

Lumina Foundation Awards Three Degree Profile Grants: Testing a New Framework for Learning

May 12, 2011

Back in January of this year, Lumina Foundation released a proposed version of a [Degree Qualifications Profile](#), a framework for defining the knowledge and skills that individual students need to acquire in order to earn associate, bachelor's and master's degrees.

Today, Lumina announces three projects that were funded through grant work to test and refine the beta version of the Degree Profile. Lumina has finalized grant agreements with the following groups to test the Degree Profile: the Senior College Commission of the [Western Association of Schools and Colleges](#) (WASC), the [Higher Learning Commission](#) (HLC) and the [Council of Independent Colleges](#) (CIC).

WASC is being awarded **\$1,500,000** to transform WASC's accreditation process to assure clearer standards for graduation rates, levels of learning and degree outcomes using the Degree Profile. Using a four-phase process, WASC will re-design the accreditation process for member schools in California and Hawaii with the Degree Profile as a central reference point. WASC expects to complete work by September 2014.

"This grant will enable the Senior College Commission of WASC to address key challenges facing accreditation: accountability, quality assurance and transparency," said Ralph Wolff, president of the Senior College Commission of WASC. "The Commission will be working with institutions to externally validate their graduation rates and learning results in key areas. Central to this project will be exploring the uses of the Degree Profile developed by Lumina. The Profile can fill a much needed gap by identifying common degree outcomes across multiple degree levels beyond an accumulation of credit hours and minimum GPA. Grant support will enable WASC to create multiple learning communities to apply research and successful practices to improve student learning and completion."

"With so many of today's students transferring and moving between institutions, the Degree Qualifications Profile should provide a basis for facilitating credit transfers and broader alignment of associate, bachelors and masters degrees," said Linda Johnsrud, WASC Commission chair.

HLC has been awarded **\$425,000** to explore the applicability and usefulness of the Degree Profile through HLC's new Open Pathway model for reaffirmation of accreditation. HLC will recruit a cohort of 20 diverse institutions, including community colleges, which are eligible for the region's Open Pathway model, to apply the Degree Profile. They will test its usefulness as a framework for focusing on student learning outcomes expected from graduates at the associate, bachelor's and master's degree levels.

"The Higher Learning Commission is eager to help test the viability of the Degree Qualifications Profile. We hope to learn both how well the draft Profile works as a common definition for degree levels and whether it can play an ongoing role in the accreditation process. Does the Degree Qualifications Profile offer descriptions of attainment for American higher education that are broad and flexible enough to fit such a diverse enterprise but also specific and substantive enough to constitute a valid standard? And how might it be improved? Twenty HLC-accredited institutions will lead us to answering those questions as the focus of their individual Improvement Projects in the Commission's new Open Pathway model for continued accreditation," said Sylvia Manning, president of HLC.

CIC has been awarded **\$425,000** to explore the applicability and usefulness of the Degree Profile on independent college campuses. CIC will recruit a cohort of schools to apply and test the Degree Profile. Each institution will use the Degree Profile in a way that is most appropriate for its needs and circumstances.

"We are delighted that the Lumina Foundation will allow the Council of Independent Colleges to conduct a pilot project on the applicability of the Degree Qualifications Profile to smaller, nonprofit, private colleges and universities," said Richard Ekman, president of CIC. "This is a concept that is well worth exploring as one potential way to improve the quality of higher education in the United States without involving the federal government."

The use of the Degree Profile may provide an opportunity to strengthen higher education and the focus on student learning. By offering a clearer understanding of what degrees represent in terms of learning, the Degree Profile could help ensure the quality of degrees offered by new providers and delivery mechanisms.

Other accreditors and major organizations interested in grants to test the Degree Profile should contact Lumina Foundation. During the course of experimentation with WASC, HLC and CIC, which could take several years, the Foundation will continue to gather stakeholders to review the projects and seek advice on further work.

Lumina Foundation, an Indianapolis-based private foundation, is committed to enrolling and graduating more students from college—especially 21st century students: low-income students, students of color, first-generation students and adult learners. Lumina's goal is to increase the percentage of Americans who hold high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by 2025. Lumina pursues this goal in three ways: by identifying and supporting effective practice, through public policy advocacy, and by using our communications and convening power to build public will for change.

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3 Responses to Lumina Foundation Awards Three Degree Profile Grants: Testing a New Framework for Learning

Lumina Foundation Awards Three Degree Profile Grants: Testing a New Framework for Learning « Focus on Adult Learning . . . Innovation through Inquiry says:

May 19, 2011 at 8:20 pm

Reply

dr. tom p abeles says:

May 31, 2011 at 4:41 pm

The research and analysis seems to show that:

a) a college degree is being used as a screening device and that regardless of competencies, many persons with degrees will be working in jobs which do not require such a degree with two results:

*1) with an increase in numbers of graduates, the wages will be depressed
2) the more graduates working in non-degree jobs may push those in the middle and lower into even lower paying jobs or unemployment*

b) knowledge is fungible and transferable across geo-political boundaries which means that much knowledge work is exportable and corporations need knowledge work close to their markets such as is happening with high tech companies moving research and other facilities overseas.

c) school is now K-16 where the bright line for the "idea of the universities" has moved from between the secondary/post secondary institutions to between the baccalaureate and post baccalaureate programs. There are too many ways to slide from grade 12 to grade 13/14 and beyond continuously and effortlessly including CCBA's and the variety of post secondary options as well as outcome and competency based certifications as social media disrupts, in Clayton Christensen's terms, a mature market.

The Lumina proposal seems to fit well into Christensen's model of trying to sustain such a market in the face of rising alternatives.

Reply

Peter Nakhulo says:

June 2, 2011 at 5:29 am

This is a very innovative and quite philanthropic. I wish you had a programme for african(Kenya) schools that day to day activities are in jeopardy because of lack of resources.more so desks and texts books. If there is any kind of grant for Africa please let me know.

Your faithfully,

Peter

Reply

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