

**The 2013**  
**Aspen Prize**  
**for Community College Excellence**



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE



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For millions of Americans, community colleges provide an essential pathway to well-paying jobs and continuing higher education. The Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence honors those 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

**C**ommunity colleges have received extraordinary attention over the past year, in the presidential debates, in state legislatures, and in the media. This buzz is about more than the fact that 7 million degree-seeking students are enrolled in U.S. community colleges each year, making up the majority of freshmen and sophomores. It reflects a broad recognition that our nation's ability to develop a talented workforce and equalize opportunity absolutely depends on increasing the success of community college students.

Too often, though, that attention focuses on the undeniably low completion rates at community colleges rather than on excellence in the sector. There are nearly 1,200 community colleges in the country. Looking only at their student success averages obscures that some colleges achieve exceptional outcomes. The winners of the 2013 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence demonstrate just what can be accomplished.

At both of the 2013 winning colleges—Santa Barbara City College in California and Walla Walla Community College in Washington—more than half of full-time students earn a credential and/or transfer to a four-year college, far above the national average. While both are comprehensive colleges, each achieves exceptional outcomes by focusing on a different, equally important goal. Santa Barbara orients most of its programs to four-year transfer. Not only do unusually large numbers of students achieve that goal, but the majority of transfers go on to complete bachelor's degrees as well. At Walla Walla, on the other hand, most programs offer career and technical education, providing graduates high rates of employment and wages that are, on average, between 50 and 80 percent higher than those for other workers in the region.

Both colleges have made an enduring commitment to maintaining access and ensuring success for students from diverse racial and economic backgrounds. They build intentional strategies to recruit and ensure the success of those who might not otherwise have access to such exceptional programs. They work closely with at-risk students in K-12 schools and pay special attention to students who arrive at college without adequate academic and language skills. They work hard to help veterans, and one even educates thousands of prisoners.

Most importantly, these colleges never use the presence of many underprepared students on their campuses as an excuse to water down content. In job training and traditional academic programs alike, standards are held high to make sure that students don't just finish their degrees, but learn what they need to succeed after graduating.

The Aspen College Excellence Program is proud to recognize the achievements of the 2013 Aspen Prize winners, finalists-with-distinction, and all the finalist institutions. Each of them shows that broad access and high levels of student success are not mutually exclusive and provides important lessons on how to achieve both goals.

Sincerely,



**Joshua Wyner**

Executive Director, College Excellence Program, The Aspen Institute

The Aspen Institute congratulates each  
of the ten finalists for the 2013 Aspen Prize  
for Community College Excellence:

**CO-WINNERS:**

Santa Barbara City College (CA)  
Walla Walla Community College (WA)

**FINALISTS-WITH-DISTINCTION:**

Kingsborough Community College-CUNY (NY)  
Lake Area Technical Institute (SD)

**FINALISTS:**

Brazosport College (TX)  
Broward College (FL)  
College of the Ouachitas (AR)  
Santa Fe College (FL)  
Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College (KY)  
West Kentucky Community and Technical College (KY)



**2011 WINNER:**

Valencia College (FL)

**2011 FINALISTS-WITH-DISTINCTION:**

Lake Area Technical Institute (SD)  
Miami Dade College (FL)  
Walla Walla Community College (WA)  
West Kentucky Community and Technical College (KY)

**With this prestigious prize, the Aspen Institute and its partners aim to further the national understanding of how community colleges can increase student success. The winning community colleges profiled in this document have done just that. They have shown us that what colleges do matters deeply to student achievement.**

#### HOW DO WE DEFINE EXCELLENCE?

Community college excellence means providing students with strong and equitable access to a high quality, continuously improving education; an education that motivates and inspires students to excel, and, in the end, equips them with the skills and knowledge they will need to succeed in work and life. The winners of the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence have achieved excellence within four domains.

**1**

##### **COMPLETION OUTCOMES**

High levels of student completion of workforce certificates, two-year degrees, and transfer to four-year colleges driven by institutional practices and policies that promote completion.

**2**

##### **LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES**

High rates of employment and earnings for graduates achieved through institutional practices and policies aligned with labor market needs and student labor market success.

**3**

##### **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

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

**4**

##### **EQUITABLE OUTCOMES**

High levels of access and success for students who are often underserved, including those from three underrepresented racial/ethnic groups—African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American—and students from low-income backgrounds, stemming from an institutional commitment to close achievement gaps.

All 10 finalists for the Aspen Prize deserve the deep appreciation of everyone who believes in the promise of higher education to deliver the job and life skills our nation's students, businesses, economy, communities, and families need.

The four community college profiles that follow showcase important lessons from our national Prize winners, Santa Barbara City College and Walla Walla Community College, and the two additional colleges chosen for special commendation.



**WINNERS**

Santa Barbara City College  
Walla Walla Community College

**FINALISTS-WITH-DISTINCTION**

Kingsborough Community College-CUNY  
Lake Area Technical Institute

**HOW DID WE SELECT THE WINNERS?**

**Round 1**

**From over 1,000 community colleges to 120 eligible.**

Aspen convened a national panel of community college experts, which devised a formula—based on existing national data on performance and improvement in student completion, as well as completion for underrepresented racial/ethnic groups—to assess over 1,000 public two-year colleges and identify 120 eligible to apply for the Prize.

**Round 2**

**From 120 community colleges to 10 finalists.**

Aspen invited each of the 120 eligible institutions to submit an application, and convened a selection committee of experts in community college and higher education to select 10 finalists from among 96 applications submitted. The Selection Committee identified 10 finalists based on Round 1 data and information from applications, including (1) institution-level data on completion, labor market, and learning outcomes, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, (2) descriptions of how institutions have achieved and improved student outcomes, and (3) interviews with the leadership teams of 46 colleges.

**Round 3**

**From 10 finalists to the selection of the winners and finalists-with-distinction.**

Aspen collected unique data sets, including (1) data from states on graduates' employment rates and earnings, (2) data from the National Student Clearinghouse on four-year transfer and completion rates, and (3) information gathered by experts before and during 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 the Prize winners and finalists-with-distinction.

## WHY FOCUS ON COMMUNITY COLLEGES?

# 45%

Community college students constitute nearly half of the entire United States undergraduate student population.

Source: (2011). IPEDS Fall Enrollment Survey [AACC Analysis]

There are 13 million students being educated in more than 1,000 community colleges across the country. Of these students, 7 million are working toward degrees and certificates. They are more likely than four-year college students to be minorities, to come from low-income backgrounds, and to be the first in their families to receive higher education. In uncertain economic times, community college is often their only viable path to advancement.

# 40%

Completion rates at community colleges are not what they should and can be. Even when transfer students are followed into four-year institutions, the estimated success rate for students who start higher education at community colleges does not pass the 40 percent mark.

Source: Federal IPEDS Data. (2008-2010)



# 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.

## QUANTITATIVE DATA

### THE INTEGRATED POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION DATA SYSTEM (IPEDS)

- Credentials awarded per 100 FTE (encompassing both full-time and part-time students)
  - » For all students
  - » For underrepresented minority students
- Three-year graduation/transfer rate
  - » 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, credentials awarded per 100 FTE
- Achievement gap

### NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE

- Four-year transfer rate
- Bachelor's degree completion rate

### INSTITUTIONAL DATA

- Institutional data on workforce outcomes based on surveys
- Six-year cohort analysis on completion and transfer outcomes

### STATE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE RECORDS MATCHED WITH INSTITUTIONAL COHORT DATA

- Class of 2006 employment information
  - » Job placement rate one year and five years after graduation
  - » Rate of continuous employment
  - » Annualized salaries and wages five years after graduation
- Class of 2011 employment information
  - » Job placement rate at graduation and one year after graduation
  - » Rate of continuous employment
  - » Annualized salaries and wages one year after graduation

## QUALITATIVE INFORMATION

- 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

## CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

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.

### THE INTEGRATED POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION DATA SYSTEM (IPEDS)

- 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 Native American students)
- Percentage of Pell Grant recipients

### U.S. CENSUS

- Median family income of service area
- Urbanicity
- Percentage of underrepresented minorities in the service area
- Average annual county new hire wage

### U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS

- County unemployment rate
- County five-year employment change rate
- Average annual county wage

### INSTITUTIONAL DATA

- Percentage of students entering needing remedial education



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CO-WINNER

# SANTA BARBARA CITY COLLEGE



<b>28,763</b> Number of Students	<b>City</b> Location	<b>16%</b> Students Receiving Pell Grants*	<b>35%</b> Underrepresented Minority Students	<b>24%</b> Vocational/Technical Awards (out of all awards conferred)
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**T**he first time Mauricio Isaac walked to Santa Barbara City College for a visit, he turned around before climbing the hill to campus. The second time, he made it up the hill—then turned around. Isaac, an eighth-grade dropout and recent prison inmate who has no family members with college experience, had never seen himself as a student. He looked up at the college and said to himself, “I don’t belong there.”

But the leaders, faculty, and staff at the Aspen Prize-winning college believed strongly that he did. SBCC benefits from a beautiful ocean-view campus, a faculty packed with talented professors, and proximity to a highly selective state university. Those assets are never used as an excuse to coast; rather, they are trained on one of the most vital missions of a community college: to boost the chances of the neediest students.

Isaac was being recruited through a program that prepares released inmates for SBCC. Noel Gomez, an adviser with the program, went to meet Isaac after he missed those appointments. He introduced Isaac to peers who had led similarly challenging lives and now were succeeding in college. “They looked like me,” says Isaac, 25. “They had tattoos on their head. And they looked happy, while I was miserable.”

The college provides a rich array of resources—and high expectations—for traditionally underserved students, including a large and growing population of Hispanics, who graduate and transfer at unusually high rates. Countless students who say they were given up on elsewhere are inspired, tutored, and pushed to succeed by Santa Barbara faculty. (Isaac assumed he’d get an automotive certificate, until professors and counselors convinced him to pursue engineering. “To be a mechanic,” they told him, “you’re probably wasting your potential.”) A special program is designed to not just get minorities interested in science and math, but to move them through demanding courses so they are ready to transfer. Motivation begins before students even arrive on campus, thanks to an unusually strong partnership with the local high schools.

\*This is an inaccurate reflection of the percentage of low-income students at SBCC. Throughout the California Community College system, a state tuition waiver program for low-income students significantly deters their participation in the Pell program.

# OUTCOMES

## COMPLETION/ TRANSFER

Two out of every three full-time students who begin at SBCC graduate or transfer within three years, a rate well over the national average.

**64%**  
**40%**

SBCC Percentage of Full-Time Students Who Graduate or Transfer Within Three Years

U.S. Average Percentage of Full-Time Students Who Graduate or Transfer Within Three Years

Source: Federal IPEDS Data 2008-10

## LABOR MARKET

California state records show that the 2011 wages of students who graduated five years earlier, \$42,900 on average, are comparable to the wages of *all* other workers in the area.

**\$42,900**

Annualized Wages for Employed 2006 Graduates of SBCC

Source: California State Wage Records

## LEARNING

SBCC makes excellent use of course and program-based learning outcomes and employs a number of methods, such as regular meetings between deans and faculty, to examine and act on information about student learning. Strong bachelor's attainment and licensure passage rates signify that students are learning what they need to succeed after graduating.

## EQUITY

SBCC achieves a strong three-year graduation/transfer rate of 48% for Hispanic students, who comprise over 30% of its student body.

**48%**  
**35%**

SBCC Percentage of Full-Time, Hispanic Students Who Graduate or Transfer Within Three Years

U.S. Average Percentage of Full-Time, Hispanic Students who Graduate or Transfer Within Three Years

Source: Federal IPEDS Data 2008-10



Fifty-seven percent of full-time students at SBCC transfer to four-year colleges within six years, and over half of transfer students go on to get a bachelor's degree. The Transfer Center, which Isaac visits often, takes students on college tours and helps them plan course schedules keyed to transfer. Articulation agreements with 76 colleges both inside and outside of California ensure that their credits will be accepted; several of those schools guarantee admission if students meet academic requirements.

The campus is saturated with academic support, including a writing center staffed by trained professionals and proven to improve course completion, and peer tutors embedded in hundreds of class sections. Despite budget cuts, the college expanded its tutoring staff and the office dedicated to transfer arrangements. Moreover, SBCC courses are built with an eye to the academic standards of four-year schools. "Our faculty puts

a tremendous emphasis on making sure students do a lot of writing and critical thinking," says executive vice president Jack Friedlander. "Our students come back and tell us they were really well-prepared, that our courses were as challenging or more challenging than those at their transfer institutions—even Berkeley and UCLA."

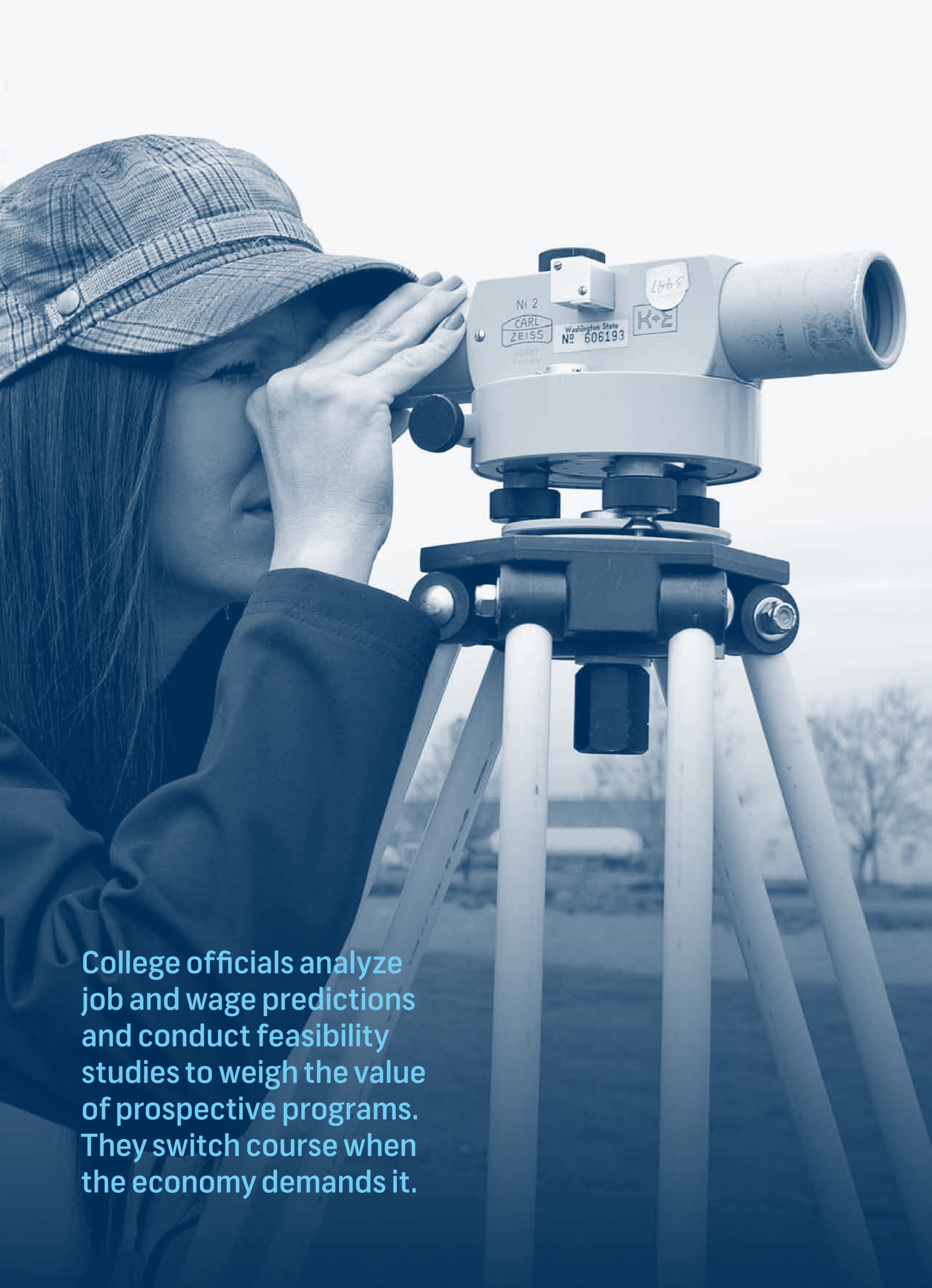
Because students can't make it to a four-year school if they are stuck endlessly in remedial classes, SBCC faculty designed the Express to Success program, which moves students in small

learning communities through two remedial courses in the time typically devoted to one. It's a counterintuitive effort—challenging students who are already behind to do even more—which reflects the innovative thinking prevalent at SBCC. New hires are chosen in part for their willingness to lead and innovate; faculty are tasked with solving problems in creative ways and given the resources to do so. At other institutions, says president Lori Gaskin, "change has been looked at with a huge amount of trepidation. Here, there is a pervasive feeling of being open to taking risks and experimenting."

The risk has paid off, with remedial course completion rates of Express to Success students exceeding those of their peers by 30 percentage points. One beneficiary is Isaac, who managed to move from the lowest level of remedial math to pre-calculus in two semesters.

Isaac is now a 4.0 student, writing and math tutor, and mentor for minority students interested in science and math. He is studying this semester in Rome and plans to transfer to University of California, Irvine. He never doubts anymore that college is for him, and knows that because of SBCC's help he will succeed. "I have goals and I want to accomplish them," he says. "I always have someone checking on me everywhere I go." ♦

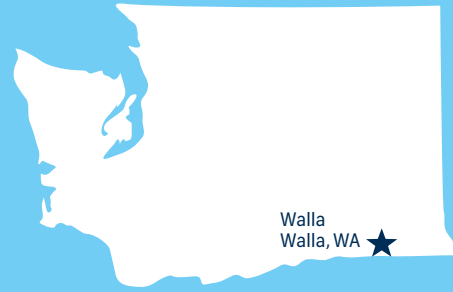
**Countless students who say they were given up on elsewhere are inspired, tutored, and pushed to succeed by faculty.**



College officials analyze job and wage predictions and conduct feasibility studies to weigh the value of prospective programs. They switch course when the economy demands it.

CO-WINNER

# WALLA WALLA COMMUNITY COLLEGE



8,635

Number of  
Students

Small Town /  
Rural  
Location

43%

Students Receiving  
Pell Grants

20%

Underrepresented  
Minority Students

64%

Vocational/Technical Awards  
(out of all awards conferred)

**A**griculture in southeast Washington, long the region's economic engine, was slowing by the late 1990s. The kind of farming that required food processing was moving overseas, and lumber mills were closing. The primary employer in the small city of Walla Walla was the local penitentiary. "This was a community in financial trouble," says Steven VanAusdle, the president of Walla Walla Community College.

In 2000, the Aspen Prize-winning college, which has a campus in Walla Walla and one 100 miles away in Clarkston, created an enology and viticulture degree program. Since then, the number of local wineries has grown from 16 to over 170, many staffed by WWCC graduates. But the success of the wine program isn't merely defined by the relatively small number of students who graduate from it. Rather, it has spurred the creation of national wine distribution and other related facilities, as well as a healthy hospitality sector that has left the region relatively unscathed by the recession, that boosts the employment prospects of not just winemakers but also chefs, nurses, and all the other community college graduates in demand in a thriving society. "That community college has been at the forefront of the redefinition and re-creation of that community," says Rob Sentz, a vice president at Economic Modeling Specialists Inc., which has helped WWCC anticipate workforce needs.

In 2011, new WWCC graduates earned \$41,548 on average, nearly twice the amount of other new hires in the region. State development officials attribute much of that to the vision of VanAusdle, who set out to transform the college from one left

vulnerable to the fate that awaited small towns throughout rural America to one that would train and funnel students right into high-paying jobs they—and the community—needed. To do so, college officials analyze job and wage predictions and conduct feasibility studies to weigh the value of prospective programs. They switch course when the economy demands it. Even though students were still interested in carpentry, for instance, the college closed the program when construction waned. When analysis showed that the region could absorb at least twice as many nurses as WWCC was producing, it doubled the nursing program. Irrigation instruction shifted from farms toward lawns and sport fields, where there is more work. A new energy program provides technicians for the area's growing stock of wind turbines. Labor statisticians helped the college plan a watershed ecology degree that will provide jobs especially for Native Americans coming to the college from a nearby reservation, which struggles to maintain salmon populations. "We're very intentional," says Janet Danley, dean of instruction at the Clarkston campus. "Yes, we have good programs. But we match those programs with careers that are available in our communities."

# OUTCOMES

## COMPLETION/ TRANSFER

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

**54%**  
**40%**

■ WWCC Percentage of Full-Time Students Who Graduate or Transfer Within Three Years

■ U.S. Average Percentage of Full-Time Students Who Graduate or Transfer Within Three Years

Source: Federal IPEDS Data 2008-10

## LABOR MARKET

Washington state records show that 2011 graduates of Walla Walla earn 79% more—on average—than do other new hires in the area around the college.

**\$41,548**  
**\$23,244**

■ Annualized Wages for 2011 Employed Graduates of WWCC

■ 2011 Average Regional Annualized Wages for New Hires

Sources: Washington State Wage Records, U.S. Census Bureau

## LEARNING

Walla Walla maintains strong relationships with employers to assess whether what students learn is aligned to specific job needs.

## EQUITY

Walla Walla enrolls a larger proportion of underrepresented minority students than is present in the college's service area. And, underrepresented minorities at Walla Walla succeed at rates well above the national average.

**48%**  
**34%**

■ WWCC Percentage of Underrepresented Minority Students Who Graduate or Transfer Within Three Years

■ U.S. Percentage of Underrepresented Minority Students Who Graduate or Transfer Within Three Years

Source: Federal IPEDS Data 2008-10



Walla Walla is innovative not just when it comes to workforce needs, but also in getting students in the door and through to completion. Through programs at two local corrections facilities, the college is leading 1,600 inmates a year, to credentials—vocational certificates and associate degrees. Instructors in adult basic education programs, such as one at a local meatpacking plant, are trained to coach their students into degree programs. “We all want GED students to enroll in college programs,” says Terri Trick, an adult basic education instructor. “[VanAusdle] speaks to it in every meeting we have.”

Getting students in the door is just the beginning. Thanks to focused efforts, 54 percent of full-time WWCC students graduate or transfer within three years, compared to 40 percent of community college students nationally. Two new retention specialists reach out to students at risk; after contacting 300 people who were students in the spring but had not registered for the fall, one-third re-enrolled. Faculty make heavy use of a system to trigger alerts when students are absent, miss assignments, or otherwise fall short.

And at a school where four in five students are the first in their family to attend college, little is left to chance. Every student must see an advisor every quarter until they have proven themselves academically. All professors advise; they receive regular training, follow an advising syllabus, and have a day cleared from their schedule each term to meet students. Anyone educating or advising a student can access an easy-to-use, informative online portal that allows them to see each step remaining to degree completion and every possible roadblock.

Students speak enthusiastically about their professors calling each other to talk about issues they noticed on the online portal, sending them text messages reminding them to register, and never letting them leave an advising meeting without a firm understanding—and computer printout—of where they stand on the way to their degree. Sandra Cruz Camora, 37, dropped out of college once before but now is succeeding in pre-nursing coursework. When she got to WWCC, she spent more than an hour with her adviser mapping out every potential path and how long it would take, and those meetings with her adviser and professors continue to guide her. “No matter who you are, how old you are,” Camora said, “they make you feel confident that you can accomplish what you want to accomplish.” ♦



**“That community college has been at the forefront of the redefinition and re-creation of that community.”**

**Kingsborough is unafraid  
to experiment, and then  
scales and sustains what  
works.**



FINALIST-WITH-DISTINCTION

# KINGSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE



<b>25,425</b> Number of Students	<b>City</b> Location	<b>61%</b> Students Receiving Pell Grants	<b>47%</b> Underrepresented Minority Students	<b>26%</b> Vocational/Technical Awards (out of all awards conferred)
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**M**any community college presidents look at student outcomes and direct action based on what they find. For Regina Peruggi, the president of Kingsborough Community College, that's not enough. Each year, Peruggi visits each academic department to give faculty a customized book of outcomes data. The message: You, and I, will do whatever it takes to achieve student success.

With that drive, Kingsborough is unafraid to experiment, in broad and sustained ways. For instance, while at many colleges remedial students face only a narrow range of (often intimidating) options, Kingsborough students have a variety of pathways to college-level work: There are one-week, two-week, and eight-week classes; classes during winter and summer breaks; "flipped" classrooms, where students digest the material outside of class and spend class time working out problems with the assistance of instructors; and even, for some students, extra tutoring and immersion workshops that enable them to skip remedial classes altogether.

Another Kingsborough experiment—which is now a way of life there—is the college's 50 learning communities each semester, which link three courses, and their instructors, together. The professors receive training and resources, create cross-disciplinary assignments, and are paid extra for those efforts.

In one set of learning communities, 600 students, primarily low-income, have mandatory appointments with advisers who are in their classes weekly. A recent independent study demonstrated that Kingsborough's learning communities notably improve student success, with increases in retention rates more than offsetting the cost.

Kingsborough's whatever-it-takes approach is perhaps best reflected in a center called Single Stop, which connects Kingsborough students, three-fifths of whom are low-income, with services: transportation aid, food stamp and welfare applications, legal aid, assistance in filing taxes, and more. Recent data show that compared to others in their economic bracket, students who use Single Stop are more likely to stay in school. "There's a tenacity about keeping these kids enrolled that's amazing," says Joan Bartolomeo, a trustee of the college's foundation. "It's like, 'We're not letting you go without a fight.'" ♦

# OUTCOMES

## COMPLETION/ TRANSFER

Data from the National Student Clearinghouse indicates that Kingsborough achieves a transfer rate to four-year institutions of 60%, more than double the national average.

**60%**  
**26%**

■ Kingsborough Percentage of Students That Transfer to Four-Year Institutions

■ U.S. Average Percentage of Students That Transfer From Two-Year to Four-Year Institutions

Source: National Student Clearinghouse

## LABOR MARKET

New York state records show that the 2011 wages of students who graduated five years earlier, \$40,872 on average, are comparable to the wages of *all* other workers in the area. This is especially impressive given that 78% of students at Kingsborough are under the age of 25.

**\$40,872**

■ Annualized Wages for Employed 2006 Graduates of Kingsborough

Source: New York State Wage Records

## LEARNING

Through mandatory professional development opportunities and certifications for faculty, Kingsborough has strengthened the outcomes of targeted interventions such as learning communities, key writing courses, and instruction.

## EQUITY

In a highly diverse community, Kingsborough has worked hard to provide and maintain access for a broad range of minority students.

**47%**  
**46%**

■ Percentage of Underrepresented Minority Students Enrolled at Kingsborough

■ Percentage of Underrepresented Minority Students Within Service Area

Sources: Federal IPEDS Data 2008-10; U.S. Census Bureau



Another Kingsborough experiment, which is now a way of life there, is the college's 50 learning communities, which link three courses, and their instructors, together.

Students follow rigid,  
full-time schedules that  
leave little room to stray.



FINALIST-WITH-DISTINCTION

# LAKE AREA TECHNICAL INSTITUTE



<b>1,503</b> Number of Students	<b>Small Town / Rural</b> Location	<b>41%</b> Students Receiving Pell Grants	<b>3%</b> Underrepresented Minority Students	<b>82%</b> Vocational/Technical Awards (out of all awards conferred)
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**A** week or two into the school year, new students at Lake Area Technical Institute are working on cars, feeding livestock, pouring dental molds. Minimizing desk time and maximizing hands-on learning reflects the college's dual mission: to teach students new skills and ways of thinking while linking that education to working-world realities. "We get into the lab just enough so that they're curious, and then we can teach the theory," says dental assisting instructor Rhonda Bradberry. "That's so much more successful."

Success is certainly the norm at LATI, where the graduation rate is among the highest anywhere, more than triple the national average. The college offers only technical degrees, and has a close relationship with local employers. Industry advisory boards, a staple of community colleges, are worked unusually hard at LATI; curriculum is adjusted regularly, and some programs bring in industry representatives every week to work with students. With proven programs and strong alignment to available jobs, LATI has local companies eager to hire its graduates, so the college has them help recruit students and donate equipment.

Even general education instructors create courses with a singular focus on building effective employees: a composition

class that teaches paramedics to write field reports, math taught through the calculations that diesel technicians must perform daily, a speech class that helps physical therapists improve communications with patients.

Students choose a program when they apply, which immediately defines their graduation plan. They follow rigid, full-time schedules that leave little room to stray. Instructors see their students daily but still meet with them in formal conferences, making clear that student success is a joint responsibility. Says auto paint instructor Todd Bretschneider, "I constantly tell my students, 'I'm here early, I'll stay late, I'll do whatever it takes,' and I mean that sincerely." ♦

# OUTCOMES

## COMPLETION/ TRANSFER

Three of every four full-time students who begin at LATI graduate or transfer within three years, among the highest rates in the United States.

**76%**  
**40%**

LATI Percentage of Full-Time Students Who Graduate or Transfer Within Three Years

U.S. Average Percentage of Full-Time Students Who Graduate or Transfer Within Three Years

Source: Federal IPEDS Data 2008-10

## LABOR MARKET

South Dakota state records show 2011 graduates of LATI earn 40% more—on average—than do other new hires in the area surrounding the college.

**\$28,756**  
**\$20,532**

Annualized Wages for 2011 Employed Graduates of LATI

2011 Average Regional Annualized Wages for New Hires

Source: South Dakota State Wage Records

## LEARNING

LATI clearly identifies the skills students need to master in each course, and instructors use informal, individualized approaches to increase student learning. Strong labor market success rates signify that students are well prepared for careers.

## EQUITY

LATI's exceptional student outcomes are particularly impressive given the fact that 41% of its first-time full-time students receive Pell grants, the main federal financial aid program for low-income students.

**41%**

Percentage of First-time Full-time Students Who Receive Pell Grants at LATI.

Source: Federal IPEDS Data 2008-10





Some programs bring in industry representatives every week to work with students.



The Aspen College Excellence Program works to investigate, synthesize, and share what colleges do to achieve high levels of student success.



# DEFINING EXCELLENCE

<p><b>CO-WINNERS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Santa Barbara City College (CA)</li> <li>• Walla Walla Community College (WA)</li> </ul>	<p><b>FINALISTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brazosport College (TX)</li> <li>• Broward College (FL)</li> <li>• College of the Ouachitas (AR)</li> <li>• Santa Fe College (FL)</li> <li>• Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College (KY)</li> <li>• West Kentucky Community and Technical College (KY)</li> </ul>
<p><b>FINALISTS-WITH-DISTINCTION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kingsborough Community College-CUNY (NY)</li> <li>• Lake Area Technical Institute (SD)</li> </ul>	



In many respects, you couldn't find a group of 10 schools more diverse than the finalists for the 2013 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. One community college serves 1,500 students, another 56,000. There are institutions devoted primarily—even solely—to technical degrees, and ones devoted mainly to preparing students for further academic study. A journey from college to college would take you to the Big Apple, through an Appalachian holler, into the heart of America's plains, and finally, up to a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

Although the Aspen Prize finalist colleges are different in many respects, they have one thing in common: They achieve impressive outcomes for their students in the four areas that comprise the Aspen Prize's definition of excellence:

- **COMPLETION.** Do students earn degrees and other meaningful credentials?
- **LEARNING.** Do colleges set expectations for what students should learn, measure whether they are doing so, and use that information to improve?
- **LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES.** Do graduates get well-paying jobs?
- **EQUITY.** Do colleges work to ensure equitable outcomes for minority, low-income, and other underserved students?

Nationally, 23 percent of first-time full-time community college students complete a credential within three years, a rate that declined by 6.7 percent between 2006 and 2010. At Aspen Prize finalist institutions, that graduation rate is, on average, 35 percent, and it has improved by 4.7 percent over the same

period. Another 16 percent of students at finalist colleges transferred to a four-year college without first receiving an associate's degree, bringing student success rates at Prize finalists above 50 percent.

With the help and support of national experts, the Aspen College Excellence Program works to investigate, synthesize, and share practices that have enabled Prize winning community colleges—to achieve such high and improving levels of student success. In addition to helping to find venues for these colleges to tell their own stories—in publications, on panels, and through conversations with other community college leaders—Aspen is producing publications and making presentations on what we have learned through the Prize process. Much of this material can be found at (<http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/aspen-prize/guide-effective-practices>), including:

- Defining Excellence: Lessons from the 2013 Aspen Prize Finalists
- The Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, 2011 Publication
- Creating a Faculty Culture of Student Success
- A Guide for Using Labor Market Data to Improve Student Success
- What is Community College Excellence? Lessons from the Aspen Prize (published in *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*)

Over the coming months and years, additional items will be posted as they become available.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to the analytic work and selection processes that led to the naming of the 2013 Aspen Prize Winners, Finalists-with-Distinction, and Finalists, chosen from among more than 1,000 public two-year colleges.

## PRIZE JURY

We offer our sincere appreciation to the Prize Jury, which thoughtfully deliberated and selected the winners and commended institutions from among the 10 finalist community colleges.

**THE HONORABLE JOHN ENGLER** (Co-chair), Business Roundtable, former Governor of Michigan

**THE HONORABLE RICHARD RILEY** (Co-chair), Nelson Mullins Riley and Scarborough LLP and EducationCounsel LLC; former Secretary of Education; former Governor of South Carolina

**ESTHERAGUILERA**, Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute

**DR. ANTHONY CARNEVALE**, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

**DAVID LEONHARDT**, *The New York Times*

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX**, United Negro College Fund

**JOE LOUGHREY**, Cummins, Inc. (retired)

**WES MOORE**, Author, *The Other Wes Moore*

**JOHN MORGRIDGE**, Cisco Systems, Inc. (emeritus)

**DR. CHARLENE NUNLEY**, University of Maryland University College; Montgomery Community College (emeritus)

**JON SCHNUR**, America Achieves

**GENERAL ANTHONY ZINNI**, Former Commander in Chief of United States Central Command (CENTCOM); United States Marine Corps (retired)

## DATA/METRICS ADVISORY PANEL (ROUND I)

In Round I, 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 120 colleges eligible to apply for the Prize. We greatly appreciate the efforts of Dr. Patrick Kelly and Matt Crelin from NCHEMS as well as the members of the Data/Metrics Advisory Panel:

**DR. KEITH BIRD** (Co-chair), Corporation for a Skilled Workforce

**DR. WILLIAM TRUEHEART** (Co-chair), Achieving the Dream

**DR. TOM BAILEY**, Community College Research Center, Columbia University

**DR. JACQUEE BELCHER**, Options Unlimited

**KEVIN CAREY**, New America Foundation

**DR. RANDY EBERTS**, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research

**DR. KENT FARNSWORTH**, University of Missouri-St. Louis

**GERRI FIALA**, U.S. Department of Labor

**DR. ROBERT MCCABE**, Miami-Dade College (emeritus)

**DR. CHARLENE NUNLEY**, University of Maryland University College; Montgomery Community College (emeritus)

**JANE OATES**, U.S. Department of Labor

**JON O'BERGH**, U.S. Department of Education

**JAY PFEIFFER**, MPR Associates, Inc.

**KENT PHILLIPPE**, American Association of Community Colleges

**DR. SHIRLEY ROBINSON PIPPINS**, Victory University

**JESSICA SHEDD**, U.S. Department of Education

**DR. DAVID STEVENS**, University of Baltimore

**DR. JEFF STROHL**, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

## FINALIST SELECTION COMMITTEE (ROUND II)

In Round II, the Finalist Selection Committee identified 10 institutions that aim to deliver exceptional student results in terms of completion, learning, labor-market, and equitable outcomes. Many thanks for the hard work and thoughtful analysis of the Committee:

**DR. ELAINE BAKER**, Community College of Denver

**DR. KEITH BIRD**, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce

**DR. GEORGE R. BOGGS**, American Association of Community Colleges (emeritus)

**DR. SARA GOLDRICK-RAB**, University of Wisconsin-Madison

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

**DR. ROBERT JOHNSTONE**, Research & Planning Group for California Community Colleges

**AMY LAITINEN**, New America Foundation

**DR. NAN POPPE**, Consultant

**DEBORAH SANTIAGO**, Excelencia in Education

**DR. NANCY SHULOCK**, Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy, California State University, Sacramento

**DR. NICOLE SMITH**, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

**DR. GREGORY STOUP**, Research & Planning Group for California Community Colleges

**DR. HEATHER WASHINGTON**, University of Virginia

**JANE WELLMAN**, National Association of System Heads

## SITE VISITORS (ROUND III)

In Round III, teams of experienced researchers and practitioners led by the RP Group conducted two-day site visits to each of the 10 finalist institutions to gather qualitative research. Special thanks to Kathy Booth, Dr. Rob Johnstone, Kelly Karandjeff, and Elisa Rassen for leading the RP Group's efforts, and to our site visitors:

**DR. ELAINE BAKER**, Community College of Denver

**DR. DARLA COOPER**, Research & Planning Group for California Community Colleges

**DR. REBECCA COX**, Simon Fraser University

**DR. ROB JOHNSTONE**, Research & Planning Group for California Community Colleges

**HILARY PENNINGTON**, The Generations Initiative

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Last but not least, we would like to thank our colleagues at the **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**, the **WHITE HOUSE**, **DR. JILL BIDEN'S OFFICE**, the **AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES**, and the **ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRUSTEES**; and our communications partners at **BURNES COMMUNICATIONS**, who have been valuable partners in communicating the importance of community college excellence and the value of the Prize.



For more information about  
the Aspen Prize for Community  
College Excellence, please visit  
our website at [aspenprize.org](http://aspenprize.org).

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**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](http://www.aspeninstitute.org).

**THE ASPEN COLLEGE EXCELLENCE PROGRAM** aims to identify and replicate campus-wide practices that significantly improve college 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/policy-work/aspen-prize](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/aspen-prize).



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