

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

In Nebraska, about 40 percent of the state's 911,000 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 about 38 percent. Attainment rates in Nebraska 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 Nebraska continues to increase attainment at the rate it did over the last decade (2000-2008), the state will have a college-attainment rate of 50 percent in 2025 — well short of the Big Goal of 60 percent.

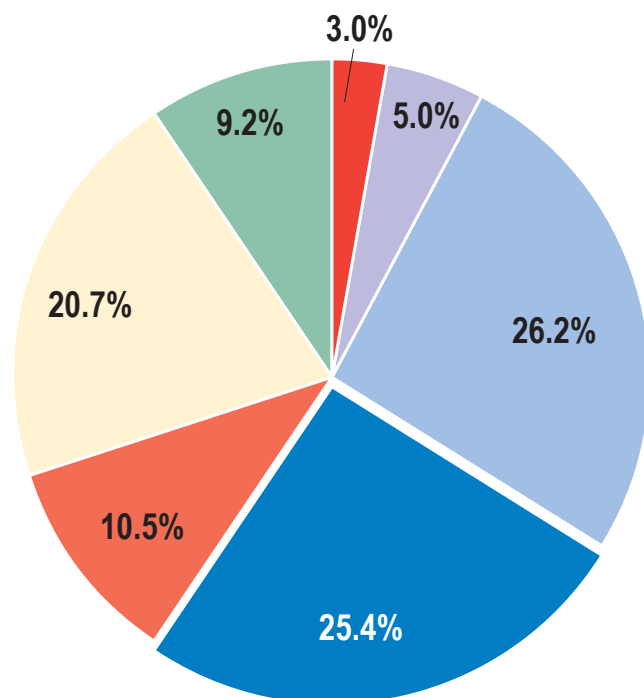
However, this gap *can* be closed. The key is to begin increasing degree production, and to continue to increase it each year until 2025. By increasing production by 1,207 associate or bachelor's degrees each year between now and 2025 — an annual increase of 4.6 percent — Nebraska will reach the Big Goal.

One excellent place to begin looking for these additional graduates is in the ranks of Nebraska residents who have completed some college without earning a degree. In 2008, about 230,000 Nebraska residents fit into this category

— representing more than 25 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 Nebraska 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 Nebraska'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, 66 percent of Nebraska's jobs will require postsecondary education by 2018. Between now and 2018, Nebraska's will need to fill about 321,000 vacancies resulting from job creation, worker retirements and other factors. Of these



Levels of education for Nebraska residents, ages 25-64

Less than ninth grade	27,018	3.0%
Ninth to 12th grade, no diploma	45,014	5.0%
High school graduate (including equivalency)	239,098	26.2%
<b>Some college, no degree</b>	<b>231,566</b>	<b>25.4%</b>
Associate degree	96,039	10.5%
Bachelor's degree	188,554	20.7%
Graduate or professional degree	84,151	9.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>911,440</b>	<b>100%</b>

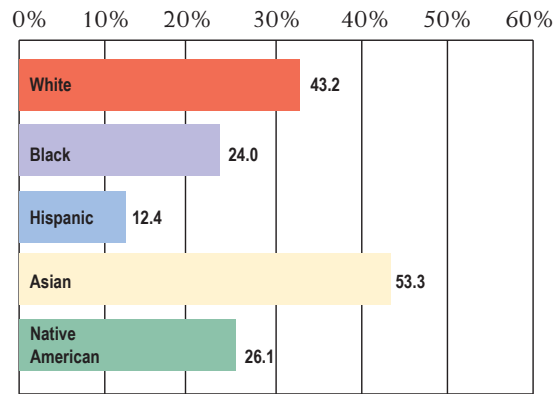
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey

job vacancies, 207,000 will require postsecondary credentials, while only 114,000 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 Nebraska, as in other states. The current higher education attainment rates in Nebraska 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 Nebraska 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 Nebraska'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 Nebraska adults (25-64) with a two- or four-year degree, by county:

Adams	37.8	Dodge	28.1	Lincoln	32.9	Scotts Bluff	33.2
Buffalo	45.3	Douglas	45.4	Madison	35.4	Other counties	33.9*
Cass	39.9	Gage	30.4	Platte	33.1		
Dakota	24.3	Hall	26.7	Sarpy	47.1		
Dawson	20.6	Lancaster	49.7	Saunders	38.4		

\*This percentage is an average for the 77 Nebraska 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).

