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LAKE AREA TECHNICAL INSTITUTE NAMED ONE OF TEN FINALISTS FOR 2015 ASPEN PRIZE FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE

LATI in Running for Top Community College Honor for Third Time

*\$1 Million Prize for Excellence in Four Areas: Learning, Degree Completion, Employment and Earnings, and Success for Minority and Low-Income Students
Winner to be Announced in March 2015*

Washington, D.C., September 4, 2014 – South Dakota’s Lake Area Technical Institute (LATI) was named today one of ten finalists for the [Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence](#), the nation’s preeminent recognition of high achievement and performance in America’s community colleges.

Located in Watertown, LATI with 1,700 students has earned a place on the ten top finalists’ list in each of the three years the Prize has been awarded and was named a finalist-with-distinction in 2011 and 2013. The \$1 million prize fund will be awarded in March 2015 in Washington, D.C. to the winner and up to four finalists-with-distinction. **see complete list of finalists below**

The Prize, awarded every two years, recognizes outstanding institutions selected from an original pool of more than 1,000 community colleges. With a singular focus on student success, the Prize assesses community colleges’ achievements in four areas: student learning, certificate and degree completion, high rates of employment and earnings for graduates, and high levels of access and success for minority and low-income students.

“This small town college is delivering big results,” said Joshua Wyner, Executive Director of the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program in Washington, D.C., and author of [What Excellent Community Colleges Do](#). “LATI has devised a clear and compelling set of pathways for students aligned to specific available jobs. Providing high-quality instruction that combines classroom and hands-on learning, LATI has come to be relied upon by students and employers alike to deliver excellent outcomes.”

LATI stands out as one of the nation’s top community colleges for many reasons, including:

- 73% graduation/transfer rate—one of the highest rates among all US community colleges

- Exemplary workforce training programs in 29 different disciplines—from aviation mechanics to nursing to welding—that result in exceptional levels of employment and strong earnings
- Extensive partnerships with local businesses that result in regular, real-time assessments of and improvements in program quality
- Strong pedagogical training for instructors, many hired directly out of the industries relevant to their programs

The success of our nation’s community colleges is more important than ever before. Nearly half of all college students attend community college, with more than seven million students – youth and adult learners – working toward degrees and certificates. This includes rapidly growing numbers of lower-income and minority students.

The federal government is increasingly looking to community colleges to help educate and transform our nation’s workforce and grow the country’s middle class. And constrained family budgets and mounting student debt—which recently surpassed \$1 trillion nationally—will only serve to increase the appeal of community colleges. With average tuition of about \$3,000 per year per student—less than half the average at public four-year colleges and less than 10 percent of what is now charged by top private four-year colleges and universities—community colleges offer a uniquely affordable path straight to a job or an on-ramp to a bachelor’s degree.

Through the Prize, the College Excellence Program has gathered and published a [unique set of data and qualitative assessments](#) that point the way for community colleges aiming to dramatically improve student success.

The Selection Process

Aspen’s Finalist Selection Committee, comprised of former community college presidents, respected researchers and policy experts, selected the ten finalist institutions after reviewing extensive data on performance and improvements in learning, graduation, workforce outcomes, and equitable outcomes for all students, especially those in traditionally underserved racial/ethnic groups—African American, Hispanic/Latino and Native American—and those from low-income backgrounds. Of the 150 institutions named eligible in January, over one hundred applied to compete for the Prize.

This fall, the Aspen Institute will conduct site visits to each of the ten finalist institutions. Following a rigorous review process, a distinguished Prize Jury will select a grand prize winner and up to four finalists-with-distinction to be announced in March 2015. To learn more about the selection process, go to: www.aspeninstitute.org/aspens-prize-selection-process.

The 2013 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence was awarded to Santa Barbara City College (California) and Walla Walla Community College (Washington). In 2011, Valencia College (Florida) was the inaugural Prize winner. According to the Prize rules, former winners were not eligible to reapply for this cycle.

The Aspen Prize finalists selected today reflect the diversity and richness of American community colleges – from the large El Paso Community College in El Paso, Texas, with a majority Latino student body of 40,000, to the small-town Lake Area Technical College in Watertown, South Dakota

with 1,700 students, to the urban, ethnically diverse Eugenio María de Hostos Community College, part of the City University of New York and located in the South Bronx, the nation's poorest congressional district.

The 2015 Aspen Prize Finalists (listed in alphabetical order):

*Two colleges have been named finalists in three consecutive Prize cycles (indicated with *) and two others were finalists for a second time (indicated with #)*

Brazosport College - Lake Jackson, TX#

Contact: Kyle Smith, tel: 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

Contact: Ana Carrión-Silva, tel: 718-518-4407, amcarrion@hostos.cuny.edu

Indian River State College – Fort Pierce, FL

Contact: Dr. Mary Locke, tel: 772-462-7225, mlocke@irsc.edu

Kennedy-King College – Chicago, IL

Contact: Katheryn Hayes, tel: 312-553-2719, khayes32@ccc.edu

Lake Area Technical Institute, Watertown, SD*

Contact: LuAnn Strait, tel: 605-882-5284 ext. 241, straitl@lakeareatech.edu

Olympic College – Bremerton, WA

Contact: Joan Hanten, tel: 360-475-7120, jhanten@olympic.edu

Renton Technical College – Renton, WA

Contact: Kendra Smith, tel: 425-235-2356, ksmith@rtc.edu

Santa Fe College, Gainesville, FL#

Contact: David Houser, tel: 352-381-3625, david.houser@sfcollege.edu

West Kentucky Community and Technical College, Paducah, KY*

Contact: Janett Blythe, tel: 270-534-3079, janett.blythe@kctcs.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.