Plenary Session I:
Achieving Our College Completion Goals – The Federal/National Perspective

For the last half of the 20th century, American higher education policy focused almost exclusively on expanding access. From the GI Bill to the Sputnik scare, both of which provided impetus for rapid expansion in higher education, to the Great Society program that spawned the Higher Education Act and the advent of substantial federal student financial aid, to the rapid expansion of community colleges to serve regular folks, the focus has been on transforming higher education from a meritocratic to an egalitarian public good.

The dawning of a new century has brought a new policy thrust: moving from access as the primary focus to access to success as the new mantra, with success defined as college completion. The completion agenda gained its initial momentum in 2006, with publication of “A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education,” the final report of Secretary of Education Margaret Spelling’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education. This report bemoaned the loss of American competitiveness in college attainment rates, compared to the rest of the developed world, and charted a course for improving postsecondary productivity through the reform of federal, state, and institutional policy. President Obama has sustained this federal thrust, announcing in his State of the Union speech in 2012 that he would support policy that would help the U.S. regain its preeminence in educational leadership. He adopted the goal that by 2020, 65 percent of young adults in the U.S. would have a certificate or degree that would make them competitive in the increasingly global economy.

The federal government was not the only force beginning to focus on the completion agenda. Nationally, momentum has been mounting for a major focus from within higher education to increase the success of students. By 2006 the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation was supporting an initiative to double the numbers of low-income young adults receiving a college education. And in 2009 Lumina Foundation adopted its “Big Goal”: 60 percent of all American adults will have attained a postsecondary credential by 2025.

This panel presentation and the following discussion bring representatives from both the federal and national levels together to discuss what led their leaders to focus on the completion dilemma, what strategies they have pursued to advance this agenda, how well the efforts have gone, and what lies ahead.

The panel will be moderated by George Pernsteiner, president of the State Higher Education Executive Officers organization. Before recently accepting the SHEEO presidency, Pernsteiner was the chancellor of the Oregon
University System, which was one of the first higher education systems in the country to adopt (below the radar) a completion-oriented performance-funding approach, built in part on lessons learned from England and Ireland. Jamienne Studley, deputy undersecretary of Education, will reflect the federal perspective, and Dewayne Matthews, vice president of Lumina Foundation, will discuss the interest and activities of foundations in the completion agenda.

**Speakers:**
Dewayne Matthews, vice president for policy and strategy, Lumina Foundation
Jamienne Studley, deputy under secretary, U.S. Department of Education

**Facilitated Discussion on:**
Achieving our College Completion Goals – The Federal/National Perspective

**Facilitator:**
George Pernsteiner, president, State Higher Education Executive Officers

**Biographical Information on the Speakers & Facilitator**

**Dewayne Matthews** is vice president for policy and strategy of Lumina Foundation. Matthews has served in a variety of higher education leadership roles, including senior adviser to the president and vice president of the Education Commission of the States, director of the Student Exchange Program for the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, and executive director of the New Mexico Commission on Higher Education. He has been a legislative staff member, faculty member, and university trustee, and has worked with higher education institutions in Mexico, Canada, and Japan. He began his career as a first-grade teacher in Taos, NM. Matthews is a graduate of the University of New Mexico and earned a master’s degree in bilingual education at New Mexico Highlands University in Las Vegas. He earned a doctorate in educational leadership and policy studies at Arizona State University and received an honorary doctor of humane letters from Marycrest International University.

**George Pernsteiner** became the president of the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) association on September 16, 2013. Prior to joining SHEEO, Pernsteiner served as chancellor of the Oregon University System from 2004 to 2013. Previously in his career, he served as vice chancellor for administrative services at the University of California, Santa Barbara; vice president for finance and administration at Portland State University; and vice provost and chief financial officer at the University of Oregon. He has taught at Portland
State University, the University of Puget Sound, and the University of Oregon. Before beginning work in higher education, Pernsteiner served as a senior executive for Seattle city government. He holds degrees from Seattle University and the University of Washington.

Jamienne S. Studley is the U.S. deputy under secretary of education. The former president of Skidmore College and one-time Education Department general counsel, Studley oversees the department’s second-term higher education agenda. Studley, whose was appointed as a consultant to Martha J. Kanter in June, is expected to focus on such issues as accreditation and college pricing, and to play a key role in shaping President Obama’s far-reaching proposal to create a system to rate colleges on affordability, quality, and other matters. She is a graduate of Barnard College and Harvard Law School.