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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Communities can help laid-off workers gain new jobs, workforce study says

BLACKSBURG, Va., April 1, 2015 – Southwest Virginia economies continue to reel from declines in coal production and employment.

Against this backdrop, communities can seize opportunities to better support and retrain displaced coal mine workers in an industry where jobs fell to a record low of less than 4,000 in 2014, a Virginia Tech workforce study says.

"It's important that we don't throw displaced miners on the scrap heap," said John Provo, director of the Office of Economic Development. "They have marketable skills and opportunities."

The study found that many coal industry workers possess skills in the STEM fields – science, technology, engineering, and math.

"These competencies are highly compatible with many manufacturing jobs in areas such as the manufacturing of plastics, rubber, and metals," said Scott Tate, senior economic development specialist in Virginia Tech's Office of Economic Development and the study's primary author. "Other relevant fields include recycling and biomass as well as advanced machining."

The study analyzed top occupations in the region, a basis for local government leaders and the region's workforce entities to "recognize transferrable skills and address worker skill gaps," Tate said. The region includes seven counties and is covered by the Southwest Virginia Workforce Investment Board Area One.

Coal industry workers are part of Southwest Virginia's sizable "middle skill" workforce, able to perform jobs that require less than a bachelor's degree yet pay higher wages than jobs typically available to those with less than a four years of college.

The Southwest Virginia Workforce Investment Board commissioned the study, which analyzed more than 100 occupations.

Darrell Blankenship, Southwest Virginia Workforce Investment Board Area One's executive director, says, "This study helps us better understand the skills of our workers and how some skills can be developed to help them transfer to related occupations."

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The study recommends:

- **Use data to address competency gaps**. Gaps in basic skills limit employment options for transitioning workers. Workers with high levels of competency in science or technology, for example, may possess lower levels of competency in "soft skills" such as communication, customer service, administration, and writing.
- **Support growth of manufacturing, health care, tourism, and the professional, scientific and technical industries through training and recertification incentives**. In varying degrees, these areas hold promise for boosting the regional economy based on industry concentration, growth potential, or occupation earning levels.
- **Continue to develop innovative training and certification.** Community colleges and other training institutions offer programs, but more models and delivery methods must be added to reach a larger labor pool. For example, workers with coal industry-related technical skills may lack formal certifications or credentials that new employers may require.

Dedicated to its motto, *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve), Virginia Tech takes a hands-on, engaging approach to education, preparing scholars to be leaders in their fields and communities. As the commonwealth's most comprehensive university and its leading research institution, Virginia Tech offers 225 undergraduate and graduate degree programs to more than 31,000 students and manages a research portfolio of $496 million. The university fulfills its land-grant mission of transforming knowledge to practice through technological leadership and by fueling economic growth and job creation locally, regionally, and across Virginia.

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Virginia Tech ranked in top 10 percent among 3,500 of the world's best universities

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BLACKSBURG, Va., Sept. 17, 2015 – Virginia Tech jumps 17 places to be among the top 10 percent of universities in the world among more than 3,500 universities, according to Quacquarelli Symonds, (QS) World University Rankings released Tuesday[2].

In what PR Newswire calls "the most popular annual league table of world universities" based on web traffic, social media metrics, and online consumers, Virginia Tech rose from 355 to 338 in the world.

The Department of Mechanical Engineering held the position of 45th in the world for the second year in a row and third year in the top 50.

Less than a year after being recognized by U.S. News & World Report as an institution that will appeal to students "who plan to enroll in universities outside of their own country[3]," Virginia Tech's rise in international standings is not a new revelation for Guru Ghosh, vice president for Outreach and International Affairs[4].

"Virginia Tech continues to rise in these global measurements because of what we already know - that our faculty, research, and programs are among the best in the world," he said. "International research and engagement will continue to play a key role in achieving Virginia Tech's goal to be among the top three percent globally."

The QS World University Rankings aim to provide a useful resource for prospective students worldwide who are seeking to identify the most prestigious and influential institutions in their chosen subject of study. The rankings are based on survey responses by faculty throughout the world, but respondents are asked to evaluate only universities in their region.

The methodology, as listed on the QS World University Rankings' website, consists of six indicators that assess universities in four areas: research, teaching, employability, and internationalization. Four of the indicators are based on "hard" data, and the remaining two are based on major global surveys - one of academics and another of employers - each the largest of their kind. The indicators include:

1. Academic reputation (40 percent)
2. Employer reputation (10 percent)
3. Student-to-faculty ratio (20 percent)
4. Citations per faculty (20 percent)
5. International faculty ratio (5 percent)
6. International student ratio (5 percent)