

7. Higher education

These are uncertain times in higher education, but one thing is certain: We must place much greater emphasis on access to higher education and on equipping graduates with the skills they really need to succeed.

For the millions of Americans who struggle to become part of the middle class, higher education offers the greatest opportunity to enter the workforce with the skills and knowledge to be successful. Long gone are the days when Americans with little education could secure jobs working at the same office or factory for their entire careers and have the economic means to buy homes and cars, to pay for their children's college education and save for their own retirement. Today two-thirds of new jobs require some form of post-secondary education. If we do not insist on a higher education system that gives access and opportunity to every single American, we are sacrificing our economic stability as a nation.



Eduardo Padrón Courtesy of author

While we emphasize the importance of accessible and affordable college education, we must also focus on college completion and on equipping our college graduates with the skills that will help them succeed. We must give our students the financial, social and emotional support necessary to finish their studies, and we must prepare our graduates to be productive members of the ever-changing workforce. Our preoccupation with high-stakes testing serves too often to limit the scope of learning for students — a point reinforced by the United States' largest employers, who tell us that graduates need to have a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them. We must send our graduates into the workforce not as rote memorizers but as well-rounded, socially engaged and ethically minded human beings. In addition to discipline-specific knowledge, they will need critical- and creative-thinking skills, solid communication, analysis and problem-solving abilities, knowledge of emerging technologies and an appreciation for diverse cultures, the arts and the environment.

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