Unlocking the Nation’s Potential

A Model to Advance Quality and Equity In Education Beyond High School

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The Challenge

How can we support colleges and universities to serve today’s students well, increase attainment rates, close equity gaps, and provide high-quality credentials to all learners?
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How can we support colleges and universities to serve today’s students well, increase attainment rates, close equity gaps, and provide high-quality credentials to all learners in a post-pandemic world?

A US Initiative—with international implications

• Blue-ribbon task force convened in fall 2018 by Lumina Foundation—academic administrators, accreditors, association heads, and thought leaders

• Three person-to-person meetings led to the findings presented in Unlocking the Nation’s Potential and to five explicit recommendations focused on collaboration to:
  
  Generate and use strong data sets
  Operationalize a commitment to quality and equity
  Build seamless pathways
  Support faculty development and collaboration
  Plan for institutional closures and mergers
What do these recommendations share?

Generate and use strong data sets
Operationalize a commitment to quality and equity
Build seamless pathways
Support faculty development and collaboration
Plan for institutional closures and mergers

As a result of the pandemic, each has become more urgent and compelling.
Strong data sets

- To enable cumulative, student-owned transcripts
- To allow for performance comparisons of institutions and alternate delivery methodologies to catalyze improvements
- To increase the efficiency and effectiveness of accreditation given new models
- To expose and document inequities—and to track the effectiveness of student success interventions

Quality and equity

- A commitment to quality requires attention to equity
- A commitment to equity and generating real opportunity requires defining and advancing quality
- Post-pandemic reforms should reflect these commitments to both as one priority
The Quality and Equity Imperative

Only quality credentials will provide expanded, more equitable access to:
• economic opportunity
• social mobility across generations
• meaningful civic participation

“Ultimately, the most valuable education over the long term is the one that provides the most marketable combination of specific and general skills.”

(Carnevale, 2019)

What do we know concerning quality?

• Employers report gaps between what they need and what BA degree holders possess in terms of both general and specialized skills.
• The process of curricular change is failing to keep up with workplace skill shifts.
• Though 80% of employers rate complex communication, critical thinking, and analytic reasoning skills as very important, fewer than 30% rate BA holders well prepared in those areas.
• One assessment project supported by Lumina found only 10% of college seniors in 4-year programs rated proficient in critical thinking.
What do we know concerning equity?

While 34% of all individuals ages 25-65 have earned a 4-year degree—

• Only 17% of Latinos
• Only 24% of Black individuals
• Only 21% of Native American individuals

— have done so.

Seamless pathways

• Provide guidance for students facing an increasingly complex and opaque credentials environment
• Express the resolve of colleges and universities to enhance the coherence, cumulativeness, and efficiency of their programs
• Enable bridges students may cross to connect providers, programs, aspirations
What do we know concerning completion rates?

In the 3000 four-year colleges and universities in the US, fewer than 300 institutions award credentials to at least 70% of students within 6 years. Considering all US institutions —
• Only 60 percent of all students
• Only 40 percent of Black students
• Only 54 percent of Latino students — graduate within 6 years.
Faculty development and collaboration

- Supports increased responsiveness to unexpected challenges
- Reinforces emphasis on student success
- Increases awareness of inequities while building skills for recognizing and addressing them
- Strengthens commitment to defining, seeking, and assessing quality

Plan for institutional closures and mergers

- Improve quality and frequency of monitoring
- Explore alternatives to closure, including mergers
- Provide more effective “early warning” to students while protecting vulnerable providers from negative spirals
- Strengthen standards for teach out, faculty placement, staff placement, and resource deaccession plans
- Recognize the interests of providers’ host communities
Practical means toward critical ends (1-6)

1. Improvements in student support services
2. More effective assurance of affordability
3. Greater reliance on co-requisite remediation
4. More attentive, frequent, and thorough academic advising
5. More effective integration of equity-minded high-impact educational practices to promote achievement of learning goals and increase completion rates of all students—and especially returning adult students
6. Expanded access to alternate delivery systems with quality checks and that are aligned with needs of adult students (e.g., shorter-term courses, competency-based programs, work-integrated options)

Practical means toward critical ends (7-10)

7. Build work-integrated learning options for all students
8. Create more partnerships with employers and educators to design and redesign programs with employability capabilities intentionally built into curricular pathways and to create new BA degrees in high-growth fields
9. Expand work-study funding and flexibility and connect work-study placements directly with curricular requirements and key institutional learning outcomes
10. Expand and improve policies that award credit to working adults for competencies learned on the job either prior to enrollment or while enrolled
Practical means toward critical ends (11-14)
11 Implement “guided pathways” more broadly to improve efficiency through the embedding of high quality teaching and learning approaches.
12 Build alternative pathways for working adults into and through traditional BA/BS programs (e.g. competency-based curricula and more appropriate assessments) that enable them to learn more effectively and to finish more quickly.
13 Build more effective pathways among institutions and credentials especially in public systems with 2-year and 4-year institutions (e.g., dual-degree programs, BAAS pathways, embedded certifications, etc.)
14 Ensure that all degree pathways develop essential competencies for long-term success.

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis that is committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. The Foundation envisions a system that is easy to navigate, delivers fair results, and meets the nation’s need for talent through a broad range of credentials.