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SIC, RLC among nation's top community colleges

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Aspen Institute, an international nonprofit institution that recognizes community college academic and workforce achievements, has chosen Southeastern Illinois College of Harrisburg and Rend Lake College of Ina as two of the nation's top 120 community colleges.

The two Southern Illinois schools join three others from Illinois on a list expected to be pared down to eight to 10 finalists in September with a grand-prize winner and two to three runners-up announced in December. The grand prize winning college will receive an approximate \$700,000 award. The runners-up will split the balance of the \$1 million fund.

"It's an almost indescribable honor to be ranked among the top 10 percent of community colleges in the nation," said SIC President Jonah Rice. "This honor is a testament to the determination that our fine faculty and staff members show in providing for our students' needs, and the dedication our students have maintained on their pathways to continued success."

Likewise, Dana Keating, SIC's Vice President for Academic Affairs, lauded school programs and student accomplishments.

"This honor is a confirmation that Southeastern is meeting the needs of its students and providing the support they need," Keating said.

Rend Lake College President Charley Holstein said a large part of the data that Aspen analyzed was graduation rates.

"In that regard (graduation rates), we rank second among public two-year colleges in the state of Illinois. Being ranked in the top five in the state and top 120 of the nation's 1,200 community colleges for something like that is a monumental credit," Holstein said while praising the school's faculty, staff and students.

Chris Kuberski, Rend Lake College Vice President of Academic Instruction, said in-class tutoring begun several years ago for college preparatory classes at Rend Lake College has been an invaluable asset to overall student performance.

"The (graduation) numbers have incrementally increased and our metrics continue to show an upward trend, so we are definitely doing something right," Kuberski said.

The 120 colleges were chosen by information gleaned from federal reporting data in several areas including percentage of students who graduate with degrees or successfully transfer into four-year institutions, performance with minority and low-income students, and completion rate improvement over recent years, according to information provided by Aspen as to how the community colleges were quantitatively measured.

Aspen is the lead sponsor and administrator of prize money through collaboration with Joyce Foundation, Lumina Foundation for Education, the Bank of America Charitable Foundation, the JP Morgan Chase Foundation, the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor, and was designed in cooperation with senior officials from the Obama Administration, according to information provided by Aspen.

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