The economic crisis has hit the state hard, as witnessed by one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation. Further leveraging our educational institutions is key to upgrading our state's workforce from post GED to college educated adults. Our approach builds on proven strategies for enhancing productive, sustainable industry clusters (already under development throughout the state) built upon the active engagement of industry leaders in knowledge creation activities geared toward economic growth. South Carolina was a pioneer in using statewide information technology networks via satellite broadcasting for extended reach of a range of educational offerings. This proposal envisions the next generation of networked technology delivery of education by building in advances in broadband telecommunications and related user-interface technology to enhance the quality and utility of extant and planned economic development oriented educational offerings statewide. Postsecondary education provides clear and important economic development impacts, as detailed in a 2009 study, sponsored by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (CHE), (http://moore.sc.edu/UserFiles/moore/Documents/Division%20of%20Research/EconReturnHigherEdAugust09.pdf). Dr Douglas Woodward, an economist at the Moore School of Business, highlighted that the jobless differences among the college-educated and those citizens with lower levels of educational attainment are dramatic. From 2005 to 2007 (the latest data), the average unemployment rate for South Carolina was 5.8 %. For citizens with less than a high school degree, the rate jumped to 12.1 %. For those with a bachelor's degree or more, it fell to 2.4 %. The labor force participation for college graduates is much higher than for others. This means college graduates contribute to the overall economy at an elevated rate, which in turn means more tax revenue for the state. Poverty rates are significantly different as well: just 3.5 % for individuals with a bachelor's degree or more, vaulting to 27.1 % for the segment of the population without a high school degree. Less poverty and elevation of the general education of the state's workforce means state and local government costs are lower while increasing the overall attractiveness of the state. The data in Woodward's study indicate that for every dollar invested between 2010 and 2030, in reaching an aspirant goal of achieving at least 29% of the population with at least a baccalaureate degree, $11.20 is added to the economy in higher gross state product. After reaching the goal in 2030, the gain in economic activity rises to $25.20. To further support the investment in higher education infrastructure and distribution networks for South Carolina, the study revealed that becoming a more educated state will mean improved health and lower healthcare costs, significantly lower unemployment, and additional benefit through lower expenditures for social services. Over a typical career, the total income in South Carolina for an individual with a bachelor's
degree is $2.5 million, after subtracting higher education's costs. On average, individuals holding bachelor's degrees earn $1.2 million more than individuals with only a high school diploma. Given an average investment in a four-year degree, an individual gains 8.2 times that amount in additional income. These data make a compelling case for the investment in a statewide distribution network for education programming enhancement with the intent of job creation acceleration. The TLC Network responds to the competitiveness needs in the state that require reorientation of the workforce towards the knowledge economy. Individuals who expected to spend a lifetime in traditional manual labor-based employment must now shift their preparation so that they can compete for specialized jobs that require both advanced knowledge and the ability to comprehend the challenges of a changing competitive landscape. Even college degree holders are pressed to rapidly acquire knowledge and abilities in new areas to deepen expertise in their current field. Convenient and content-relevant opportunities to develop these skills are more important than ever. Change of this kind presents many challenges to those who were not expecting it. For adults who completed little or no post-high school education or who didn't finish high school at all, reentering the educational stream presents powerful psychological barriers, not to mention challenges related to free time and affordability. Adults with more experience in education may have greater confidence, but often fall short in furthering their education due to logistical challenges and the costs associated with securing advanced skills and knowledge. Existing computer-based and online instructional strategies are a partial solution to the problems facing adults, but can underwhelm or frustrate the adult learner in a number of ways. First, the least-educated individuals are known to be resistant to purely computer-based instruction. Second, while adults who have completed all or part of degrees are generally comfortable with online work, this approach fails to prepare them for the demands of business and industry, which are increasingly looking for people who can function effectively in problem-solving teams. Colleges and universities are willing to offer 'blended' instruction in response to these concerns, but very frequently find that courses of this kind lack the enrollment scale needed to be cost-effective. Complementing online instruction with high quality (high definition) videoconferencing and related multimodal technologies offers a solution to many aspects of the workforce preparation challenge: less educated individuals can build confidence in working with real people, those seeking more advanced credentials can undertake the problem-solving group interactions that employers seek, and colleges and universities can achieve the instructional critical mass necessary to make needed instruction affordable and available.