For Immediate Release
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HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION RECEIVES $500,000 FROM LUMINA FOUNDATION FOR INITIATIVES IN INNOVATION AND ACCREDITATION TO MEET EMERGING NEEDS

GRANT INCLUDES FOCUS ON NEW THRESHOLDS ON STUDENT SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

CHICAGO (September, 30, 2016) – The Higher Learning Commission (HLC), the largest regional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, has been awarded a $500,000 Lumina Foundation grant for programming to cultivate industry leading practices within the higher education accreditation process.

HLC’s initiative will develop and adopt student success policies and processes to provide a more complete insight into the colleges and universities it accredits. The grant also will support an innovation infrastructure, including a think tank focused on the accreditation process. The grant also supports HLC’s new strategic plan Beyond the Horizon.

“We at HLC are extremely energized and thankful for Lumina being the partner to help us execute this important work we have envisioned for some time,” said HLC President Barbara Gellman-Danley, Ph.D. “This project sets a framework in higher education accreditation that, in the end, will benefit thousands of students served by our member institutions and ultimately, we expect, higher education as a whole.”

Lumina officials noted that HLC’s partnership with a leading educational foundation is trend setting as a collaboration to improve student success and advance accreditation processes to further meet current conditions and emerging needs.

“HLC’s leadership focusing on the attainment of high quality credentials as a measure of student success and create processes that recognize the diverse credentialing ecosystem holds great promise for addressing some of the most pressing quality assurance issues today,” said Amber Garrison Duncan, Ph.D., strategy director with Lumina Foundation.

The award will be distributed over three years. The project’s two-pronged approach addresses enhancing insight into the current state of student success as well as driving innovation to enhance accreditation.
Student Success
HLC plans to heighten insight into student success by working with institutions to provide comprehensive benchmarks and terminology focused on student success measurements. Additionally, HLC will look at identifying better agency expectations on key indicators, especially student completion rates, working in partnership with institutions, state leaders and federal regulators.

HLC will utilize a cohort of institutions to test various models in measuring student success. Those approaches could include development of revised thresholds and differentiation of goals by institutional sectors. The agency also will seek to engage discourse among member institutions by showcasing best practices by high-performing colleges and universities.

Innovation Infrastructure
The Innovation Infrastructure portion of the initiative will develop a framework for increased understanding of innovative practices by HLC in tandem with its member institutions. HLC also will develop institutional “safe zones” for piloting programs and new practices that may be launched more broadly following the three-year project.

Also, the HLC think tank will become an incubator for emerging practices to enhance the value of institutional accreditation. The group will include educational leaders in addition to creative minds across non-educational industries known for innovation in the 21st century.

About The Higher Learning Commission: The Higher Learning Commission (hlcommission.org) accredits approximately 1,000 colleges and universities that have a home base in one of 19 states that stretch from West Virginia to Arizona. HLC is a private, nonprofit regional accrediting agency. HLC’s mission is to assure and advance the quality of higher learning. It is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. The institutions HLC accredits include public, private not-for-profit, and proprietary institutions at degree levels from the associate’s through the doctoral degree level and from small, specialized institutions through large research universities.

About Lumina Foundation: Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation committed to increasing the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates and other credentials to 60 percent by 2025. Lumina’s outcomes-based approach focuses on helping to design and build an equitable, accessible, responsive and accountable higher education system while fostering a national sense of urgency for action to achieve Goal 2025.

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