEAD TO JOBS."

A community college that wants to move its students into jobs—good, in-demand jobs, with wages you can raise a family on—must build a deep, symbiotic relationship with area businesses. A meeting once a semester where employers and faculty discuss the marketplace isn't enough; at the most successful colleges, that conversation is always happening. Are

we offering the right programs? Teaching the right skills? How are our graduates doing? College leaders take a proactive role in the community, getting employers to understand that the relationship is a two-way street—for the college to produce great graduates, everyone needs to help out—and do what they can to generate economic opportunity in the region rather than waiting to see what industry delivers.

One of the cornerstones of an effective technical education is real-world, hands-on experience. The best colleges do not let students sit in a classroom for months before they get their hands on an engine or a blood-pressure cuff or a server—Lake Area administrators tells new teachers to make that happen within two weeks. Within a month, new law enforcement students were conducting foot patrols and directing traffic at a town festival, having practiced for several days on each other acting as cars, then on vehicles at a four-way stop on campus.

It's important that students become familiar with the equipment and facilities they'll face in the field, which is why Indian River designed its health sciences building to mimic the layout of a hospital and why its public safety complex was designed in collaboration with police officers, firefighters, and other officials (and with the help of their contributions). At what local police chief Sean Baldwin calls "no doubt the finest public safety training facility in the nation," students can experience everything from jail intake to burning buildings to courtroom questioning, applying their new skills to the full range of job responsibilities they will need in the field—and causing employers to laud Indian River graduates' ability to hit the ground running once hired.

Of course, colleges can't emulate everything students will encounter in their future career. So they work with employers to provide, and sometimes require, meaningful field experiences. Or they provide degree programs that are connected to jobs. Nearly one-quarter of employees at the massive Puget Sound Naval Shipyard graduated from a very successful Olympic College apprenticeship program, where students alternate between class and work; Brazosport runs a 14-week training program for new petrochemical employees in the area.

Dow and other local petrochemical companies rely so heavily on Brazosport's production of skilled graduates that they invest considerably in the college's facilities and instructors. Thanks to donations, students work on the same equipment being used in the plants, which makes them all the more effective once they graduate. Local firms get their names on buildings for donating money—a strategy that has brought state-of-the-art facilities to Indian River too. At several Aspen finalist colleges, local companies supplement or entirely fund faculty salaries to attract the best people, who could make more money in industry jobs.

Buildings and hardware are not enough, of course—it is imperative that colleges and employers work together to ensure

"If a student is ready, get them through as quickly as they can."

Nate Slaton, West Kentucky Community and Technical College

students are learning the right things. Every technical program director tells of employers explaining that a new technology is coming down the pike, or that graduates need to improve their people skills. But the best colleges take the relationship further, consulting with advisory boards whenever they make significant changes to the curriculum or adding new skills to attract new employers.

When Mindtree, a global information technology firm, was choosing from among several states to open a new facility, a major factor in its decision to land in Gainesville was the speed and enthusiasm with which Santa Fe added mobile applications to its programming degree. Now, as many as one-fifth of its local employees are Santa Fe graduates. Gregory Carso, the executive chef of the Metropolitan Club in Chicago, was one of several employers who helped Kennedy-King restructure its culinary program. The goal was to focus less on every aspect of cooking and more on practical skills like time management, math, and business that would lead them to a wider variety of jobs—to give them "more of a reality taste of what this business is about rather than the Food Network [version]," he says.

A large part of creating opportunity for students is offering the right programs in the first place. As a region's economic landscape changes, so should the community college programs. This means not just opening programs but closing them, no matter their popularity, if they're not in high-wage, high-demand sectors. This process should include employer engagement too. Lake Area shuttered its hospitality and tourism concentration because employers were hiring people without degrees for the same wages they hired graduates; when it considered ending medical assisting because of low pay, on the other hand, employers responded by raising wages so that the college would continue the program. Indian River quickly created a program in nuclear medicine when local hospital leaders needed workers; once the spots were filled, the college disassembled the program but is poised to relaunch it as soon as the need arises again.

Sometimes, the best thing a community college can do to improve opportunity is to acknowledge another school has a role to play. Olympic has built bachelor's programs to meet community needs in an isolated region, but it also invited universities to offer degrees on its campus, including in engineering, business, and education. "Instead of trying to turn Olympic College into another state university, they invited existing programs to come and work collaboratively with the

community college, therefore accomplishing something in a lower-cost manner much faster than we would have been able to accomplish otherwise,” says Linda Brown, chair of an advisory board to the college president and the executive director of a local medical center.

While it’s crucial for colleges to be responsive, the best leaders take it a step further, actually seeding economic growth. Santa Fe’s president founded a community initiative that has been credited with bringing in more than 1,400 area jobs by aligning academic opportunities with industries predicted to have the greatest high-wage job growth in the region. West Kentucky developed an associate degree in logistics in anticipation of a new major interstate—that plus the college’s location near several rivers make it a potential nexus for warehousing and distribution, though it isn’t yet. “We’re really poised to capitalize on the growth that might come in this area in the next five to ten years, and I give ... the community college a lot of credit for making that happen,” says Brian Van Horn, dean of continuing education and academic outreach at Murray State University, where logistics students will be able to continue through to a bachelor’s.

“WE ARE COMMITTED TO EQUITY.”

For a college to truly serve disadvantaged students, it is not enough to open the doors and hope they come in. It’s not enough to offer a couple of small mentoring programs and a diversity day. True commitment to equity is a continuing process of outreach, analysis, and support.

This starts with ensuring access. Several Aspen Prize finalists have worked to make sure that the makeup of their student body reflects the makeup of the communities they serve. Some have done so by building campuses and other academic facilities where the neediest students live. Some have focused their efforts to move students in adult basic education, including those with limited English skills, into degree programs. Or they work with the K-12 system to build a college-going culture in regions with low educational attainment.

West Kentucky, with the help of community partners, now offers two years of free college, and a special support system, for anyone who gets a 2.5 GPA at one of several local high schools—including schools in lower-income areas that didn’t traditionally send many students to college. “You have a group of students who we have been able to draw to the community college that have not typically come to us—they have typically gone nowhere,” says president Barbara Veazey. The college has increased the population of underrepresented minorities in the student body so that the percentage matches that of its service area. El Paso works with the city’s education collaborative to increase college readiness and with K-12 partners to spark college aspirations even in elementary schoolers, in a population that not so long ago was “not considering college as an option,” says president William Serrata. The college “adopts”

local elementary schools, visiting and speaking to students to promote the importance of getting a degree and bringing the children on campus to meet faculty. Once the kids are older, El Paso will measure whether the efforts made a difference. “Our freshman class of 2025 are second-graders right now,” Serrata says. “It’s not that far out for us ... to plant that seed that they will go to college.”

Colleges—even those where nearly all students face some disadvantage—must take account of who among their students struggles most, then design ways to support them. Is it certain minority groups? Veterans? Non-native English speakers? Single parents? Nearly every student at Hostos is Hispanic, an ethnic group with relatively low college degree attainment. But within that group there are some students whose needs are especially great, and Hostos has built programs for them, programs that go way beyond the mere mentoring many colleges rely on: an intensive language-immersion program that teaches English through academic content, a program for students with low literacy skills in their native languages, a 25-hour-a-week intensive track for students with the greatest remedial needs. Each of the programs has impressive success rates.

At all community colleges, students’ limited financial resources are a massive roadblock to completion. So colleges committed to equity do all they can to minimize the barrier. That starts with financial aid. Some are able to build up a large scholarship fund reserved only for students with financial need; Brazosport, for instance, gave out more than \$5 million in scholarships last year. Financial aid advisors at the college meet individually with each aid recipient, aggressively counseling them away from any loans they don’t absolutely need to complete college and drawing from the scholarship fund to meet all sorts of emergency needs, whether a dual-credit student can’t afford books or a part-time student can’t afford child care. The result: Only 8 percent of Brazosport students with financial needs have to resort to loans, a fraction of the number at colleges with a less proactive approach to financial aid advising. Olympic has managed to reduce students’ default rate by 5 percentage points, in large part through one-on-one counseling, even coaching students through phone calls with their loan servicers to get them on a reasonable repayment plan.

Olympic students also have the benefit of a one-stop service center for emergency resources: food, referrals to social services agencies, funds for anything from gas money to boots for welding class, and a textbook lending library that distributes 1,500 books a year. Hostos offers such services, and more, through a Single Stop USA center on campus, which connects nearly 2,000 of Hostos’s 9,000 students with benefits and services each year, including tuition assistance, public assistance, financial planning, and help finding housing and legal aid. “We’ve seen them go beyond what is needed,” says Andrew Stettner, chief program officer of Single Stop USA. “They know that this program is going to improve retention, but they also know it’s just the right thing to do.” ♦

ALL DATA CITED IN THIS REPORT ARE DRAWN FROM FEDERAL AND STATE DATA SETS DESCRIBED ON PAGE 30.

HOW DID WE SELECT THE WINNERS?

Round 1

From over 1,000 community colleges to 150 eligible.

Aspen convened a national panel of community college experts, which devised a formula—based on national data on performance and improvement in student completion, as well as completion for underrepresented racial and ethnic groups—to assess every U.S. public two-year college and identify 150 eligible to apply for the Prize.

Round 2

From 150 eligible to 10 finalists.

Aspen invited each eligible institution to submit an application, and convened a selection committee of higher education experts to select 10 finalists from among 106 applications submitted. The committee identified the finalists based on Round 1 data and information from applications, including institutional data on completion, labor market, and learning outcomes, disaggregated by race and ethnicity; descriptions of how institutions have achieved and improved student outcomes; and interviews with the leadership teams of 54 colleges.

Round 3

From 10 finalists to a winner, finalists-with-distinction, and a Rising Star.

Aspen collected unique data sets, including data from states on graduates' employment rates and earnings and from the National Student Clearinghouse on four-year transfer and completion, and conducted two-day site visits to the 10 finalist institutions.

A prize jury of prominent former elected officials, national business and civil rights leaders, and community college experts reviewed the quantitative and qualitative information gathered in each of the three rounds to select a winner, finalists-with-distinction, and a Rising Star.

ASPEN PRIZE DATA

To assess the four elements of excellence—learning, completion, labor market, and equitable outcomes—the Aspen Institute accesses multiple sources to collect quantitative data and qualitative information about the finalist colleges.

<p>QUANTITATIVE DATA</p> <p>THE INTEGRATED POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION DATA SYSTEM (IPEDS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credentials awarded per 100 FTE (encompassing both full-time and part-time students) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > For all students > For underrepresented minority students • Three-year graduation/transfer rate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > For all students > For underrepresented minority students • Retention rate (first-to-second year) • Data on five years of improvement on three measures: retention rate, three-year graduation/transfer rate, degrees awarded per 100 FTE • Achievement gap <p>NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four-year transfer rate • Bachelor’s degree completion rate <p>INSTITUTIONAL DATA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional data on workforce outcomes based on surveys • Six-year cohort analysis on completion and transfer outcomes <p>STATE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE RECORDS MATCHED WITH INSTITUTIONAL COHORT DATA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class of 2008 employment information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Job placement rate one year and five years after graduation > Rate of continuous employment > Annualized salaries and wages five years after graduation • Class of 2013 employment information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Job placement rate at graduation and one year after graduation > Rate of continuous employment > Annualized salaries and wages one year after graduation 	<p>QUALITATIVE INFORMATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of Peter Ewell and Karen Paulson (NCHEMS) regarding how the institution collects and uses information about student learning to improve learning outcomes • Assessment of expert site visitors based on information collected during site visits including (1) meetings with institutional leaders, professors, department chairs, deans, staff, students, and employers, and (2) documents submitted by each institution, including strategic plans, accreditation reports, and program review reports <p>CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION</p> <p>Because community colleges work with many different student populations in communities with varying challenges, Aspen collects a significant amount of contextual data to share with the Finalist Selection Committee and Prize Jury.</p> <p>THE INTEGRATED POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION DATA SYSTEM (IPEDS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of students attending part-time • Percentage of vocational/technical awards (out of all awards conferred) • Percentage of non-traditional age students (25 & older) • Percentage of underrepresented minority students (disaggregated by African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students) • Percentage of Pell Grant recipients <p>U.S. CENSUS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of students entering needing remedial education • Median family income of service area • Urbanicity • Percentage of underrepresented minorities in the service area • Average annual county new hire wage <p>U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County unemployment rate • County five-year employment change rate • Average annual county wage <p>INSTITUTIONAL DATA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of students entering needing remedial education
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We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to the analytic work and selection processes that led to the selection the 2015 Aspen Prize winner, finalists—with-distinction, Rising Star, and finalists.

PRIZE JURY

We offer our sincere appreciation to the Prize Jury, which thoughtfully deliberated and selected the winners and commended institutions from among the ten finalist community colleges.

MITCHELL E. DANIELS, JR. (Co-chair), former Governor of Indiana; President, Purdue University

THE HONORABLE GEORGE MILLER (Co-chair), former U.S. Representative, State of California

DR. ANTHONY P. CARNEVALE, Research Professor and Director, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

DR. MARTHA KANTER, former Under Secretary, U.S. Department of Education; Distinguished Visiting Professor of Higher Education and Senior Fellow, Steinhardt Institute of Higher Education Policy, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, New York University

DR. WILLIAM KIRWAN, Chancellor, University System of Maryland

DAVID LEONHARDT, Managing Editor, *The Upshot*, *The New York Times*

DR. MICHAEL L. LOMAX, President and Chief Executive Officer, United Negro College Fund

DELIA POMPA, Senior Vice President, Programs, National Council of La Raza

JON SCHNUR, Executive Chairman, America Achieves

JUAN SEPÚLVEDA, former Senior Advisor for Hispanic Affairs, Democratic National Committee; former Executive Director, White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics; Senior Vice President, Station Services, PBS

VALERIE MOSLEY, Chairwoman, Valmo Ventures; Founder, Heartbeings.com

DATA/METRICS ADVISORY PANEL, ROUND 1

The Data/Metrics Advisory Panel, with technical support from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), built upon last year's formula to devise an even stronger method of evaluating all U.S. community colleges and select 150 colleges eligible to apply for the Aspen Prize. We greatly appreciate the efforts of Dr. Patrick Kelly and Matt Crellin from NCHEMS as well as the members of the Data/Metrics Advisory Panel:

DR. KEITH BIRD, Senior Fellow, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce

DR. RANDALL W. EBERTS, President, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research

DR. ROB JOHNSTONE, Founder & President, National Center for Inquiry & Improvement

DR. PATRICK KELLY, Senior Associate, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS)

JON O'BERGH, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of the Under Secretary, U.S. Department of Education

KENT PHILLIPPE, Senior Research Associate, American Association of Community Colleges

RICHARD REEVES, Program Director, Administrative Data Division: Postsecondary Branch, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education

JEFF STROHL, Director of Research, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

DR. WILLIAM E. TRUEHEART, President and CEO & Director, Achieving the Dream, Inc.

FINALIST SELECTION COMMITTEE, ROUND 2

The Finalist Selection Committee identified ten institutions that aim to deliver exceptional student results in completion, learning, labor market, and equitable outcomes. Many thanks for the hard work and thoughtful analysis of the committee:

ELAINE DELOTT BAKER, Acceleration Specialist, Colorado Online Energy Training Consortia, Colorado Community College System

DR. KEITH BIRD, Senior Fellow, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce

DR. KATHY BOOTH, Senior Research Associate, WestEd

VICKIE CHOITZ, former Senior Policy Analyst and Interim Director of Workforce and Postsecondary Education, CLASP; Associate Director, Economic Opportunities Program, The Aspen Institute

MARC HERZOG, Chancellor Emeritus, Connecticut Community College System

DR. ROBERT JOHNSTONE, Founder & President, National Center for Inquiry & Improvement

AMY LAITINEN, Deputy Director of Higher Education, New America Foundation

DR. NANCY POPPE, Campus President for the Extended Learning Campus (ret.), Portland Community College

DR. LASHAWN RICHBURG-HAYES, Director, Young Adults and Postsecondary Education Policy, MDRC

DEBORAH SANTIAGO, Chief Operating Officer and Vice President for Policy, Excelencia in Education

ROBERT SHIREMAN, Executive Director, California Competes

DR. NICOLE SMITH, Senior Economist, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

DR. SHANNA SMITH JAGGARS, Assistant Director, Community College Research Center, Columbia University

DR. HEATHER WASHINGTON, Chief Executive Officer, Maya Angelou Schools and the See Forever Foundation

JANE WELLMAN, Founding Director, Delta Cost Project

SITE VISITORS, ROUND 3

Teams of experienced researchers and practitioners conducted two-day site visits to each of the ten finalist institutions to gather qualitative research. Special thanks to our site visitors:

ELAINE DELOTT BAKER, Acceleration Specialist, Colorado Online Energy Training Consortia, Colorado Community College System

DR. DARLA COOPER, Director of Research and Evaluation, The Research & Planning Group for California Community Colleges (The RP Group)

MARC HERZOG, Chancellor Emeritus, Connecticut Community College System


DR. DAVIS JENKINS, Senior Research Associate, Community College Research Center, Columbia University

DR. ROBERT JOHNSTONE, Founder & President, National Center for Inquiry & Improvement

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