



Northwest Iowa
Community College

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NEWS RELEASE

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Northwest Iowa Community College named as One of the Best 120 Community Colleges in the Nation

The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program has named Northwest Iowa Community College (NCC) to its list of what they consider the 120 “best” community colleges in the country for the second year in a row. This kicks off a multistep, data-driven process for identifying a single institution to receive its \$1 million award for “community college excellence.”

The Aspen Institute identified the 120 community colleges -- 10 percent of all institutions -- using a quantitative formula that assesses performance and improvement in four areas: graduation rates, degrees awarded student retention rates, and equity in student outcomes. These colleges will now compete for the prestigious honor following a year-long research process into how well their students learn, complete degrees, and get jobs with competitive wages after graduating. A full list of the 120 community colleges is available at www.AspenPrize.org. Prize winners will be announced in March 2013.

Some seven million students – youth and adult learners – enroll in America's 1,200 community colleges every year.

"The success of our nation's community colleges is more important than ever before," said Aspen Institute College Excellence Program Executive Director Josh Wyner who announced the names of the 120 top community colleges at the annual convention of the American Association of Community Colleges in Orlando, Florida. "At a time when a college degree is essential to entering the middle class, community colleges like Northwest Iowa Community College offer the most promising path to education and employment for literally millions of Americans. This competition spotlights excellence and we encourage NCC to apply for the nation's top community college prize to help raise the bar for all community colleges to improve student achievement and better prepare the next generation for the job market after college."

Dr. Alethea Stubbe, President of NCC, stated, ““NCC offers a variety of programs that lead to high-wage, high-growth jobs in healthcare, advanced manufacturing, business, electrical, and transportation industries. The College has developed numerous transfer agreements with four-year colleges that enable students to transfer smoothly and continue their education.”

Stubbe continued, “For the second year in a row, we are honored to be nationally recognized for being one of the best 120 community colleges in the nation (top 10% of all community colleges) by the Aspen Institute. This national recognition shows that the College provides excellence in its educational programs and services not only regionally, but nationally, as proven by our graduation rate (71% - the highest in the state of Iowa), retention rate, number of degrees awarded, and student outcomes. Unemployment is low in our area and employers have job openings, but there is a shortage of skilled workers. We are proud to assist in filling this gap by being responsive to community needs with quality, accessible, and affordable programs and customized training. As we look toward the future there is always more work to do as we strive for continuous improvement, but we are proud of this reaffirmation of student success and fulfilling our mission.”

The 120 community colleges announced were selected from a national pool of over 1,000 public two-year colleges using publicly available data on student outcomes. The data was analyzed by an expert advisory committee co-chaired by William Trueheart, CEO of Achieving the Dream, and Keith Bird, former chancellor of the Kentucky Community College System. The data focuses on completion, considered from three perspectives:

- **Performance** (retention, graduation rates including transfers, and degrees and certificates per 100 “full time equivalent” students)
- **Improvement** (awarded for steady improvement in each performance metric over time)
- **Equity** (evidence of completion outcomes for minority and low-income students)

NCC is now eligible to submit an application containing detailed data on degree/certificate completion (including progress and transfer rates), labor market outcomes (employment and earnings) and student learning outcomes. It must demonstrate that it delivers exceptional student results for all students – including those who come from racial minority and/or low-income backgrounds – and also use data to inform decisions and continually improve over time.

Ten finalists will be named in September. The Aspen Institute will conduct site visits to each of the finalists in the fall. A distinguished Prize Jury co-chaired by John Engler, president of Business Roundtable, former Michigan Governor, and former president of the National Association of Manufacturers and Richard Riley, former South Carolina Governor and U.S. Secretary of Education, will select a grand prize winner and four runners-up, to be announced in March 2013.

"American employers have jobs open right now but lack enough skilled, educated workers to fill them," Engler said. "The job training programs at community colleges must play a central role in filling those gaps and preparing the American workforce. Community colleges' success will help determine whether and in what sectors America will continue to lead in the global economy."

While every community college faces challenges, particularly in today's economic climate, Secretary Riley underscored the importance of improving outcomes for community college students, the majority of whom are underrepresented minorities: "Many community colleges across this country are doing an excellent job of boosting student success, but we need to encourage all community colleges to achieve excellence. When students learn more, graduate or transfer to four-year institutions, and get competitive-wage jobs after college, it helps everyone - students, employers and our nation's economy as a whole."

To view the entire list of The Aspen Institute's *College Excellence Program – 120 “Best” Community Colleges* go to: <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/aspens-prize/2013eligibleinstitutions>