

# SHORT-TERM CREDENTIALS:

*A vital measure of post-high school educational attainment in the United States*

Increasing attainment of postsecondary education in the United States is more important today than ever—key to preparing more people for success in the global economy and to meeting the nation’s growing need for talent. That’s why Lumina Foundation works to ensure that, by 2025, 60 percent of Americans hold a credential beyond high school.

Lumina’s signature online report, A Stronger Nation, tracks progress toward that goal by counting the number degrees and quality short-term credentials among people ages 25-64. In 2020, Lumina added industry certifications to the national dataset to provide a more comprehensive picture of post-high school learning across the country.

## What are “short-term” credentials?

Short-term credentials, including college-level certificates and industry-recognized certifications, generally take less time and money to earn than degrees. Still, they meet Lumina’s benchmarks for quality if they:

- Lead to meaningful employment
- Serve as a steppingstone to career advancement, higher pay, and future opportunities
- Provide a pathway to continued education training—and lifelong learning

<b>Certificate</b>	<b>Certification</b>
Results from an educational process	Results from an assessment process
Indicates completion of a course or series of courses with a specific focus	Indicates mastery/competency as measured against a defensible set of standards
Awarded by educational program or institution	Awarded by a third-party, standard-setting organization
Course content determined by the specific provider or institution, not standardized	Standards set through a defensible, industry-wide process of required knowledge and skills
Awarded for life	Has on-going requirements to maintain
Usually listed on a resume detailing education	Typically results in credentials listed after one’s name



### Why add certifications to *A Stronger Nation*?

*A Stronger Nation* offers an inclusive view of all high-quality post-high school credentials to track the nation's progress toward increasing postsecondary attainment. Since it was first launched in 2009, *A Stronger Nation* has counted four- and two-year degrees, and in 2016, Lumina added certificates. Now for the first time, Lumina has reliable national data showing that 3.8 percent of Americans hold a quality certification as their highest credential.

Certifications—and short-term credentials in general—are a vital part of the effort to increase educational opportunities for underserved populations, close persistent gaps in attainment associated with long-term racial inequity, and prepare more Americans for meaningful work in in-demand and emerging fields.

### Fast Facts on Certifications

- According to a recent Gallup study, U.S. workers with a high school education and a professional certification—but no other postsecondary education—are among the workers most likely to be in a “good job” at 49%.
- Professional certifications are some of the most common short-term credentials, can be tailored to industry needs, and confirm a worker's proficiency in a given field.
- Professional certifications are more equitably distributed among workers of different racial and ethnic backgrounds than are degrees.
- Health care, education, and government service are the leading sectors in which most workers with no postsecondary education have a certification.

To learn more about *A Stronger Nation*, short-term credentials, and the latest data on post-high school educational attainment in the United States, visit [strongernation.luminafoundation.org](http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org).