

New Look for Lumina

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By **Paul Fain**

The big goal for the Lumina Foundation hasn't changed, but the powerful foundation has come up with **a new set of strategies** to boost America's proportion of college graduates to 60 percent by 2025.

The foundation's leaders said times have changed in the four years since they assumed their role in helping to push the completion agenda. And they have new ideas about how to spend \$300 million over the next four years, with focuses on building a social movement, targeting metropolitan areas and encouraging innovations based on student learning and competencies rather than the **credit hour**.

Lumina's emphasis until now has been on college preparation, college success and productivity in higher education, said Jamie P. Merisotis, the foundation's president. Those three broad areas will be replaced by five specific goals around mobilizing support and collaboration, and three that seek changes to the nation's higher education system. He hopes the new approach will build urgency.

"There hasn't been enough progress on the attainment agenda," he said.

A key shift for the foundation is to a student-centric view, rather than an institutional or issue-based focus. And while Merisotis said Lumina would actually increase what it is spending on grants, the money would be aimed at areas where they feel strongly that they can add value, and they expect to see results.

Targeting metro areas can be promising, in part because workforce needs have brought employers, local governments and community organizations to the table with leaders from higher education. Dewayne Matthews, Lumina's vice president for policy and strategy, pointed to building momentum in Memphis, Tampa and Los Angeles.

"They're coming to us," Matthews said of coalitions in metro areas. "They're attracted by these goals."

Lumina will also continue to push completion-related efforts at both the state and federal levels. And the foundation's leaders said federal policy would be crucial in shaping a modern higher education system necessary to encourage the 23 million additional degrees and meaningful credentials needed to hit 60 percent attainment.

They pointed to a desperate need for strong leadership at the federal level on questions about the structure of student aid, quality assurance and accreditation, and the alignment of workforce development and higher education.

For example, **competency-based education** has the potential to help more students get to graduation, they said, but still faces barriers. And emerging forms of credentialing, like **certificates** issued by massive open online course (MOOC) providers, pose plenty of questions for employers, federal regulators and accrediting agencies.

Lumina's role will be to help spread the word that change has arrived to higher education, said Merisotis, and to convene leaders across sectors to figure out how to build a new system that works for students while protecting academic quality.

"These new emerging models have to play a big role in how you get to the 23 million degrees," he said.

The foundation will seek to extend the reach of its **Degree Qualifications Profile**, which attempts to establish what constitutes a valuable college degree. They plan to add certificates to the mix, which had previously not been considered under the profile.

Lumina has hired Julie Peller, who is currently deputy staff director at the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and the Workforce, to be its strategy director for federal policy. And Zakiya Smith, who was recently a senior education policy adviser to President Obama, will be the foundation's strategy director for student financial support. Both Peller and Smith will be based in Washington, D.C.

Merisotis said Lumina will make public the results and lessons learned from its grants. And the foundation plans to drop efforts that aren't working.

"When you have this kind of capacity you have a moral obligation to be

transparent,” he said.