

Unlocking Opportunity: Eight Strategies to Strengthen the Value of Community College Credentials

DREAM 2025 Spotlight Session | February 19, 2025

Introductions



Marcia Ballinger
President, Lorain County
Community College



Greg Williams
President, Odessa College



Jason Wood
President, Southwest Wisconsin
Technical College



Millicent Bender
Director, Leadership & Field
Engagement, Aspen Institute



Davis Jenkins
Senior Research Scholar, Community
College Research Center

Thank You to Our Supporters



Assessing and Strengthening the Value of Community College Credentials

Davis Jenkins, Senior Research Scholar,
Community College Research Center

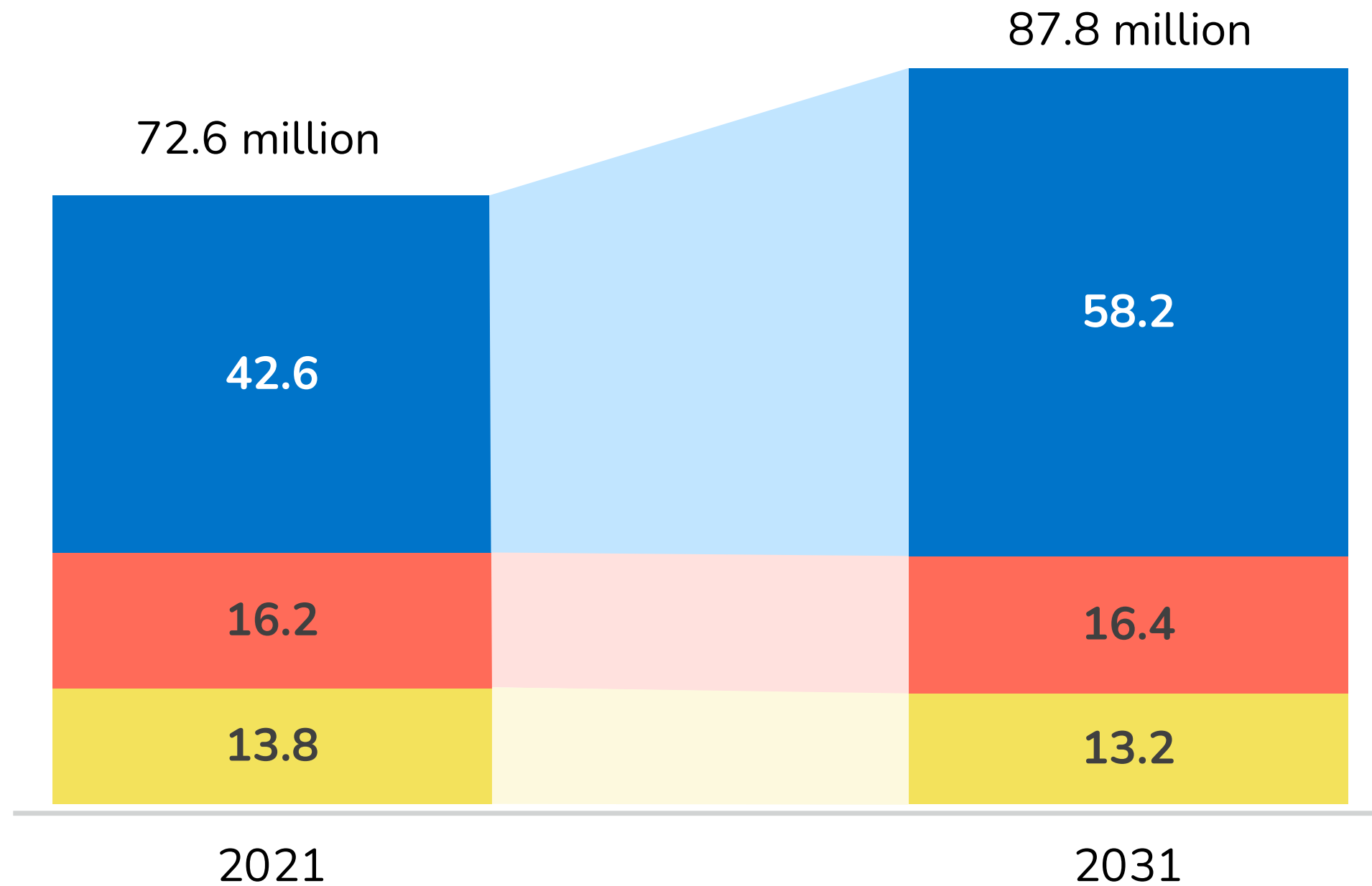
Community College 3.0

Unlocking Opportunity Through Focusing on Post-College Success



**UNLOCKING
OPPORTUNITY**

Number of good jobs (in millions)



The number of good jobs for workers on the bachelor's degree pathway will grow by more than 15 million net new jobs, while the number of good jobs on the high school pathway will decline by nearly 600,000.

■ High school pathway ■ Middle-skills pathway ■ Bachelor's degree pathway

Source: [Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce](#)

Jeff Strohl, Artem Gulish, and Catherine Morris. *The Future of Good Jobs: Projections through 2031*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2024. cew.georgetown.edu/goodjobsprojections2031.

CCRC COMMUNITY COLLEGE
RESEARCH CENTER
Teachers College, Columbia University

**COLLEGE
EXCELLENCE
PROGRAM**
aspen institute

Broken Transfer Negatively Impacts Millions of Students

80% of community college students want a bachelor's degree



of community college students transfer to a four-year institution



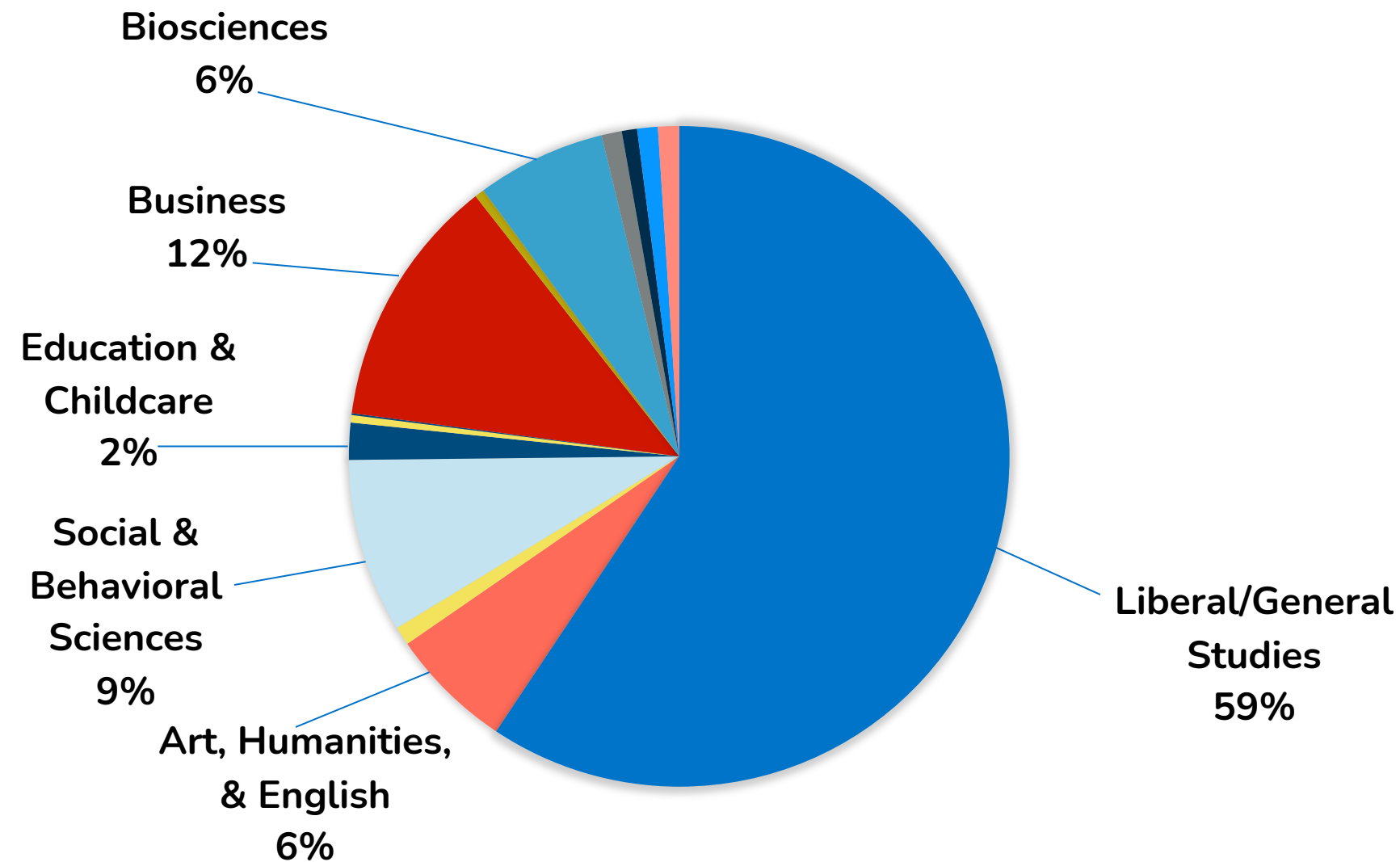
of community college students will graduate with a bachelor's degree within six years of starting college



Source: Velasco, Fink, Bedoya-Guevara, Jenkins, & LaViolet. (2024, February). Tracking Transfer: Community College and Four-Year Institutional Effectiveness in Broadening Bachelor's Degree Attainment. In <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/Tracking-Transfer-Community-College-and-Four-Year-Institutional-Effectiveness-in-Broadening-Bachelors-Degree-Attainment.html>

Community College Transfer Associates Are Not Well Aligned With Bachelor's Degrees Awarded by Four-Year Institutions

Community College Transfer Associate Degrees by Field
AY 2022-23



STEM Majors

CC Transfer Associate Degrees	Bachelor's Degrees, Public Four-Years
10%	24%

Liberal/General Studies Majors

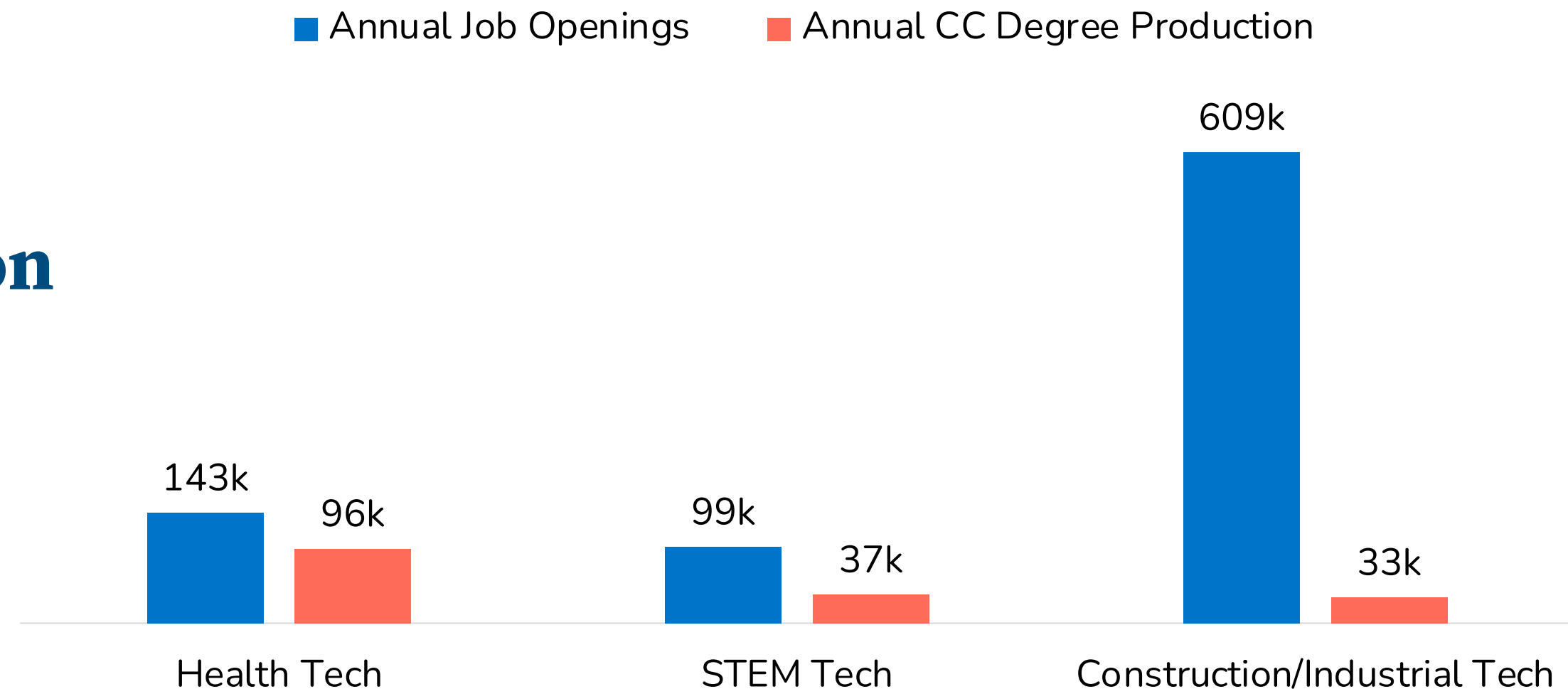
CC Transfer Associate Degrees	Bachelor's Degrees, Public Four-Years
59%	24%

There is **strong projected demand for middle-skill jobs** that pay well above living wages and offer strong career advancement opportunities.

Community colleges are **not on track to meet this demand.**

Programs leading to higher earnings also have **greater need to diversify.**

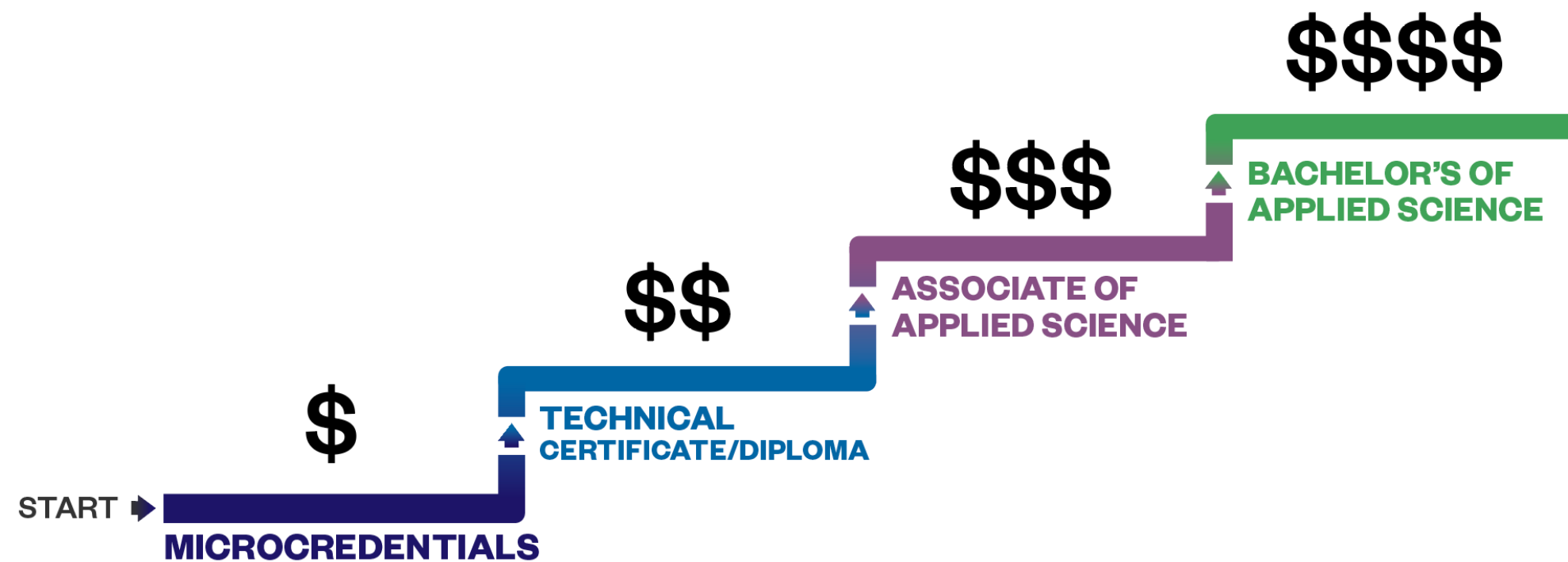
Projected Middle-Skill Job Openings in Technology Fields 2021-31 compared to Community College Workforce Degrees in Technology Fields 2022-23



On Paper, Community College CTE Are Often Designed to Be “Stackable”...

Stackable credentials:

Earn workforce certifications on your way to college degrees



...In reality, colleges too often leave it to students to figure out how to stack credentials to better jobs and degrees.

Most workers who stack in high-wage fields already have experience in the field and degrees.

Women, low-income, and students of color disproportionately represented among short CTE certificate awardees in low-wage fields.

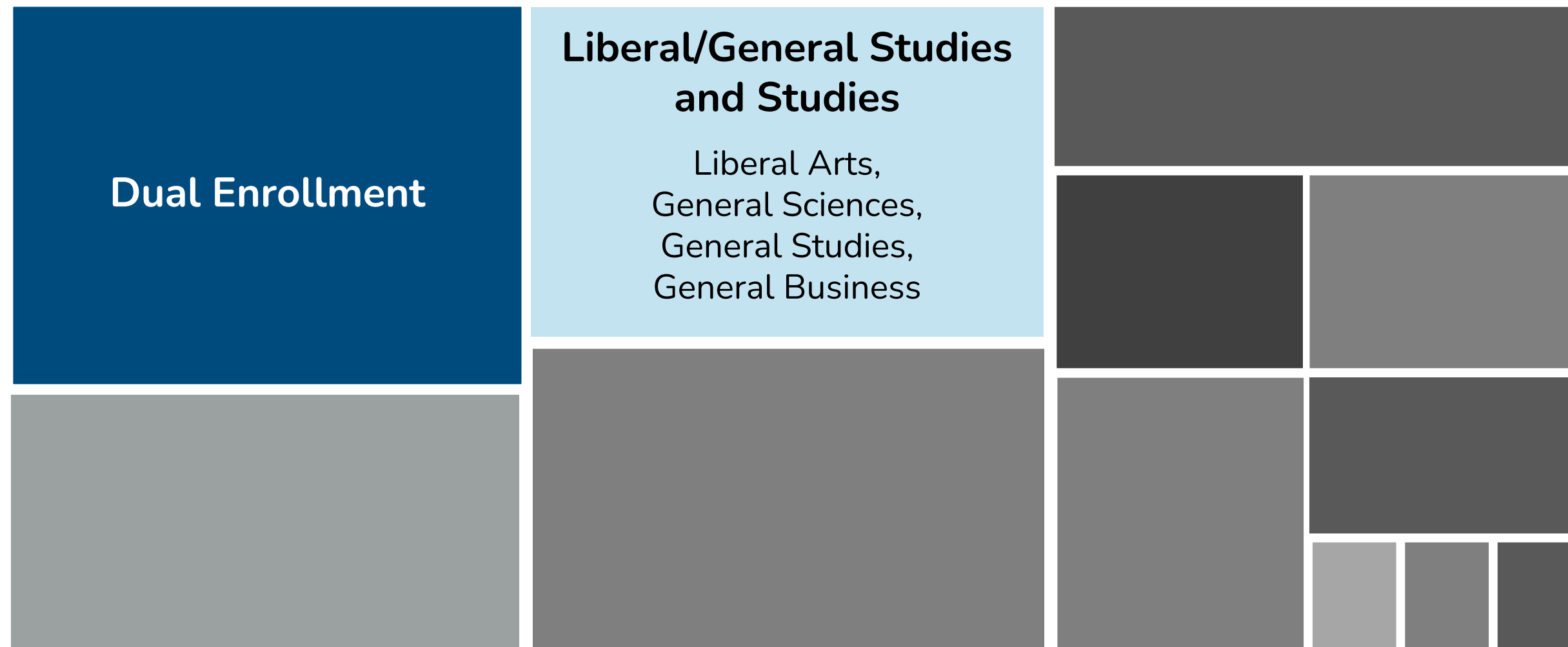
“Fast-track” short-term training programs for underemployed workers to enter well-paying, high demand fields are rare.

Classifying Programs by Post-Completion Value: Key Questions

1. What programs are our students enrolled in? Which are they completing?
2. What jobs do our workforce programs lead to? Which pay a living wage, and which do not?
3. Are our bachelor's/transfer tracks preparing students to transfer efficiently in their major field of interest? How do we know?
4. How many students are in high-value workforce or transfer pathways, and how many are in lower-value pathways? Or not in a program?
5. Are specific groups of students underrepresented in high-value programs or overrepresented in low-value programs?
6. Where are there opportunities to expand access and success in programs with high value for employment and transfer for students from underrepresented groups?

Many Students Are Not Enrolled In a Program That Clearly Lead to a Job or Transfer in Their Major Field of Interest

Typical Community College Program Enrollments By Field



What motivation do these students have to continue and complete?

New Classification Tools

Resources based on early learning from the Unlocking Opportunity network:

1. Classifying Community College Programs by Post-Completion Success in Transfer and Workforce
2. Program Enrollment Analysis Tool
3. Inquiry Guide on Classifying Community College Programs by Post-Completion Success in Transfer and Workforce
4. Strengthening Community College Program Maps and Educational Plans for Post-Completion Value: Practical Guide

View the classification tools:



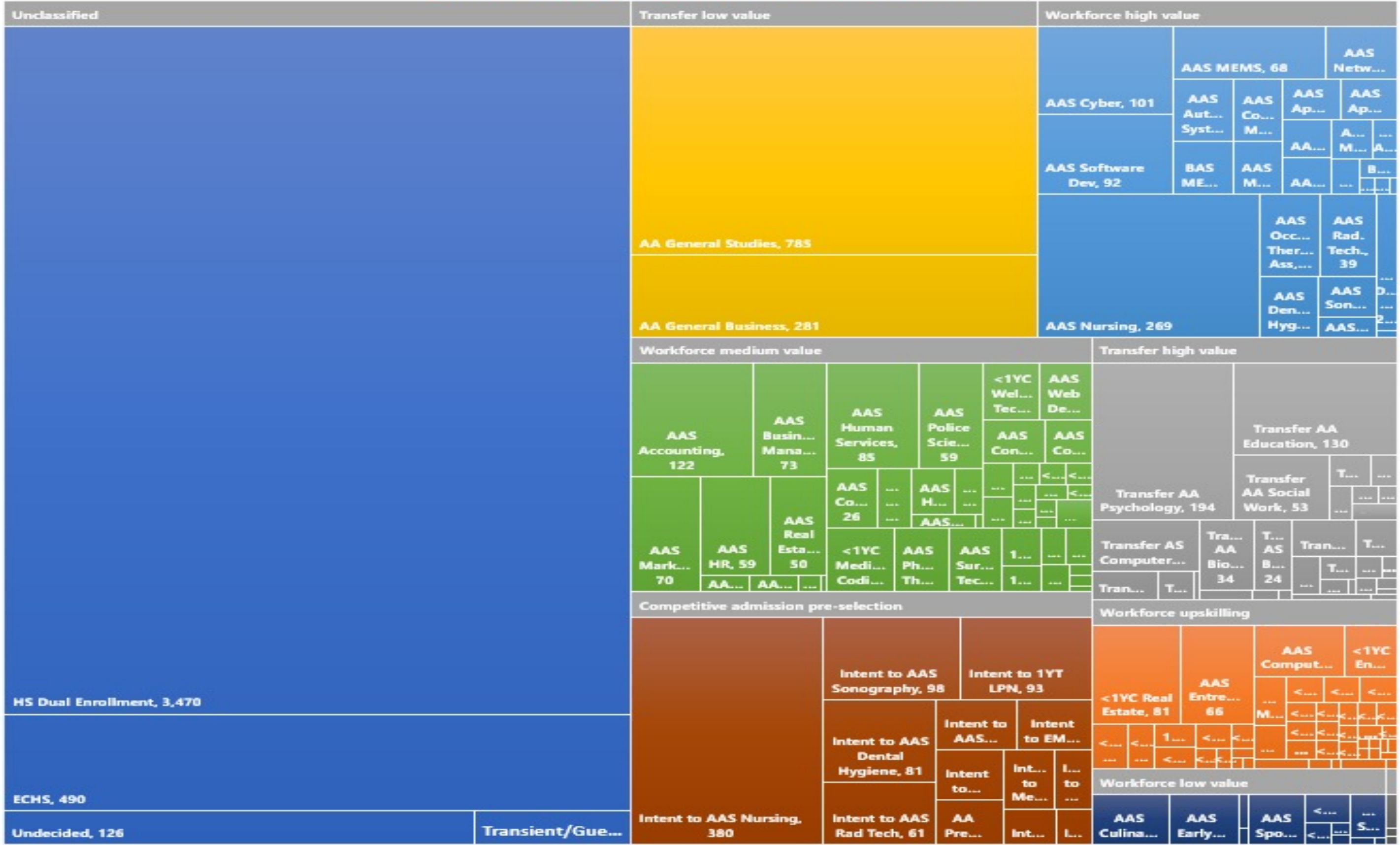
<https://rb.gy/v01rkt>

Classifying Programs: How Our Tool Works

Program PCV Category	Program leads to credentials that enable completers to:
Workforce high-value	Secure jobs that pay well above living wages and provide opportunities for learning and career advancement.
Workforce medium-value	Secure jobs that pay more than the prevailing wage for low-skill work <u>and</u> can serve with further training as stepping stones leading to living-wage jobs.
Workforce low-value	Secure jobs that pay at or less than wages for low-skill work and do not provide opportunities for advancement without extensive further education or training.
Workforce upskilling	Develop and document skills of value in the labor market but that may not by themselves enable students to secure or advance to better paying jobs.
Transfer high-value	Transfer all or most of their credits toward a bachelor's degree in their major field of interest.
Transfer low-value	Transfer many of their credits only as electives rather major-applicable credits.
Competitive admission for pre-selection	Prerequisites coursework for admission into a selective program such as Nursing, Radiography Tech or some Engineering programs.
Value unclear	Program tracks that do not enable completers to advance to better jobs, build workforce or academic skills or advance to higher levels of education.

Classifying Programs: How Our Tool Works

Enrollment in Programs by Workforce/Transfer Outcome



Unlocking Opportunity: Network Goals & Strategies

Millicent Bender, Director, Aspen Institute
College Excellence Program

CCRC COMMUNITY COLLEGE
RESEARCH CENTER
Teachers College, Columbia University

**COLLEGE
EXCELLENCE
PROGRAM**
aspen institute



ALAMO
COLLEGES
DISTRICT



*Lorain County
Community College*

St. Petersburg College

SPC



Monroe
Community
College
STATE UNIVERSITY
OF NEW YORK



TULSA
COMMUNITY
COLLEGE



Quantitative Goals for 2025

More Students
in High-Value
Programs

28,441

16,129

Fewer
Students in
Lower-
Opportunity
Pathways

Source: Unlocking Opportunity strategy submission documents, October/November 2023.

Note. These numbers should not be combined as some of the students proposed to move out of lower-value pathways are also captured in the proposed move to higher-value pathways.

How can we unlock opportunity?

More Students in High-Value Programs

Fewer Students in Lower-Opportunity Pathways

Strengthen the Program Portfolio

- Devise strategies to expand high-value workforce programs
- Devise concrete strategy to develop short-term credentials of value and recruit adults into them
- Devise strategies to strengthen low-opportunity workforce programs
- Strengthen or expand health care programs so all pre-health students have a pathway to a credential tied to a good job

Strengthen workforce programs

Strengthen transfer and bachelor's programs

- Intensify strategies to accelerate bachelor's attainment
- Connect general studies to pre-major programs

Strengthen Supports to Enter and Complete High-Value Programs

- Redesign program onboarding to increase and accelerate enrollment in high-value programs and development of full-program educational plans
- Connect dual enrollment students to high-value pathways

Panel Discussion

Millicent Bender, Director, Aspen Institute College Excellence Program

Marcia Ballinger, President, Lorain County Community College

Davis Jenkins, Senior Research Scholar, Community College
Research Center

Greg Williams, President, Odessa College

Jason Wood, President, Southwest Wisconsin Technical College

The Next Phase of Unlocking Opportunity

Millicent Bender, Director, Aspen Institute
College Excellence Program

CCRC COMMUNITY COLLEGE
RESEARCH CENTER
Teachers College, Columbia University

**COLLEGE
EXCELLENCE
PROGRAM**
aspen institute

Apply to Join the Network

Learn more about
Unlocking Opportunity



<https://rb.gy/u97gsb>

Sign up to receive updates
when applications open



<https://rb.gy/rbp312>

Thank You



unlockingopportunity@aspeninstitute.org