The Hendrick Best Practices for Adult Learners Conference
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Why Adult Learning Has Come of Age in Higher Education
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Good afternoon. It's a great pleasure to join you today for your conversations about adult learning. And thank you to the Penn State Commission for Adult Learners for inviting me to share Lumina Foundation's perspectives about adult learners – and why we believe adult learning has come of age in higher education.

I noted with interest that you have been holding this conference for 12 years – some of you were no doubt meeting at this conference before the Lumina Foundation was even founded. Last summer we just celebrated our 10th anniversary.

Lumina is the nation's largest foundation committed solely to enrolling and graduating more students from college, especially today's students ─ the ever-growing number of low-income, first-generation college, students of color, and older, adult students who constitute the "new normal." We've been calling this increasingly diverse group of students, 21st century students. And we're asking – do we have the 21st century higher education system to serve 21st century students?

All of our Foundation's resources and energies are focused on achieving one ambitious but specific goal for college attainment, what we call "Goal 2025" or simply, the Big Goal: **By the year 2025, we want 60% of Americans to hold high-quality college degrees and credentials**. For those of you who would like to see the "picture version," I've provided a handout with a graphic map of our BIG GOAL.

We arrived at this Goal after years of looking at the data related to access to and success in college, the mission of our Foundation.

Today around 40% of Americans ages 25-64 hold college degrees (baccalaureates and associate degrees).That percentage has not changed in about 40 years─and that's a problem, because it's far too low to meet the nation's future workforce needs.

So our work at Lumina Foundation is focused on increasing degree attainment substantially — we think the needle needs to move from the current 40% to 60% by 2025. To reach these numbers, the nation will need all types of students to succeed and in far greater numbers. This means that our strategies have to address both traditional-age students and adult learners.

We know from looking at the data that even if all students in high school graduated and went on to college and then graduated from college, we still would not reach the 60% goal. So, adults who have not completed degrees yet are a vital part of a college attainment agenda.

At Lumina, therefore, we've been looking at the numbers in the adult population ─ to help guide our strategies. There are folks who never completed a high school diploma and are seeking a

GED. There are folks who have a diploma or GED with no college. And there are people with some prior college credits but no degree. We all know that this is not a one-size-fits-all group ─ each of these groups requires a different set of strategies.

It's the third group of adults that Lumina is especially interested in now—the more than 37 million Americans who have 'some college credits who never earned a degree' – or some 22% of all 25-64 year olds. And if you count the folks under age 25 with family and work responsibilities, who really are adults as well, the number is well above 40 million.

These are the kind of data that has led Lumina to target a key portion of our work on returning adults.

But there is another important aspect to the Big Goal. Increasingly, we don't think we can talk about increasing degree completion without talking about workforce and labor markets. Again, our understanding of this issue comes from data.

Lumina, with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, has been partnering to support the work of The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, led by economist, Tony Carnevale. We hope you all know of this work, and especially the major report published this past June called "Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018."

Perhaps the most telling headline from this work is the projection that by 2018, 63% of all the nation's jobs will require some form of postsecondary education or training. That would be a huge increase since the mid-1970s, when less than 30% of jobs required any education beyond high school. That's a really astounding change, that less than 30% of jobs in the 1970s required any education beyond high school.

A second telling headline is that in virtually every major job category the Center studied, more postsecondary education will be critical to job success. The Center is not saying that everyone will need a baccalaureate degree. But the data are saying that associate degrees, baccalaureate degrees and certificates that have value in the workforce — all will be critical to meeting future workforce needs. So the emerging message: 21st century students must be educated in a 21st century higher education system to fuel the nation's 21st century workforce. We increasingly believe that our postsecondary education system is the human capital development system for the nation.

The context I've already spoken to is a P-20 to workforce pipeline. Students have to move successfully from high school to college – and many will go to community colleges – and then to workforce, with many side trips in-between. It is these detours – and the on- and off-ramps that are especially interesting about adult learners.

Here's a bit more of the context that many of you likely deal with daily in your jobs working with returning adults (many of these points were covered in the recent White House Summits on Community Colleges – the first of which was hosted in Philadelphia):

- More than half (60%) of all first-time bachelor's degree recipients attend more than one college or university; 35% attend two institutions, and 16% attend three. So, attending multiple higher education institutions is a reality for many adults.

- Nearly half of undergraduate students in the U.S. are enrolled in community colleges. And most states projecting rapidly growing numbers of high school graduates are heavily dependent upon community colleges as the entry point for students seeking the bachelor's degree.[1] There are two regions of the U.S. that are projecting declining numbers of high school graduates, and two that are projecting rapidly growing high school populations. The New England and Midwest regions are on the declining side – and that may be one reason why colleges in these two regions have been paying more attention to the adult learner populations.
- Students from racial and ethnic groups with low college completion rates are concentrated in community colleges and dependent upon effective transfer to achieve baccalaureate degrees.
- The costs of inefficiencies in the transfer process (e.g., credits that are not transferable; excessive credits taken after transfer because community college credits are not applied to degree requirements) are borne primarily by states and students.
- Financial aid is critical for low-income transfer students, particularly since most are transferring to higher cost institutions.

All of these facts point to a clear bottom line: it's critical that we all ─ and especially states ─ pay attention to the on-and off-ramps that exist among educational institutions ─ high schools, community colleges, universities, and of course, employers.

Within this context then, what are key actions Lumina is taking in the adult learning area and what trends and best practices are we seeing?

There are several areas of work Lumina is supporting in the adult learning area:

First: Last April, Lumina issued a first-time Request for Proposals to increase adult degree completion – with the goal of supporting large-scale efforts to increase degree completion among adults who have earned some college credits but no degree. I'll come back to this in a few minutes because this is such a major strategy for us.

A second area is database work. We've been paying special attention to data capacity. This has resulted in supporting the creation of state data profiles on adult learners, and database work on the importance of degrees related to workforce demands. As examples:
- CAEL (the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning) in 2008 completed 50 state profiles on adult learners, which I hope you all know about.
- Lumina also completed in 2010 state profiles in a report, "A Stronger Nation through Higher Education." The Pennsylvania profile I've provided today as a handout comes from this report. In this report (to be issued annually now), you'll find data on what it will take for each state to reach a 60% college degree goal by 2025. In Pennsylvania's case, with 37.9% of folks ages 25-64 holding college degrees (2008 data), almost 1.4 million additional degrees will be needed. It may be helpful for you to know that the states with the highest percentages of college degree-holders are Massachusetts (49.6%), Connecticut (46.6%), New Hampshire (46%), Colorado (45.3%), and Minnesota (45.0%).

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[1] From The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education issue brief in October 2010, on Transfer Policy for the White House Summit on Community Colleges.

- We've also been supporting the work of the Georgetown Center on Education & the Workforce that I've already mentioned. The Center will be releasing in the next few weeks data on the economic value of various degrees and college majors – linked to wage earnings and occupations.

So this type of database work, we think, can inform adult degree completion work─planning and practice.

A third area is prior learning assessment. Lumina has supported research, conducted by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, that has found that prior learning assessments do help students complete their degrees more quickly, and that saves both time and money. We think that prior learning assessment is a key strategy in an adult degree attainment agenda.

Lumina along with several other foundations is currently supporting CAEL and its partners, the American Council on Education and The College Board, in developing a national Virtual Prior Learning Assessment Center called *LearningCounts.org*. *LearningCounts* is designed to help students accelerate time to degree (including adults who do not have a home institution), expand higher education institutions' capacity to serve more students seeking assessments of prior learning, and to serve employers and workforce boards interested in obtaining prior learning assessments for their employees and clients, respectively.

A fourth area of our work focuses on developing accelerated degree models. An example is the accelerated associate degree program at Ivy Tech Community College in Lumina's home state of Indiana. Although this program doesn't focus on returning adults, but rather on at-risk high school students, we believe that many of the lessons learned will be important for developing more accelerated programs for returning adults.

Another example of an acceleration model is Western Governors University-Indiana, a competency-based model for degree completers, which is serving primarily returning adult students. Some of you may know that there are currently two more WGU-state institutions well along in the development – WGU-Texas and WGU-Washington. And WGU is in talks with a half-a dozen more states to establish this type of state partnership model more widely.[2]

A fifth area is developmental education. We all know that for many adult degree completers, returning to college means overcoming past failures and fears of returning to college, remediation in essential skills and developing effective study habits and time management. Lumina is supporting some work in developmental education with an eye toward the needs of returning adults. One example is the developing work around new mathematics pathways (Mathway/Statway), being supported by a number of foundations (led by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching). The goal is to help create a statistic-based college level math curriculum that may serve various college majors better than the current calculus-based pathway.

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[2] From "Model of the Moment," *Inside Higher Education* (May 9): The model, which to date serves adults with average age of 36 and two-thirds working fulltime is viewed as an "outsourcing" solution for higher education in some states unable to keep up with the demand for higher education by adults. WGU's pitch to state governments as it moves to "state-by-state colonization," as it is called in article, is they can help fill the gap around returning adults.

A sixth area of work is targeting a group of adults called *Near Eligible*, folks who left college with either all or nearly all credits completed toward a degree but they never completed the degree. This work, known as project Win-Win, began as a modest pilot in three states led by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP). This year the work has scaled up to 35 institutions in six states (Louisiana, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Virginia and Wisconsin). The work is focused on using statewide data systems to search records for students who left the institution with a specific number of credit hours (e.g., more than 60), then search the National Student Clearinghouse to determine if the student received their degree elsewhere, and if not, to move to a degree audit to determine which students meet the requirements for either a general associate or specialized associate degree (or in some cases, baccalaureate degree). The institutions then contact students deemed to be eligible to see if they can help them complete their degrees.

The last area of work, but certainly not the least, is policy work. Increasingly, issues around adult learners and returning adults is on the policy plate at the federal and state levels especially

So these seven broad areas of work constitute Lumina's active efforts focusing on returning adults.

I'd like to go back to the first area on the list. I already mentioned that Lumina issued a RFP seeking large-scale efforts to encourage adults with some credits to return to complete college degrees. The rationale for the RFP was anchored in the data I've already shared.

I'd like to share some of our impressions after reading more than 200 preproposals submitted in response to this RFP. We think this says something important about the challenges most of you are likely facing in your work.

First, we grouped the requests into several major areas of work applicants seemed most eager to tackle. The three most commonly identified were:

- Redesigned programs. This included redesigning degree programs, developing accelerated formats, moving programs to hybrids of face-to-face and online, or moving to entirely online formats.
- Developing or expanding direct marketing and recruiting, with a goal of increasing admissions and enrollments for returning adults.
- Support services and that included expanding or developing online support services needed by adults such as one-stop centers, academic planning and advising, one-to-one tutoring, mentoring, online modules, and orientations of various types.

We also conducted a special analysis of the 200 preproposals because we thought the response to the RFP might tell us something about both the current level of service and future vision for serving adult students throughout the U.S.

So let me share what we thought was "good news" from reading the 200 preproposals; then some "not-so-good news." But the good news first.

- There was widespread knowledge of the problem. The applicants demonstrated knowledge of the significant size of the populations in their service domains ─ of adults who have earned some college credits but who had not completed any credential. Many

applicants cited national, state and/or county-level data on the population needing service.

- There appeared to be widespread understanding of the importance and necessity of student support services for adult populations (for example, advising, mentoring, online orientation, prior learning assessment, and one-stop centers).
- There appeared to be widespread knowledge of the importance of flexible delivery systems, such as online, flexible program formats to serve adult populations.

Here's some of the "not so good news":

- Applicants appeared to be more knowledgeable about the "age" categories of adult learner populations than the actual prior "college credits" the target populations had accrued. This suggests that many applicants did not and do not have the data capacity, or have not used their data capacity, to determine just how far along target populations may be toward degree completion.
Although many states are clearly playing a role in returning adult efforts, there did not appear to be many state-level programs for populations wishing to complete either an associate or a baccalaureate degree. Most states were focused on one degree level but not both. This may be due to different higher education infrastructures in many states, i.e., four-year institutions organized in a different system than community colleges. But the implications for adults in these states is potentially a lack of access to one degree.
- Portals raised a productivity red flag – do we go state, regional, and/or national? As states recognize the importance of the adult population, more are moving to establish portals or websites to serve them, develop inventories of appropriate programs, mount marketing campaigns, etc. But no state indicated interest in collaborating with other states, regions, or national organizations. How efficient is that likely to be?
- We w*ere* very surprised to note that employer and workplace engagement strategies were sorely lacking. In fact, there was a paucity of applicants proposing to work closely with employers or provide academic credit for knowledge gained in the workplace.
- Some institutions seemed to indicate that, simply by increasing marketing their programs to students in other states or by increasing the number of transfer students accepted, they can increase degree completions. But we did not see much evidence that 'growing enrollments' would necessarily result in 'growing completions,' given the data we saw on completion rates (institutions typically reported 15, 20, or 35% completion rates in their programs).
- A last one I'll mention – only a small number of applicants offered "cross-cutting" approaches that sought to engage all or many of the elements the research suggests are key to serving returning adults well. Most applicants focused on program changes and marketing, some with college policy changes or agreements with other colleges, and some including state leaders in their plans. Our takeaway ─this likely underscores the decentralized nature of adult education programs. And, this raised a big question about how best to try to move to scale, in a highly decentralized higher education market.

I do want to say something about the applicants from Pennsylvania because I suspect many of you are in the room today. Pennsylvania has the distinction of submitting more applications to our RFP than any other state ─eight preproposals from different institutions and organizations. We don't know if this is because Pennsylvania needed the funds more than others, Pennsylvania institutions were better organized at going after grants, or Pennsylvania has an especially keen

interest in serving returning adults ─maybe all of the above are true. Certainly this conference that you've been sponsoring for more than a decade attests to your understanding of the important issues surrounding the adult learner.

We asked ourselves as we reviewed the multiple requests from states─ Pennsylvania and some of the other states that submitted multiple preproposals ─ if we funded all or many of the worthy projects in one state, would that result in a coherent, large-scale approach to serving returning adults in that state, or would we be contributing to "silos" of disjointed and likely smaller programs in scale and scope? Our answer was the latter –we did not believe the end result would be what we are hoping to see─ large-scale approaches to serving returning adults.

Now, you may want to question our conclusion on this – and I'll be happy to address those questions when we get to the Q&A session that follows my remarks. But if you were on the Lumina staff, would you advocate that the best way to serve returning adults in a state is through multiple decentralized smaller-size programs – or is a statewide approach of institutions and other partners the better strategy?

So, on to the most obvious questions: What did the RFP yield? What projects will Lumina support and why?

Lumina is funding 19 projects through our Adult Degree Completion a commitment of $15 million over the next four years. These efforts are primarily national, statewide and/or regional/metro in scope. They feature scaling-up strategies that include data mining to find adults with prior college credits, recruitment campaigns to motivate them to return, advising and financial assistance services, and other efforts that can help accelerate progress toward the degree.

I'd like to share a couple of examples in key categories of scale and scope to give you an idea of the diversity of work:

<u>With a national or multi-state focus</u>

The Southern Regional Education Board is establishing a national Adult Learner Portal with information about returning to college and other resources to help individuals decide which degree completion programs are most appropriate to their needs. A key benefit, we hope, will be cost savings to states that will not need to develop adult learner portals given the availability of the national portal.

The American Association of Community Colleges' Plus 50 Initiative is supporting efforts by 20 geographically dispersed community colleges to increase the number of learners 50 years of age and older with some prior college credits who complete credentials that are valuable in the marketplace.

<u>With a metro-area focus</u>

Graduate! Philadelphia is working to replicate this model created in 2005 to focus on "comebacker" adults with at least 15 college credits transferable into degree completion

programs to other locations – to Connecticut; Chicago, Illinois; and Des Moines, Iowa ─ as well as to improve the model operating in Philadelphia.

Greater Louisville, Inc. through its HIRE Education Forum (Higher Income Requires Education) is assisting a partnership of regional businesses, the Mayor's Education Roundtable, and higher education institutions serving the metro area to empower 200,000 employees in 19 Kentucky and seven Indiana counties who have earned some college credits to complete a degree.

<u>With a workforce/employer focus</u>

Rutgers University is working with four states (Mississippi, Pennsylvania, and two yet to be identified) to target Workforce Investment Act (WIA) clients who are 3 to 12 credits shy of a two- or four-year degree and provide the opportunity to finish that degree online through state workforce development systems.

The Manufacturing Institute is supporting 13 states (Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Mississippi, Nevada, New York, Tennessee, Wisconsin) in efforts to align educational and career pathways with the National Association of Manufacturers-Endorsed Manufacturing Skills Certification System, with the aim of increasing the number of returning adults who earn a postsecondary credential with value in the workplace.

<u>With a state-level focus</u>

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities is creating the RAPID Completion Program (RAPID stands for Returning Adults to Progress in Degree Completion Program), to increase re-enrollment, degree progress and degree completion among former system students who did not earn degrees. The system identified some 160,000 former students who attended in the last 10 years and already have 15 or more college credits.

The University of Wisconsin System Administration is expanding opportunities for adults to earn college credit via prior learning assessment, and apply the credits to degrees at all the UW System institutions.

The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission is creating an integrated statewide adult degree completion program that includes four components: the Board of Governors A.A.S. Adult Degree Completion Program, a Regents Transfer Agreement, a Regents Bachelor of Arts Today, and a student services component.

<u>Finally</u>

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education is developing a national learning network to support the current group of Lumina's Adult Degree Completion grantees plus others working on adult degree completion strategies. The Network is up and running and any of your institutions can go to the website to join the Adult College Completion Network─ http://adultcollegecompletion.org (link is included on the back of the handout)

Let me conclude my remarks this afternoon by underscoring what we're thinking about adult completion work based on what we've seen from our various areas of work — and what we think this says about the future:

- Many promising practices are under way.
- Many more are on the drawing board.
- The demographic and workforce/labor market factors at play will assure that this imperative around adult learners continues.
- The higher education infrastructure is already being redefined to better accommodate adult learners – through the rapid growth of for-profit and other providers and the moves being made in many states to centralize – or decentralize certain functions to serve adults better.
- There is also movement to align workforce and the higher education systems more closely, with the acceleration of industry-based certifications into academic and career pathways – so that working adults have more on and off ramps to expand their education and training around their work.
- The challenge is how to get to scale – to serve the large group of adults who need to complete degrees and certificates. And to institutionalize all these new programs and practices and policy developments within the traditional higher education structures so that they are not marginalized or ad hoc developments born out of a temporary necessity.

All this speaks to a coming of age for adult learners in higher education. Adult learners are clearly a critical population among our 21st century students. Our challenge is to provide a 21st century higher education system to meet their needs— and the needs of our 21st century workforce.

I'd like to open this up now, and am happy to take your questions and invite your own perspectives on these issues.