

Lee Named to Aspen's Top 150 List

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Aspen Institute has named Lee College one of the 150 institutions eligible to compete for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the nation's signature recognition of high achievement and performance among America's community colleges. The colleges selected for this honor stand out among more than 1,000 community colleges nationwide as having high and improving levels of student success as well as equitable outcomes for Black and Hispanic students and those from lower-income backgrounds.

"We are honored to be named to this prestigious list of remarkable institutions throughout the United States who are dedicated to serving all students regardless of their background," said Lee College President Dr. Lynda Villanueva. "To be recognized for our focus on student success and equity by the Aspen Institute is a testament to our strategic vision, and the substantial effort our college has invested in making that vision a reality."

The Aspen Prize spotlights exemplary community colleges in order to elevate the sector, drive attention to colleges doing the best work, and discover and share highly effective student success and equity strategies. Since 2010, Aspen has chosen to focus intensively on community colleges because they are — as First Lady Dr. Jill Biden stated at the 2021 Aspen Prize ceremony — "a powerful engine of prosperity."

But student outcomes vary enormously among community colleges, and improving those outcomes is essential to securing our nation's economic future, strengthening communities, and ensuring that diverse populations experience economic mobility and prosperity. With these goals in mind, the Aspen Prize honors colleges with outstanding achievement in five critical areas: teaching and learning, certificate and degree completion, transfer and bachelor's attainment, workforce success, and equity for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

"In an era of persistent inequity and workforce talent gaps, our nation's best community colleges are stepping up to deliver more degrees to increasingly diverse students so they are prepared for the good jobs waiting to be filled," said Josh Wyner, executive director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. "Leaders of exceptional community colleges understand that achieving excellence requires expanding college access and increasing degree completion, but it doesn't stop there. They are committed to ensuring that all students — including students of color and those from low-income backgrounds — graduate with the skills needed to secure a job with family-sustaining wages or successfully transfer to and graduate from a university. That same commitment that stands at the center of the Aspen Prize: to advance the goals of social mobility and equitable talent development."

The eligible colleges represent the diversity and depth of the community college sector. Located in urban, rural, and suburban areas across 34 states, these colleges serve as few as 230 students and as many as 57,000. Winning colleges have ranged from smaller institutions serving rural community and smaller towns—including Lake Area Technical Institute (SD, 2017 prize winner) and Walla Walla Community College (WA, 2013) — to large community colleges serving major metropolitan areas, including Miami Dade College (FL, 2019) and San Antonio College (TX, 2021).