

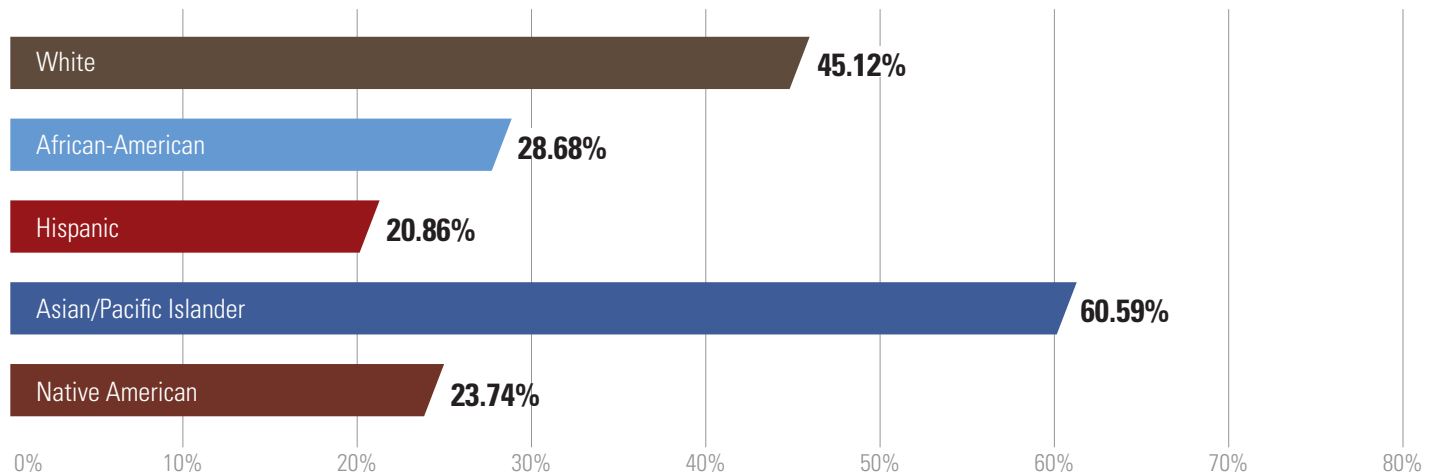
A high-angle, slightly blurred photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair and a black bag, looking up towards the camera. She is standing on a subway platform. Other people are visible in the background, some blurred, suggesting movement. The text "A STRONGER NATION" is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters, angled diagonally across the lower half of the image.

A STRONGER NATION

Postsecondary learning builds the talent that helps us rise

An annual report from Lumina Foundation

Degree-attainment rates among United States residents (ages 25-64), by population group



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-14 American Community Survey PUMS File

Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (CEW).³ Because the numbers are very close, we are confident that CEW's state-level estimates of high-quality certificates are accurate, and we have included them in the state-level data reported in this year's *Stronger Nation*.

The recognition of high-quality certificates is long overdue, but it raises important issues for Lumina and for postsecondary education as a whole. We need to better understand certificates — who gets them and issues them, the pathways they offer to further education and employment, and what they represent in terms of learning. In future reports we will track the number of certificate holders who go on to obtain degrees.

Beyond certificates, there are other postsecondary credentials that potentially meet Lumina's definition of high quality. In particular, certifications — industry-recognized credentials usually based on an assessment of skills and knowledge — often represent significant postsecondary learning and have great value in employment markets. However, the pathways to further education for those who hold certifications are not as clear as for those with certificates. Lumina is working to build stronger pathways into and through all forms of postsecondary learning in order to ensure that more Americans have opportunities for postsecondary learning.

It's about jobs ... and equity

When Lumina released its first *Stronger Nation* report, the nation had entered the Great Recession — the worst economic dislocation of the entire postwar period. The Great Recession transformed the nation's job markets in ways that made postsecondary skills essential for millions more Americans. Even though employment markets have since recovered to a large extent and overall employment is

approaching pre-recession levels, the transformation of jobs in ways that increase the need for postsecondary skills is continuing; in fact, it seems to be accelerating.

A look at job losses in the Great Recession and job growth since tells the story. According to recent data from CEW, the number of jobs held by workers with a high school diploma or less declined by 6.3 million during the recession, and very few of these jobs — if any — have come back.⁴

Workers with some college or an associate degree also lost jobs during the Great Recession — 1.8 million jobs, to be exact. However, unlike jobs requiring high school and below, these jobs have more than come back. Today, there are 700,000 more jobs requiring some college or an associate degree than existed before the recession.

Contrary to anecdotal — and incorrect — reports throughout the media, the number of jobs requiring at least a bachelor's degree did not decline during the Great Recession and has exploded in the recovery. Today, there are 8.1 million more jobs for Americans with a bachelor's degree or above than existed when the recession began. Virtually all job growth in the U.S. since 2007 is in jobs requiring some form of postsecondary education.

The implications of this fundamental shift are profound for our society. But this is not just about jobs. Success in postsecondary learning determines whether Americans can buy homes, pay for health care, and save for retirement and their children's education. Just as important, Americans who hold postsecondary credentials are more engaged in their communities — voting and volunteering at higher rates and showing greater appreciation for diverse cultures. When

¹ Data and reports are available online from NORC. Visit: www.norc.org

² GEMEnA works to develop and validate national measures of the participation in and credentialing of education and training for work. It also seeks to build government-wide consensus for the adoption of these measures in key federal data collections.

³ For each state, labor market experts at CEW calculated a certificate-attainment percentage by using Survey of Income Program Participation 2008 Wave 12 data (2012) and data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) 2014. Their calculations update work first published in a June 2012 report from CEW, *Certificates: Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees*.

⁴ A more precise way to describe what has happened is that recovery in the high-school-and-below job market has been offset by additional job losses that have continued in the recovery. The less-than-high-school job market has not recovered from the recession.