



## **ANNOUNCEMENT**

### **OP-TEC Announces Renewal of National Science Foundation Grant**

WACO, Texas (January 5, 2012) – The National Center for Optics and Photonics Education (OP-TEC) has received renewed funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF) that will continue operation of the OP-TEC National Center of Excellence through 2013. The grant provided through NSF's Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program involves a consortium of partner colleges in seven states.

OP-TEC is a consortium of two-year colleges, high schools, universities, national laboratories, industry partners, and professional societies who have joined forces to create a secondary-to-postsecondary "pipeline" of highly qualified and strongly motivated students and to empower community and technical colleges to meet the urgent need for technicians in optics and photonics. Photonics involves the interaction of optics and electronics in state-of-the-art, cutting edge technologies. It includes the use of lasers, optics, fiber-optics and electro-optical devices for manufacturing, health care, telecommunications, semiconductors, nanotechnology, environmental monitoring, homeland security, defense/aerospace and other areas critical to the success of our nation's economy.

Recent studies, commissioned by OP-TEC show that over 1200 new photonics (laser/optics) technicians are needed each year, while our nation's colleges are currently producing less than 230. Recent AAS photonics graduates are receiving multiple job offers with salaries in excess of \$40,000 per year. Texas State Technical College in Waco developed the nation's first Laser Electro-Optics Technology program in 1969 and is a national model for producing quality technicians. Students completing TSTC's A.A.S. degree in Laser Electro-Optics Technology enjoy a 99% job placement rate at graduation. Unfilled job openings are causing U.S. photonics employers to move certain of their operations offshore. OP-TEC is working with more than 30 two-year colleges throughout the nation to improve the quality and enlarge the enrollment of their Photonics Technician Education AAS programs and is assisting over 40 more colleges to start new programs.

#### More About OP-TEC

OP-TEC serves secondary and postsecondary education programs devoted to lasers, optics, and photonics technology or technologies enabled by optics and photonics. OP-TEC provides support through curriculum, instructional materials, assessment, faculty development, recruiting, and support for institutional reform. OP-TEC serves as a national clearinghouse for teaching materials; encourages more schools and colleges to offer programs, courses, and career information; and helps high school teachers and

community and technical college faculty members develop programs and labs to teach technical content. OP-TEC's 2500-square-foot facility in Waco houses administrative offices, a visitors center, a resource center, and meeting space. The center provides both hands-on and visual exhibits representing photonics in education and industry, as well as a broad range of information and educational materials, both printed and online.

Contact:

Dan Hull, Executive Director

[hull@op-tec.org](mailto:hull@op-tec.org)

254-751-9000

324B Kelly Drive, Waco, TX 76710

[www.op-tec.org](http://www.op-tec.org)

###