

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

In Montana, nearly 38 percent of the state's 512,000 working-age adults (25-64 years old) hold at least a two-year degree, according to 2008 Census data. This essentially matches the national average. Attainment rates in Montana 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 Montana continues to increase attainment at the rate it did over the last decade (2000-2008), the state will have a college-attainment rate of 46.5 percent in 2025 — far short of the Big Goal of 60 percent.

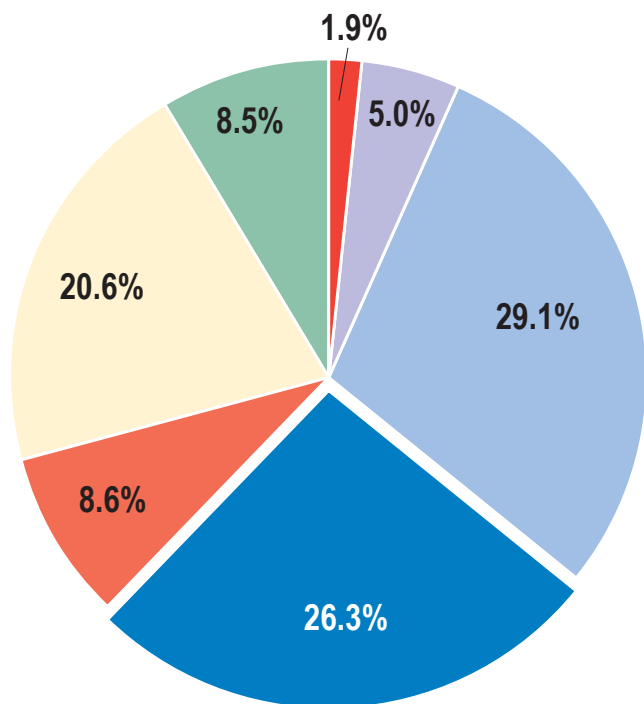
However, this gap *can* be closed. The key is to begin increasing degree production, and to continue to increase it each year until 2025. By increasing production by 826 associate or bachelor's degrees each year between now and 2025 — an annual increase of 6.4 percent — Montana will reach the Big Goal.

One excellent place to begin looking for these additional graduates is in the ranks of Montana residents who have completed some college without earning a degree. In 2008, nearly 135,000 Montana residents fit into this category

— representing more than 26 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 Montana 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 Montana'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, 62 percent of Montana's jobs will require postsecondary education by 2018. Between now and 2018, Montana will need to fill about 155,000 vacancies resulting from job creation, worker retirements and other factors. Of these



Levels of education for Montana residents, ages 25-64

● Less than ninth grade	9,820	1.9%
● Ninth to 12th grade, no diploma	25,589	5.0%
● High school graduate (including equivalency)	149,247	29.1%
● <b>Some college, no degree</b>	<b>134,652</b>	<b>26.3%</b>
● Associate degree	44,117	8.6%
● Bachelor's degree	105,377	20.6%
● Graduate or professional degree	43,317	8.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>512,119</b>	<b>100%</b>

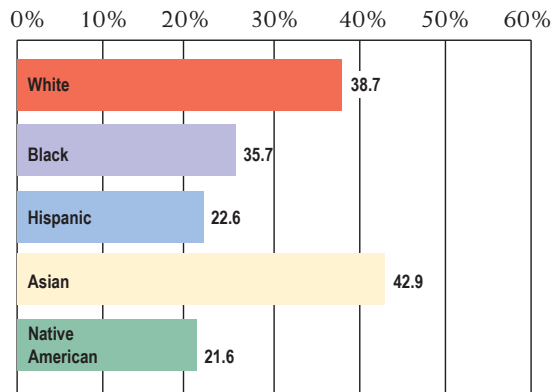
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey

job vacancies, 96,000 will require postsecondary credentials, while only 59,000 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 Montana, as in other states. The current higher education attainment rates in Montana 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 Montana 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 Montana's degree-attainment rates at [www.luminafoundation.org/state\\_data/](http://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](http://www.higheredinfo.org)).

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

Cascade	35.5	Lake	31.9	Ravalli	30.7	Other counties	30.7*
Flathead	36.5	Lewis and Clark	45.5	Silver Bow	32.3		
Gallatin	53.7	Missoula	46.2	Yellowstone	38.5		

\*This percentage is an average for the 47 Montana 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](http://www.luminafoundation.org).

