2015 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence Awarded to Florida’s Santa Fe College

Finalists-with-Distinction: Lake Area Technical Institute (SD) and West Kentucky Community & Technical College (KY)  
“Rising Star” Award: Kennedy-King College (IL)

$1.1 Million Recognizes Excellence in Four Areas: Learning, Degree Completion, Minority and Low-Income Student Success, and Employment and Earnings

Washington, DC, March 18, 2015 – The Aspen Institute announced today that Santa Fe College (SFC) in Gainesville, Florida is the winner of the 2015 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the nation’s preeminent recognition of high achievement and performance in America’s community colleges.

The $1.1 million Aspen Prize, awarded every two years, recognizes institutions for outstanding outcomes in four areas: student learning; certificate and degree completion; employment and earnings; and high levels of access and success for minority and low-income students.

Selected from 1,123 public community colleges nationwide, Aspen Prize winner Santa Fe College will receive $800,000 in prize funds. Lake Area Technical Institute (LATI) in Watertown, South Dakota, and West Kentucky Community and Technical College (WKCTC) in Paducah, KY were named finalists-with-distinction. And this year, for the first time, Aspen recognized a top ten finalist with the “Rising Star” award for rapid improvement in student completion with the honor going to Kennedy-King College (KKC), part of the City Colleges of Chicago system. All three will receive $100,000 prizes. (See full list of Top Ten Prize Finalists below and read more information about them at http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/college-excellence/2015aspenprize.)

“Aspen Prize winner Santa Fe and the finalists offer lessons in how community colleges large and small can provide an outstanding, affordable, and job-relevant education for every student,” said Joshua Wyner, Executive Director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program.
Program and author of *What Excellent Community Colleges Do*. “Santa Fe College particularly stands out for its exceptional work in keeping students on track to graduate with degrees that have incredible value after they graduate. Faculty and staff provide rigorous preparation for transfer to four-year universities like the nearby University of Florida (UF) and have proactively worked with local employers to meet their changing workforce needs. The results are clear: Santa Fe graduates have one of the highest transfer and bachelor’s attainment rates in the country as well strong employment and earnings outcomes.”

At today’s Prize announcement event at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, national and state leaders joined in celebrating the program and the accomplishments of the finalists. Speakers included Dr. Jill Biden, Second Lady of the United States; Governor Bill Haslam of Tennessee – the first state in the nation to offer free community college; and Aspen Prize Jury co-chairs Mitch Daniels, president of Purdue University and former Governor of Indiana, and former Representative George Miller (D-CA).

"So many Americans are relying on community colleges to provide the stepping stones to a college degree and a better future,” Dr. Biden said. “Our nation’s prosperity truly depends on our higher education system delivering more high-quality degrees to an increasingly diverse group of students. This is the time for community colleges to shine, and the institutions Aspen honors today are leading by example.”

Community colleges today enroll more than 40 percent of all US undergraduates – 7 million students – working toward degrees and certificates. These include rapidly growing numbers of lower-income and minority students. While nationwide, fewer than half of all community college students graduate, Aspen Prize finalist institutions demonstrate that community colleges can help students achieve higher levels of success while in college and after they graduate.

**Aspen Prize Winner - Santa Fe College (Gainesville, FL)**
Santa Fe College’s culture of excellence, collaboration, and dedication to student success is instilled throughout the entire institution. The College serves nearly 22,000 socioeconomically diverse students on main campuses and six satellite centers. Staff and faculty nimbly meet the challenge by providing rigorous education coupled with comprehensive supports – whether it’s developing apps to help students navigate the registration process, adding critical thinking coursework to every health field, bolstering supports for students who are no longer required to take remedial coursework because of a recent state law, or creating degree programs linked to new regional jobs ranging from high-tech to manufacturing. Santa Fe’s president, Dr. Jackson Sasser, has set out to address regional workforce development needs that nearby University of Florida cannot meet alone. For example, Sasser installed a bachelor’s degree programs in information technology in response to local companies’ needs for programmers and network specialists.

**Student outcomes:**

- Excellent overall graduation/transfer rates - 62% compared to 40% national average - supported by comprehensive systems to keep students on track
Clear and highly successful transfer pathways with four-year universities, including
the highly-selective University of Florida - 70% acceptance rate for Santa Fe
graduates
Strong success rates for underrepresented minority students, who make up 20% of the
student body – graduation/transfer rate 49% compared with 34% national average

To read more about Santa Fe College go to: http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-
work/college-excellence/2015aspenprize

Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence

For a full electronic press kit, including details that distinguished the Aspen Prize Winner and
Finalists-with-Distinction, as well as information and lessons learned from the all of the Prize
Finalists listed below, please visit: www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/aspen-prize/media-
resources.

Winner
Santa Fe College (Gainesville, FL)
Media contact: Chuck Clemons, (352) 395-5200, chuck.clemons@sfcollege.edu

Finalists-with-Distinction
Lake Area Technical Institute (Watertown, SD)
Media contact: LuAnn Strait, (605) 882-5284 ext. 241, straitl@lakeareatech.edu

Lake Area Technical Institute has been a finalist-with-distinction each of the three years the
Aspen Prize has been awarded since 2011.

Student outcomes:
- 73% graduation/transfer rate among highest in the nation
- 98% of graduates are employed or continuing their education six months after
  graduation
- Graduates earn 49% more than other new hires in the region

West Kentucky Community and Technical College (Paducah, KY)
Media contact: Janett Blythe, (270) 534-3079, janett.blythe@kctcs.edu

West Kentucky Community and Technical College is a three-time top ten finalist for Aspen
Prize.

Student outcomes:
- 48% graduation/transfer rate
- No gap in graduation rates for students of color

Winner: Rising Star Award
Kennedy-King College (Chicago, IL)
Media contact: Katheryn Hayes, tel: 312-553-2719, khayes32@ccc.edu
Kennedy-King College’s rapid and dramatic improvement in student completion earned them the Rising Star award.

Student outcomes:
- A tripling of graduation rates between 2010 and 2015
- 42% graduation/transfer rate for underrepresented minority students (compared to 34% nationally), who make up nearly the entire student body

Finalists

**Brazosport College (Lake Jackson, TX)**
Media contact: Kyle Smith, 979 230-3489, kyle.smith@brazosport.edu

**El Paso Community College (El Paso, TX)**
Contact: Keri Moe, tel: 915-831-6475, kmoe@epcc.edu

**Eugenio María de Hostos Community College, CUNY (Bronx, NY)**
Media contact: Ana Carrión-Silva, tel: 718-518-4407, amcarrion@hostos.cuny.edu

**Indian River State College (Fort Pierce, FL)**
Media contact: Dr. Mary Locke, tel: 772-462-7225, mlocke@irsc.edu

**Olympic College (Bremerton, WA)**
Media contact: Amanda Gebhardt-Fuentes, tel: 360-475-7721, agebhardtfuentes@olympic.edu

**Renton Technical College (Renton, WA)**
Media contact: Melissa Rohlfs, tel: 425-235-2356, mrohlfs@rtc.edu

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The Aspen College Excellence Program aims to advance higher education practices, policies, and leadership that significantly improve student outcomes. Through the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the New College Leadership Project, and other initiatives, the College Excellence Program works to improve colleges’ understanding and capacity to teach and graduate students, especially the growing population of low-income and minority students on American campuses. For more information, visit www.aspeninstitute.org/college-excellence.

The Aspen Institute is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, DC. Its mission is to foster leadership based on enduring values and to provide a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues. The Institute is based in Washington, DC; Aspen, Colorado; and on the Wye River on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. It also has offices in New York City and an international network of partners. For more information, visit www.aspeninstitute.org.