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Guest Perspective: Lumina Foundation

Jamie P. Merisotis
Lumina Foundation

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Guest Perspective: Lumina Foundation



Authored by
Jamie P. Merisotis, President & CEO



It's an exciting time to be involved in higher education. In fact, as higher-ed professionals and advocates, we live and work in an era marked by rapid, near-constant change.

From competency-based learning models to digital badges to income-based student financing mechanisms, new features pop up almost daily in the postsecondary landscape. Today, more than ever, those who work in this dynamic field need access to — and ways to *share* — reliable, relevant information.

That's why the launch of the *Journal of College Access* is so welcome, and why I am proud to contribute to this, its inaugural issue. The *JCA* has great potential to inform — and yes, to inspire — people who play a critical role in the lives of millions of students. And make no mistake; those students are our future. Their success is vital to this nation's progress and continued prosperity.

In fact, there is no greater national need than the growing need for *talent* — for citizens who embody the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to fuel the global economy. And the only way for this nation to build that talent is through postsecondary education. College-level learning — that is, the learning inherent in degrees and other high-quality postsecondary credentials — is absolutely key for any individual who hopes to attain and

maintain a middle-class lifestyle. And if we are to thrive as a nation, we must extend the benefits of higher education far more broadly, encompassing many more people in all walks of life.

At Lumina Foundation, which I am privileged to serve as president and CEO, that effort constitutes our entire mission. All of our resources are directed toward achieving a single, ambitious goal, what we call Goal 2025. Within the next decade — that is, by the year 2025 — we want 60% of Americans to hold a degree, certificate or other high-quality postsecondary credential.

We know it won't be easy to increase attainment to that level, but labor economists and other experts insist that it's necessary, and we're convinced that it's possible. But it's only possible if we embrace change and work to fundamentally redesign the higher-ed system so that it truly meets the needs of the 21st century.

Indeed, fundamental redesign is a must — because the traditional higher-ed model is simply insufficient to our needs as a society. That's not a criticism of any institution or type of institution. All have their strengths, and each can claim its successes. But taken as a whole, the current system lacks the capacity and the flexibility to properly serve the millions of additional students who must be served if we are to succeed as a nation.



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Clearly, to meet that 60% goal, we need a revamped system — one that puts students firmly at the center and provides clear, multiple pathways that are defined by actual learning outcomes, not merely by the amount of time spent in classrooms. We need a system that requires transparency and cooperative effort, one that encourages innovation by rewarding genuine results, not mere process or effort or good intentions. We need a system that challenges everyone to be accountable for the success of students — *all types* of students, in greater numbers than ever before. This is especially true for those who have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education: low-income students, first-generation students, students of color and working adults.

This system must make it a priority to eliminate persistent attainment gaps based on race and broaden opportunity among underserved students. In short, we need a higher-ed system that fosters equity *and* excellence — and Lumina is committed to helping build that system.

Creating such a system is a major undertaking, of course — one that goes far beyond Lumina and will take many years to accomplish. Still, even though this work is in its early stages, system redesign has already become a central focus for us because we know that it's critical to achieving that 60% goal.

The main point is, we won't reach that goal by any well-worn path. We need new routes, new ideas, new approaches designed to serve much larger numbers of students — and serve them better.

And that's where you and the *Journal of College Access* come in. This journal can be a place where those new paths are explored, where new ideas are surfaced and innovative new approaches are discussed and perfected. I urge you to take advantage of this forum, to use it as a conduit for sharing your best thinking and as a tool for refining your own efforts to enhance college access and increase postsecondary attainment.

Those efforts are vitally important — to all of us as Americans. 