

A stronger nation through higher education — and Alabama's role in that effort

In Alabama, nearly 32 percent of the state's 2.4 million working-age adults (25-64 years old) hold at least a two-year degree, according to 2008 Census data. This compares to a national average of around 38 percent. Attainment rates in Alabama are increasing modestly, even though the proportion of degree-holding young adults — those 25-34 years old — mirrors that of the overall adult population. If Alabama continues to increase attainment at the rate it did over the last decade (2000-2008), the state will have a college-attainment rate of 43 percent in 2025 — far short of the Big Goal of 60 percent.

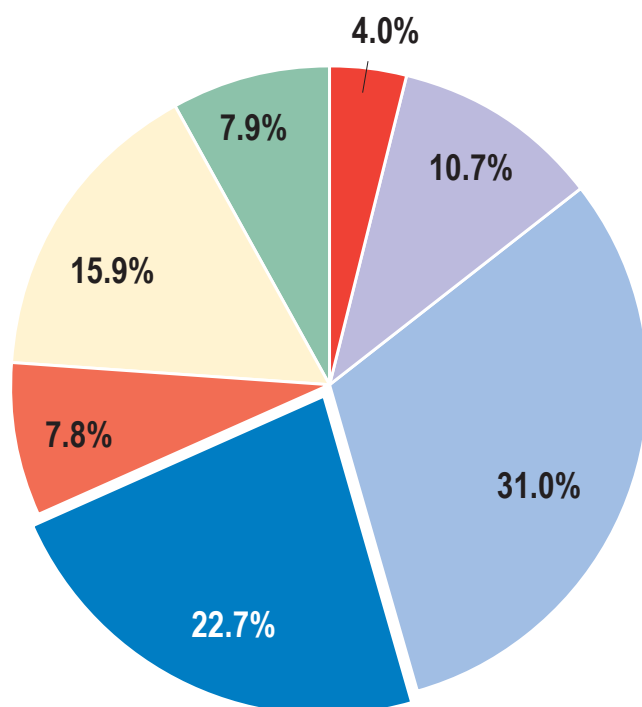
However, this gap *can* be closed. The key is to begin increasing degree production, and to continue to increase it each year until 2025. By increasing production by 4,883 associate or bachelor's degrees each year between now and 2025 — an annual increase of 7.1 percent — Alabama will reach the Big Goal.

One excellent place to begin looking for these additional graduates is in the ranks of Alabama residents who have completed some college without earning a degree. In 2008, more than 550,000 Alabama residents fit into this

category — representing nearly 23 percent of the state's adult population. If only a small portion of this group could be enticed to return to college to complete either a two- or four-year degree, it would go a long way to helping Alabama reach the goal of 60 percent higher education attainment.

Also, by looking at the geographic distribution of college graduates within the state (see chart on reverse), policymakers and other stakeholders can begin to work strategically and systematically to close achievement gaps. They can target counties and regions that show the greatest need and focus their efforts on those specific areas.

How do we know that Alabama's economy will demand more college graduates? A recent analysis by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce provides the answer. According to the center's analysis of occupation data and workforce trends, 55 percent of Alabama's jobs will require postsecondary education by 2018. Between now and 2018, Alabama will need to fill more than 680,000 vacancies resulting from job creation, worker retirements and other factors. Of these



Levels of education for Alabama residents, ages 25-64

Less than ninth grade	97,854	4.0%
Ninth to 12th grade, no diploma	259,730	10.7%
High school graduate (including equivalency)	757,350	31.0%
Some college, no degree	553,968	22.7%
Associate degree	191,594	7.8%
Bachelor's degree	385,123	15.9%
Graduate or professional degree	194,123	7.9%
TOTAL	2,439,742	100%

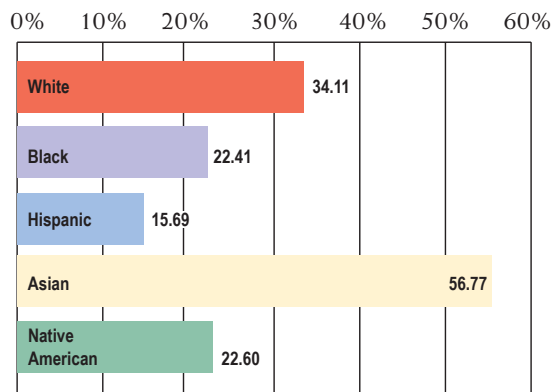
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey

job vacancies, 373,000 will require postsecondary credentials, while only 308,000 are expected to be filled by high school graduates or dropouts.

It will be impossible to reach the Big Goal without significantly increasing college success among the groups that can accurately be called 21st century students, including working adults, low-income and first-generation students and students of color. Closing attainment gaps among racial and ethnic groups is a particular challenge in Alabama, as in other states. The current higher education attainment rates in Alabama are displayed in the accompanying bar graph.

These gaps have persisted for decades, and closing them is obviously a big challenge. Still, it can and *must* be done. It will require concerted and strategic efforts over many years — efforts based on solid evidence about what works to

Degree-attainment rates among Alabama adults (ages 25-64), by population group



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey

increase attainment. Information about successful strategies to increase the number of students who complete higher education is available on Lumina Foundation's Web site. The site also provides specific information about Alabama's degree-attainment rates at www.luminafoundation.org/state_data/. From there, you can find links to data from all 50 states.

Still more information is available at a Web-based resource created

by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS). The NCHEMS Information Center provides detailed comparative data for all states and counties, as well as other contextual information that can help higher education policymakers and analysts make sound policy decisions. We urge you to visit the site (www.higheredinfo.org).

Percentage of Alabama adults (25-64) with a two- or four-year degree, by county:

Autauga	30.7	Covington	26.0	Lauderdale	30.3	Pike	26.5
Baldwin	37.4	Cullman	24.7	Lawrence	19.2	Randolph	21.3
Barbour	20.3	Dale	29.0	Lee	41.0	Russell	18.3
Bibb	15.9	Dallas	24.0	Limestone	26.5	St. Clair	21.1
Blount	19.3	DeKalb	17.6	Macon	34.4	Shelby	50.2
Butler	22.8	Elmore	26.2	Madison	46.8	Talladega	19.8
Calhoun	24.8	Escambia	23.9	Marengo	24.1	Tallapoosa	23.4
Chambers	21.1	Etowah	28.4	Marion	19.1	Tuscaloosa	35.2
Cherokee	15.3	Franklin	20.6	Marshall	24.5	Walker	18.8
Chilton	17.0	Geneva	19.5	Mobile	28.6	Winston	17.9
Clarke	22.2	Houston	30.1	Monroe	24.9	Other counties	18.5*
Coffee	31.0	Jackson	19.9	Montgomery	38.7		
Colbert	27.7	Jefferson	38.4	Morgan	28.3		

*This percentage is an average for the 18 Alabama counties with fewer than 20,000 residents.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey

Lumina Foundation for Education is committed to enrolling and graduating more students from college — especially low-income students, students of color, first-generation students and adult learners. Our goal is to increase the percentage of Americans who hold high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by 2025.

Lumina pursues this goal in three ways: by identifying and supporting effective practice, through public policy advocacy, and by using our communications and convening power to build public will for change. For more details on the Foundation, visit our Web site at www.luminafoundation.org.

