



# Lumina Foundation's Equity Imperative

Committed to equity and  
excellence in higher education

## Why equity matters

While the face of America is changing, economic and social inequities among racial and ethnic groups persist. Historical and current patterns of discrimination, segregation and racism continue to foster disparities that make it increasingly difficult to achieve "the American dream." American Indian, African-American and Hispanic students are disproportionately poor, have less access to quality education, and are underrepresented in positions of power. **Without intentional and focused efforts to address inequality in our society, the gaps will only continue to grow.**

Education is the great equalizer. However, racial and ethnic stratification plague our nation's educational system. Schools are more segregated than a decade ago; dropout rates are highest among African-American, American Indian and Hispanic students, and these students are less likely to earn a postsecondary credential or degree.

Given this polarization, American higher education is also at a critical juncture with regard to equity and excellence. As global demand for postsecondary skills and knowledge rises, the pace at which Americans are obtaining postsecondary degrees continues to lag behind other countries. Moreover, this situation is exacerbated by the persistent gap in degree attainment by race in the U.S. According to the most recent Census figures (2015),

## Core principles

**Equity:** The recognition and analysis of historic, persistent factors that have created an unequal postsecondary education system.

- Elimination of widening postsecondary attainment gaps for American Indian, African-American and Hispanic students.
- Creation of opportunities, sharing of resources, and empowering students for success.
- Focus on institutional accountability rather than student deficits.

**Excellence:** Clear, flexible and transparent pathways to students in their pursuit of postsecondary credentials.

- Credits and credentials defined by learning and competencies rather than time.
- Assurance of high-quality learning that aligns with 21st century workforce and industry needs.
- An affordable system with incentives that encourage students and institutions to increase educational attainment and close achievement gaps.



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Asian adults (ages 25-64) lead all races with approximately 61 percent degree attainment, followed by whites at 46 percent. African-American, American Indian and Hispanic students rank 29 percent, 24 percent and 21 percent, respectively. Despite improved college-going rates in postsecondary education for African-Americans, American Indians and Hispanics, the gaps that remain in educational attainment must be addressed if we are to flourish as citizens and as a nation.

## Lumina's commitment

Since its inception in 2000, Lumina Foundation has focused on increasing access and success for all students in postsecondary education. The Foundation has made a consistent commitment to address the needs of those who have historically been underserved by higher education through efforts ranging from supporting the development of statewide attainment goals that close achievement gaps to targeted support for minority-serving institutions.

In 2008, we sharpened our mission and centered all of our efforts on Goal 2025, which seeks to increase the

Lumina recognizes that, to make effective change in higher education, equity *and* excellence must be at the center of all of its efforts to reach Goal 2025.

percentage of Americans with high-quality postsecondary credentials to 60 percent by 2025. To reach Goal 2025, we quickly realized the need for a student-centered higher education system that focuses on student learning

outcomes, values diverse learning styles, and provides affordable paths for students to attain their educational goals.

Simply stated, the higher education system in America is in need of major redesign. While we know that educational attainment is at the center of civic, social and economic

success, the current system prevents an increasing number of students from realizing that success — particularly those who have been historically excluded from and served the least by the existing structure. The system must be redesigned in a way that values the diverse pathways by which students obtain the knowledge, skills and abilities they need to succeed in the workplace and in life. Achieving Goal 2025 requires Lumina to acknowledge systemic disparities and to place equity and excellence at the center of all of its work.

## Equity means:

- Recognition of the need to eliminate disparities in educational outcomes of students from historically underserved and underrepresented populations.
  - Elimination of widening postsecondary attainment gaps for American Indian, African-American and Hispanic students.
  - Creation of opportunities, sharing of resources, and empowering students for success.
  - Focus on institutional accountability rather than student deficits.

## Excellence means:

- Offering clear, flexible and transparent pathways to students in their pursuit of postsecondary credentials.
  - Defining credits and credentials by learning and competencies rather than time alone.
  - Assuring that high-quality learning aligns with 21st century societal and workforce needs.
  - Building an affordable system with incentives that encourage students and institutions to increase attainment and close achievement gaps.

As stated by Jamie Merisotis, Lumina's president and CEO, the current system must be redesigned to "meet future workforce needs, strengthen our democracy, and give all Americans — regardless of race, income and other socioeconomic factors — the opportunities that postsecondary attainment provides."

In other words, without equity and excellence as co-driving forces, Lumina and the nation will have fallen short in their efforts to meet the needs of students in a 21st century economy and society.



Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis that is committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. We envision a system that is easy to navigate, delivers fair results, and meets the nation's need for talent through a broad range of credentials. Our goal is to prepare people for informed citizenship and for success in a global economy.