

Quality and Equity in the New Credentialing Landscape
Lumina Foundation
Elsa M. Núñez
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Why is this focus on the intersection of Quality and Equity Important?

1. The alignment of educational equity and quality is a moral imperative.

- African Americans, Latinos, low-income students, first-generation students and other marginalized and at-risk groups attend and graduate from college at lower levels than white, more affluent students. For instance, while 57% of young adults from high-income families earn a bachelor's degree, only 11% of young adults from low-income families do.
- Students of color make up 45% of the undergraduate population (vs. 30% in 2000) yet have lower six-year graduation rates; at 46%, African Americans are at the bottom.
- The rising cost of a college degree is having a crippling impact on the low-income families in this nation. 68% of students graduate with an average of \$25,000 in debt.
- Students of color and those from low-income families who **do** enroll in college are less likely to engage in "high-impact practices" such as undergraduate research, internships, and study abroad programs. This lack of engagement is one more reason why they are less likely to persist.
- As important as degree completion is, the **quality** of the education received by marginalized sectors of our people must be improved if they are to have the social and economic mobility they deserve in today's technology-based economy.

2. Improving educational quality and completion is critical to America's economy.

- In 1990, the USA was number one in the percentage of adults 25 years of age and up with a college degree. Today we are 14th in the world, and it costs us billions of dollars a year in lost GDP.
- Former President Obama had a goal of 60% of all American adults with a postsecondary degree by 2025; we are barely over 40%, and underrepresented populations are at lower rates.
- Of the projected 11.6 million new jobs in the coming years, 11.5 million will require some form of post-secondary education.
- Given the shifting demographics of this nation, if we don't increase the college completion rates of these sectors of our population, we will not have the workforce we need to compete internationally.

3. Enhancing access/achievement for underrepresented populations will lower public costs.

- Illiteracy costs the USA \$225 billion year in welfare, crime, and lower economic output.
- In my state of Connecticut, 20% of the population does not have the literacy skills to succeed in the 21st century.

4. A more educated citizenry is the best insurance that our democracy will endure.

Thomas Friedman wrote an op-ed in the New York Times on February 12, 2019, called “Two Codes Your Kids Need to Know.” One is the Constitution and the other is computer code. People who are equipped with the right skills for the 21st century and with an awareness of their role in democratic self-governance will not only be stronger contributors to our economy.

They are more likely to vote, more likely to sit on local boards, and more likely to run for local or even state offices. The disenfranchised and marginalized sectors of our population will continue to be less involved in sharing the decision-making that determines the direction of this great nation.

What are several key takeaways I have garnered from the report?

1. We must adapt to a non-traditional student body with non-traditional credentials.

The traditional model of 18-year-old students taking courses full-time to achieve a degree along the bachelor’s/master’s/doctoral pathway has given way to students of all ages.

- Among working adults, 47% hold jobs that are likely to become automated.
- 65% of the jobs that will be occupied by Gen Z haven’t been created yet.
- Our current workforce is severely under skilled; 73% of employers say it is difficult to find qualified candidates, and 6.2 million jobs remain unfilled.
- Just one example of curricular innovation is the B.A.A.S. degree at UW-Madison, a “reverse degree” that allows technical degree holders to take their general education requirements at the end of their degree path rather than in the beginning.
- Giving adult students credit for prior learning must be a component of our new model.
- Credentials must be stackable and range from certificates for single competencies, e.g. data analytics, to advanced graduate degrees and certificates in trending skill sets.
- Experts say knowledge on Earth doubles every 12 hours—being able to adapt to change may be the most important skill tomorrow’s workers will have.

2. Quality and equity are interdependent goals that must be addressed in tandem.

- If we graduate more students of color who are not fully engaged in school, don’t have the benefit of experiential learning, don’t have access to technology, and aren’t supported in pursuing a career path, we have not done our job.
- We don’t have to lower standards in the process. At my institution, our SAT scores of entering freshmen continue to go up while our percentage of students of color has grown from 17% in 2004 to 30% today. In 2012, The Education Trust reported that the improvement in the graduation rate of Latino students at Eastern was the highest in the nation. And we are active partners (200+ students) in Donald Graham’s Opportunity Scholars program, where DACA students from across the nation are succeeding at Eastern (average GPA of 3.4).

3. Assessing the quality of postsecondary education and the related student learning outcomes will require collaboration and use of new analytical tools.

- We need to use tools such as Burning Glass and other data analytics and data visualization tools to assess and improve our academic programs while measuring student success in those programs.
- The soft skills highly sought by employers—critical thinking, communication, ethics—must be taught to all students and rigorously assessed.
At my own university, the faculty is hard at work on this very task this fall.
- We need to support our accrediting agencies in evaluating new credentialing programs (CBI, online and other new modalities) to ensure that they meet the same standards we expect on traditional campuses.
- Quality frameworks such as the Lumina Foundation’s Degree Qualifications Profile should be more universally used to help the higher education community align its offerings across the nation.
- Non-traditional measures should be pursued. For instance, on my own campus, we discovered that the extent to which students signed up to attend our library orientation was a high predictor of retention.
We know that students who are engaged in student clubs or community service are also more likely to graduate on time.

4. Education must be a “Seamless Pathway.”

- The plethora of postsecondary credentials in this nation (335,000 credentials and 500,000 programs) must be aligned for the benefit of students and to maximize efficiency and public investment.
- Students must be able to transfer/transport credentials between high school and college, between colleges, and from educational settings to employment settings.
- Curriculum should be student-centered and competency-based, aligned with industry and occupational standards/needs.
- Stakeholders must work more closely than ever before—educators, employers, policymakers, accrediting agencies—if we are going to align educational programming with workforce requirements to benefit our nation and our people.