

Group ranks top 120 community colleges, fastest-growing higher ed sector in the U.S.

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The D.C.-based non-profit the Aspen Institute has ranked the nation's top 120 community colleges. Dr. Jill Biden, a community college professor, and Education Secretary Arne Duncan helped present the winners today.

The analysis and resulting list are part of an initiative to improve graduation rates among the six million Americans who enroll in the primarily two-year, public educational institutions each year. Community colleges are now the fastest-growing sector of higher education in this country, with students making up 40 percent of total undergrads nationwide.

President Obama pledged \$12 billion to community colleges as part of his goal for the United States to lead the world in the proportion of college graduates by 2020, but Congress only approved a fraction of that funding. The Aspen competition was announced at a White House conference on community colleges last fall.

To pick the winners, judges analyzed Department of Education data on the percentage of students who graduate with an associate's degree or successfully transfer from their community colleges into four-year institutions. They also assessed the proportion of low-income and minority students who completed each program, and if completion rates improved over time at the particular schools. The 120 winners, representing the top 10 percent of the country's 1,200 community colleges, can now enter to win a \$700,000 prize.

Even as millions of students have flocked to overcrowded community colleges during the recession, the institutions are doing a pretty bad job at graduating those students. Fewer than three in ten full-time community college students [graduate](#) with a two-year degree in three years, according to Department of Education data. And not even half of all students who enroll in community colleges with the goal of graduating from them or transferring to a four-year university meet that goal within six years.

One major problem is that the bulk of community college students take remedial courses because they did not learn basic math and reading comprehension in high school. Remedial courses do not transfer to four-year universities, and they also slow students' progress toward an associate's degree, even though they are often necessary. Another problem is that not all community colleges are clear about which courses transfer to four-year institutions, so students often waste time on classes that don't get them closer to a bachelor's degree.

The point of the Aspen competition is to identify colleges that are beating these problems so that their strategies can be exported to struggling schools with dismal graduation rates.

Community college enrollment [surged in 2008](#) even as the percentage of young people in four-year colleges stayed flat. Some community colleges have had to turn students away as their shrinking budgets haven't been able to keep up with record enrollment. California community colleges [warn](#) they may have to reject as many as 400,000 applicants this fall.

Here's the full list of the top colleges:

Alabama	
Enterprise-Ozark Community College	Enterprise, AL
George C. Wallace State Community College-Hanceville	Hanceville, AL
Northeast Alabama Community College	Rainsville, AL
Arizona	
Cochise College	Douglas, AZ
Estrella Mountain Community College	Avondale, AZ
Arkansas	
Arkansas State University-Beebe	Beebe, AR
California	

Coastline Community College	Fountain Valley, CA
Santa Barbara City College	Santa Barbara, CA
Allan Hancock College	Santa Maria, CA
San Joaquin Delta College	Stockton, CA
Mt San Antonio College	Walnut, CA
Colorado	
Trinidad State Junior College	Trinidad, CO
Florida	
South Florida Community College	Avon Park, FL
Brevard Community College	Cocoa, FL
Daytona State College	Daytona Beach, FL
Broward College	Fort Lauderdale, FL
Santa Fe College	Gainesville, FL
Lake City Community College	Lake City, FL
Lake-Sumter Community College	Leesburg, FL
Chipola College	Marianna, FL
Miami Dade College	Miami, FL
Northwest Florida State College	Niceville, FL
Central Florida Community College	Ocala, FL
Valencia Community College	Orlando, FL
Saint Johns River Community College	Palatka, FL
Tallahassee Community College	Tallahassee, FL
Georgia	
Augusta Technical College	Augusta, GA
Illinois	
Southeastern Illinois College	Harrisburg, IL
Rend Lake College	Ina, IL
Lake Land College	Mattoon, IL
Illinois Eastern Comm. Colleges-Olney	Olney, IL
Central College	
Illinois Eastern Comm. Colleges-Lincoln	Robinson, IL
Trail College	
Iowa	
Northeast Iowa Community College-	Calmar, IA
Calmar	
Indian Hills Community College	Ottumwa, IA
Northwest Iowa Community College	Sheldon, IA
Kansas	
Salina Area Technical College	Salina, KS
Cowley County Community College	Arkansas City, KS
North Central Kansas Technical College	Beloit, KS
Flint Hills Technical College	Emporia, KS
Garden City Community College	Garden City, KS
Northwest Kansas Technical College	Goodland, KS
Hutchinson Community College	Hutchinson, KS
Manhattan Area Technical College	Manhattan, KS
Kentucky	

Ashland Community and Technical College	Ashland, KY
Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College	Cumberland, KY
Hazard Community and Technical College	Hazard, KY
Madisonville Community College	Madisonville, KY
Maysville Community and Technical College	Maysville, KY
West Kentucky Community and Technical College	Paducah, KY
Big Sandy Community and Technical College	Prestonsburg, KY
Somerset Community College	Somerset, KY
Maine	
Washington County Community College	Calais, ME
Kennebec Valley Community College	Fairfield, ME
Michigan	
Kellogg Community College	Battle Creek, MI
Macomb Community College	Warren, MI
Mott Community College	Flint, MI
Gogebic Community College	Ironwood, MI
Delta College	University Center, MI
Minnesota	
Alexandria Technical College	Alexandria, MN
Central Lakes College-Brainerd	Brainerd, MN
Minnesota State Community and Technical College	Fergus Falls, MN
Minnesota West Community and Technical College	Granite Falls, MN
Mississippi	
East Central Community College	Decatur, MS
Mississippi Delta Community College	Moorhead, MS
Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College	Perkinston, MS
Pearl River Community College	Poplarville, MS
Hinds Community College	Raymond, MS
Missouri	
Metropolitan Comm. College-Business & Technology	Kansas City, MO
Linn State Technical College	Linn, MO
Crowder College	Neosho, MO
Ozarks Technical Community College	Springfield, MO
North Central Missouri College	Trenton, MO
Missouri State University-West Plains	West Plains, MO
Montana	

Fort Belknap College	Harlem, MT
Chief Dull Knife College	Lame Deer, MT
Miles Community College	Miles City, MT
Nebraska	
Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture	Curtis, NE
Southeast Community College Area	Lincoln, NE
Northeast Community College	Norfolk, NE
New Mexico	
Navajo Technical College	Crownpoint, NM
New York	
CUNY Kingsborough Community College	Brooklyn, NY
Erie Community College	Buffalo, NY
SUNY College of Technology at Canton	Canton, NY
Corning Community College	Corning, NY
Niagara County Community College	Sanborn, NY
Onondaga Community College	Syracuse, NY
Hudson Valley Community College	Troy, NY
North Carolina	
Surry Community College	Dobson, NC
Coastal Carolina Community College	Jacksonville, NC
James Sprunt Community College	Kenansville, NC
Cleveland Community College	Shelby, NC
Davidson County Community College	Thomasville, NC
Ohio	
Lorain County Community College	Elyria, OH
Oklahoma	
Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology-Okmulgee	Okmulgee, OK
Carl Albert State College	Poteau, OK
Northern Oklahoma College	Tonkawa, OK
Pennsylvania	
Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology	Lancaster, PA
South Carolina	
University of South Carolina-Union	Union, SC
South Dakota	
Mitchell Technical Institute	Mitchell, SD
Lake Area Technical Institute	Watertown, SD
Texas	
Alvin Community College	Alvin, TX
Trinity Valley Community College	Athens, TX
Lee College	Baytown, TX
Blinn College	Brenham, TX
Texas State Technical College-West	Sweetwater, TX
Texas	
Texarkana College	Texarkana, TX
Southwest Texas Junior College	Uvalde, TX
Victoria College	Victoria, TX

Wharton County Junior College	Wharton, TX
Utah	
Snow College	Ephraim, UT
Virginia	
Wytheville Community College	Wytheville, VA
Washington	
Pierce College at Fort Steilacoom	Lakewood, WA
Spokane Falls Community College	Spokane, WA
Spokane Community College	Spokane, WA
Walla Walla Community College	Walla Walla, WA
West Virginia	
Carver Career Center	Charleston, WV
Bridgemont Community and Technical College	Montgomery, WV
Wisconsin	
Moraine Park Technical College	Fond du Lac, WI
Northeast Wisconsin Technical College	Green Bay, WI
Milwaukee Area Technical College	Milwaukee, WI

(Students in Ivy Tech Community College in Indianapolis, one of many community colleges where enrollment has surged: AP)