

Unlocking Opportunity: Strategies to Strengthen Credential Value

AACC 2025 Fireside Session | April 14, 2025

Introductions



Leigh Goodson

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Davis Jenkins

Senior Research Scholar, Community
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Josh Wyner

Founder and Executive Director,
College Excellence Program

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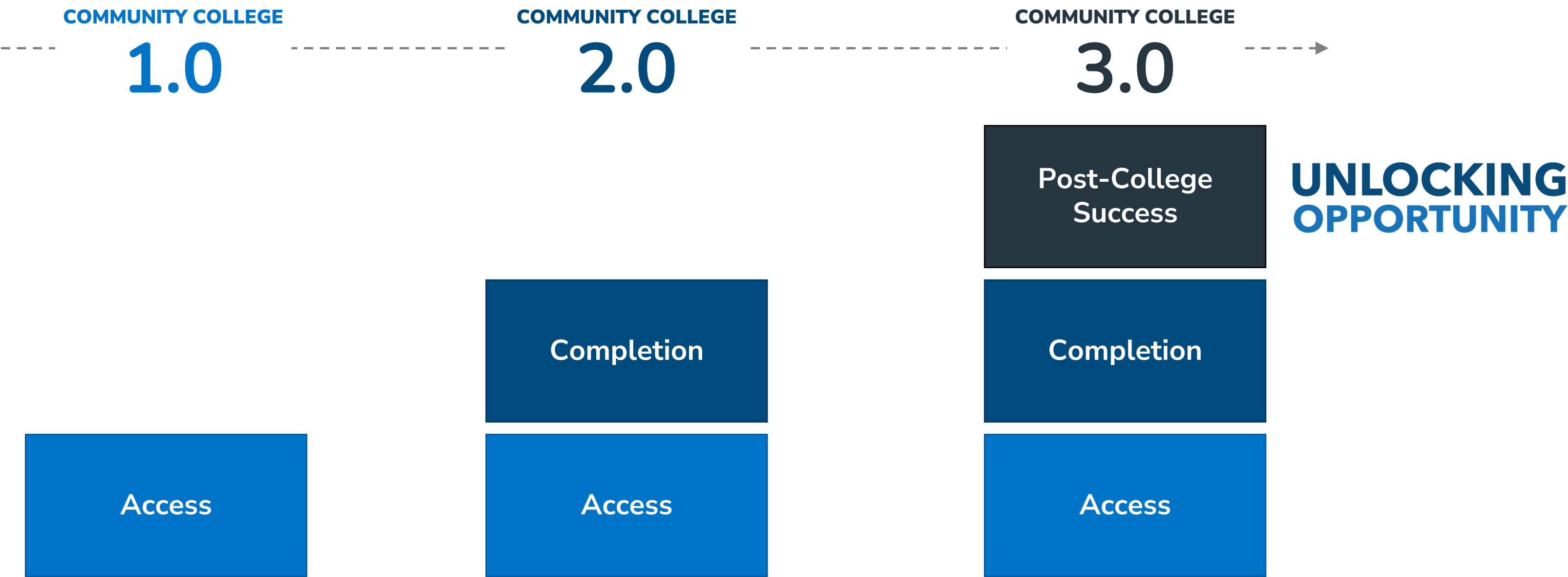


Assessing and Strengthening the Value of Community College Credentials

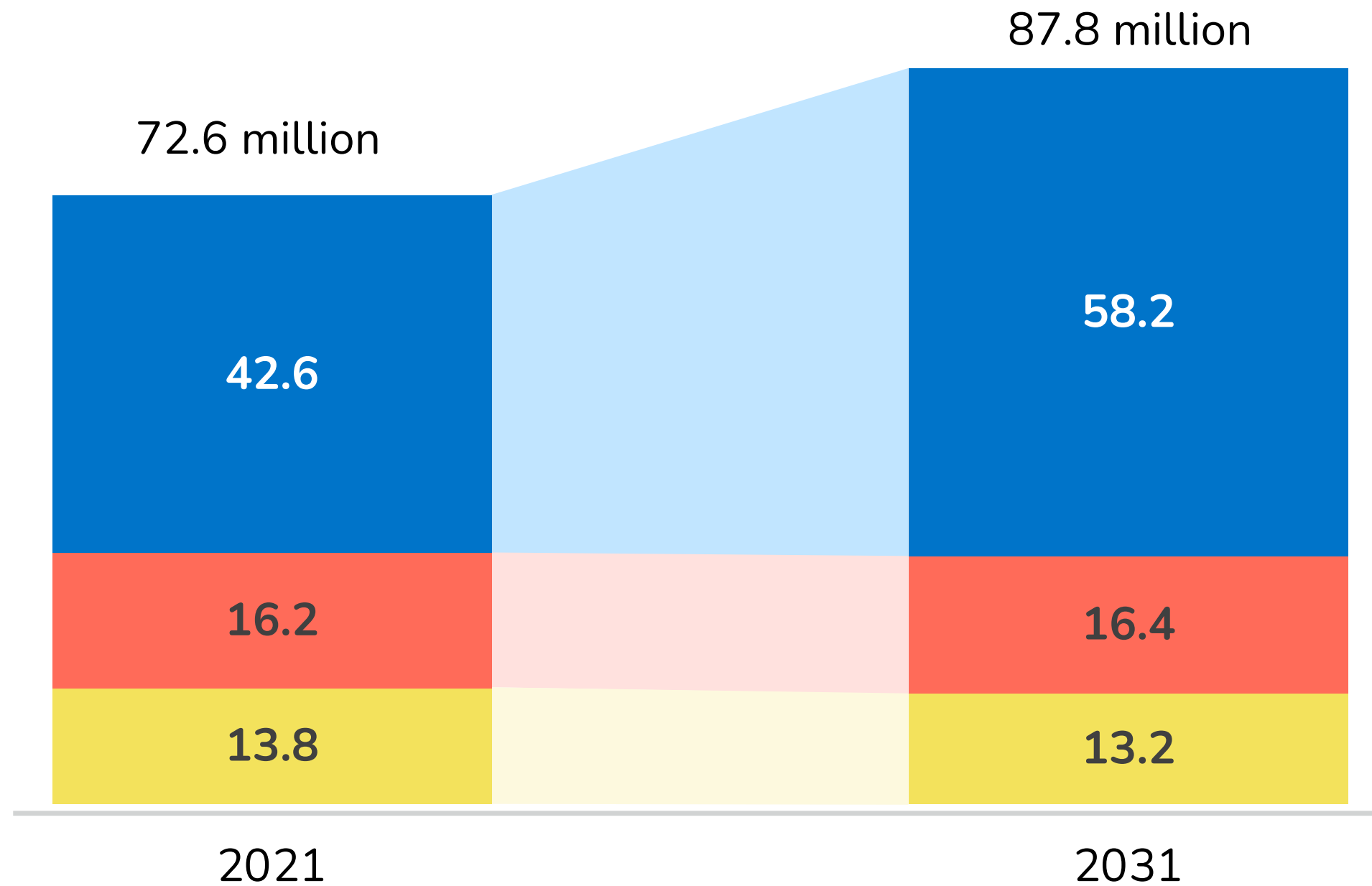
Davis Jenkins, Senior Research Scholar,
Community College Research Center

Community College 3.0

Unlocking Opportunity Through Focusing on Post-College Success



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.

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Broken Transfer Negatively Impacts Millions of Students

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



33% of community college students transfer to a four-year institution



16% of community college students will graduate with a bachelor's degree within six years of starting college



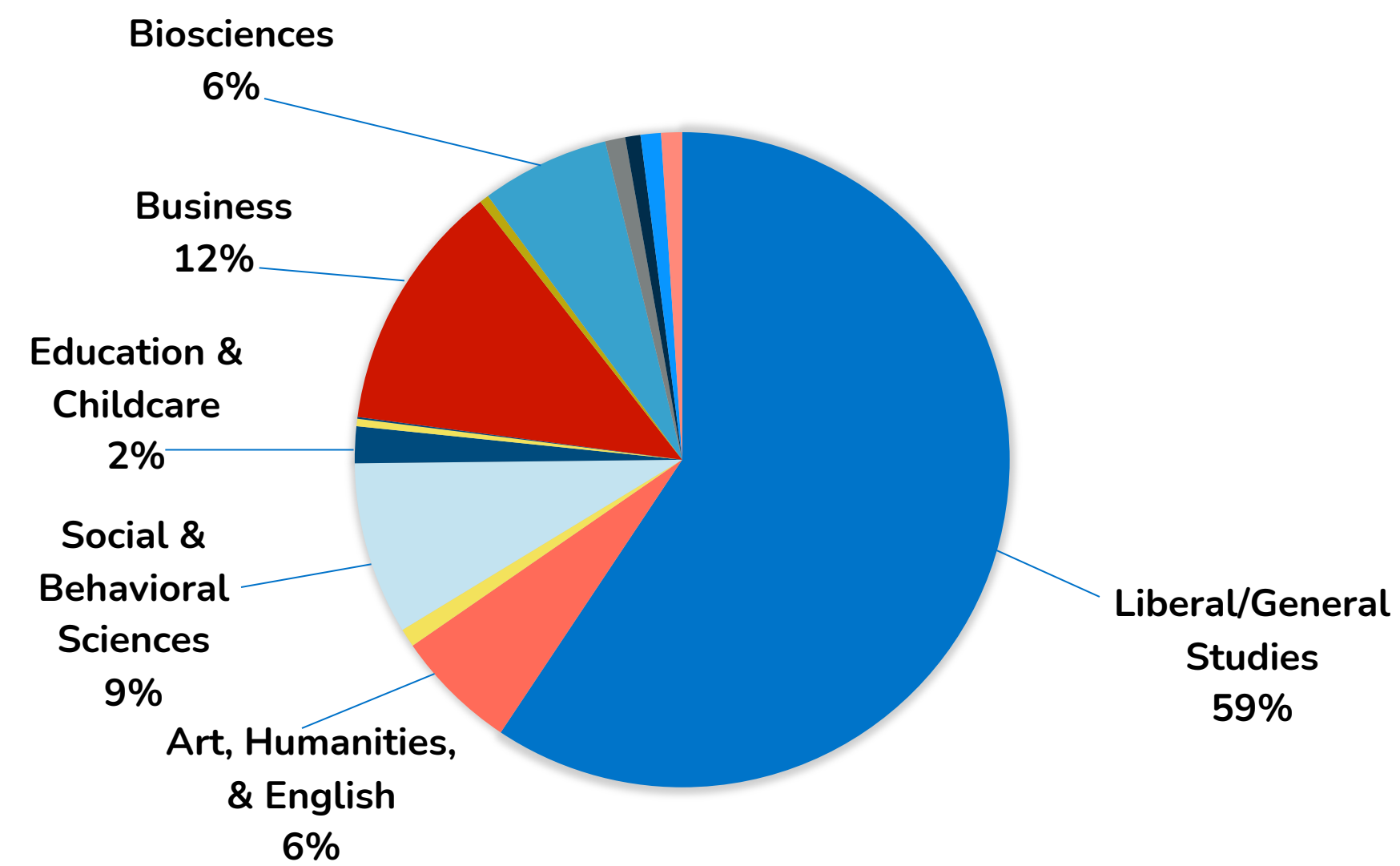
Source: Velasco, Fink, Bedoya-Guevara, Jenkins, & LaViolet. (2024, February). Tracking Transfer: Community College and Four-Year Institutional Effectiveness in Broadening Bachelor's Degree Attainment. In <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/Tracking-Transfer-Community-College-and-Four-Year-Institutional-Effectiveness-in-Broadening-Bachelors-Degree-Attainme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

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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

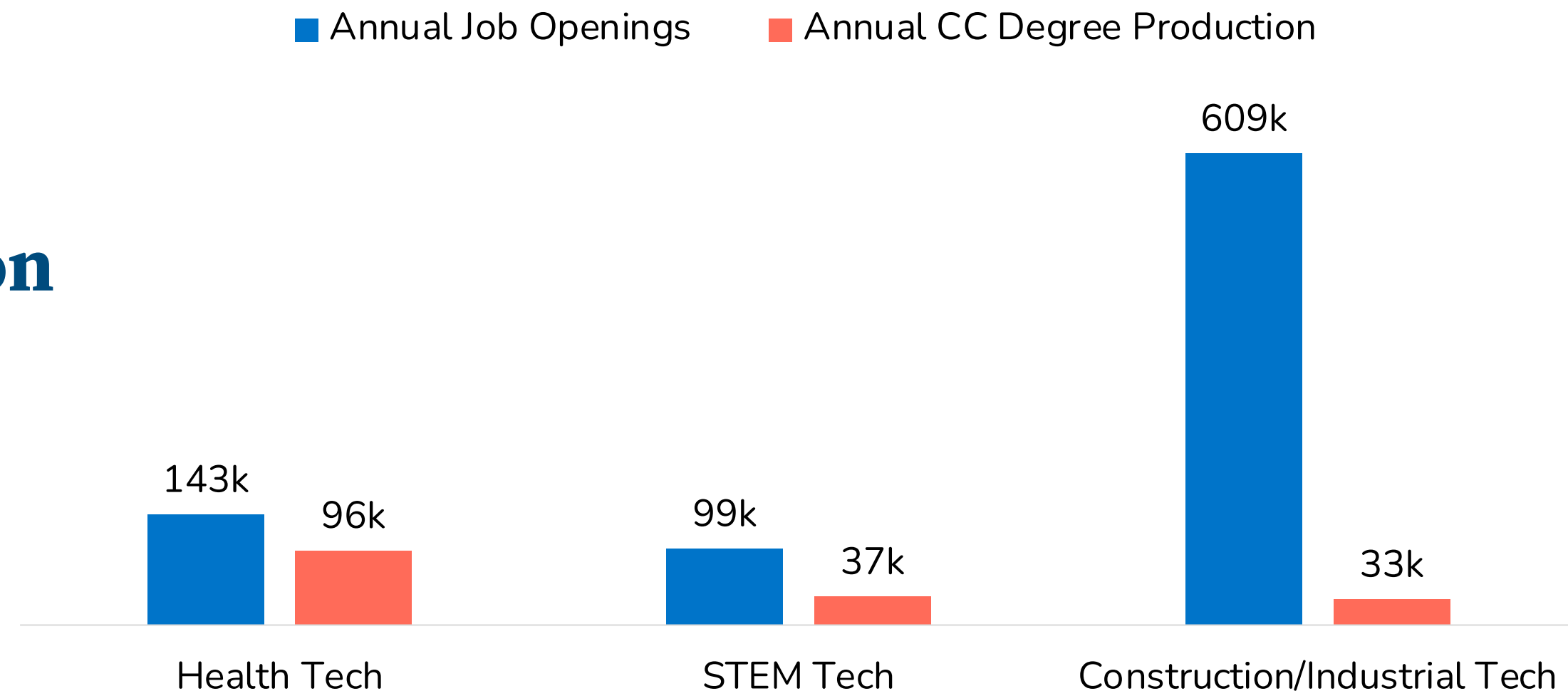
CC Transfer Associate Degrees	Bachelor's Degrees, Public Four-Years
59%	3%

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**.

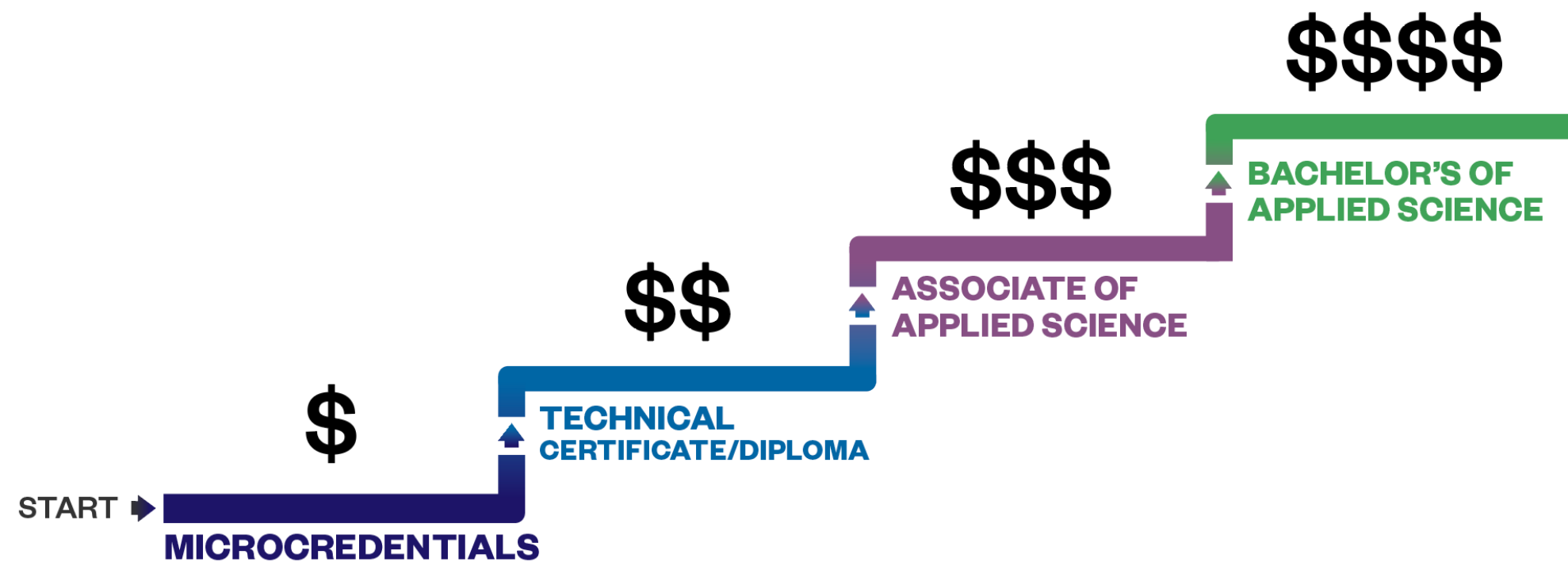
Projected Middle-Skill Job Openings in Technology Fields 2021-31 compared to Community College Workforce Degrees in Technology Fields 2022-23



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.

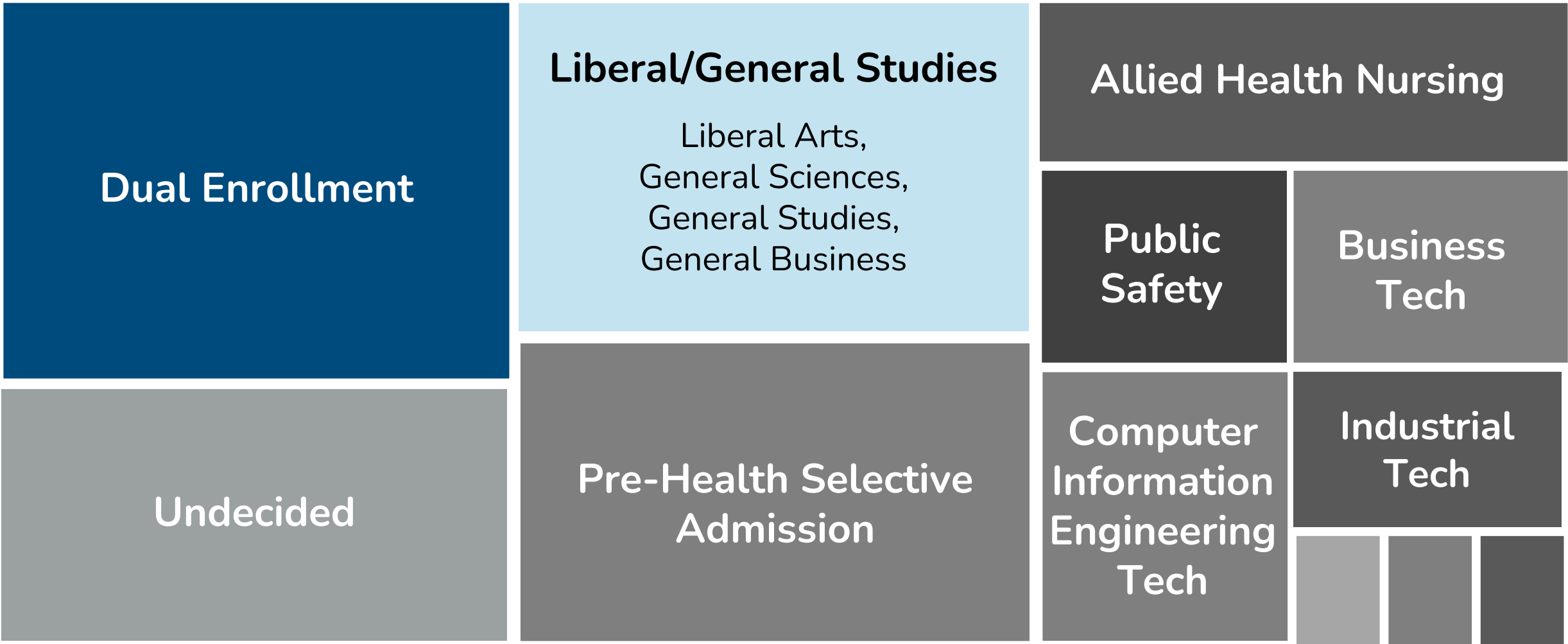
Most workers who stack in high-wage fields **already have experience in the field and degrees.**

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.**

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?

Guide to Assessing Post-Completion Value of Community College Programs

Scan here to access the guide and tools



<http://as.pn/UO>

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Classifying Community College Programs by Post-Completion Success in Transfer and Workforce

August 2024

Monitoring Equity in Enrollment of High-Value Workforce and Transfer Programs Data Tool

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This data tool is designed to help colleges start to examine data on student program enrollments around three primary questions:

1. What programs are students currently enrolled in, generally (Tab 1), and by program area, academic division that oversees the given program (Tab 2)?

2. How many students are enrolled in programs that lead to high post-completion value in terms of employment and/or transfer (i.e., that enable graduates to secure jobs that pay at least a living wage) and/or transfer with no excess credits to a bachelor's degree program in the student's major field of study (i.e., transfer with no excess credits to a bachelor's degree program in the student's major field of study)? What is the distribution of enrollments in programs by their post-completion value for employment and/or transfer (Tabs 3 and 3a)?

3. Which students are enrolled in which programs, and what do those enrollment patterns reveal about student success in enrollment and completion in higher- and lower-value programs for students of different backgrounds (Tabs 4a to 4d)?

How to Use This Data Tool

This data tool allows you to categorize program enrollments into broad subject areas (program categories based on what opportunities they lead to immediately after graduation) and, separately, workforce/transfer program post-completion (program categories based on what opportunities they lead to immediately after graduation). See the *Workforce/Transfer Categories* tab for descriptions and definitions.

The *Instructions* tab provides details on how to create your data file and incorporate it into the data tool, as well as troubleshooting tips.

The red *Data* tab is where you will enter your institution's data. This tab comes pre-populated with fictionalized data for illustration purposes. To use the data tool, replace the fictionalized data with a similar list of student program enrollments at your college. Please follow the instructions on this tab to ensure the data tool works properly.

Note: Knowledge of working with Excel pivot tables is recommended for using this tool, especially if you are going to customize it. Aspen/CCRC will not be providing technical support for tool-related issues.

Overview

Instructions

Workforce-Transfer Categories

Data

1_Program Treemap

2_Program Area Treemap

Classifying Community College Programs by Post-Completion Success in Transfer and Workforce

INQUIRY GUIDE: PROGRAM ENROLLMENT TOOL

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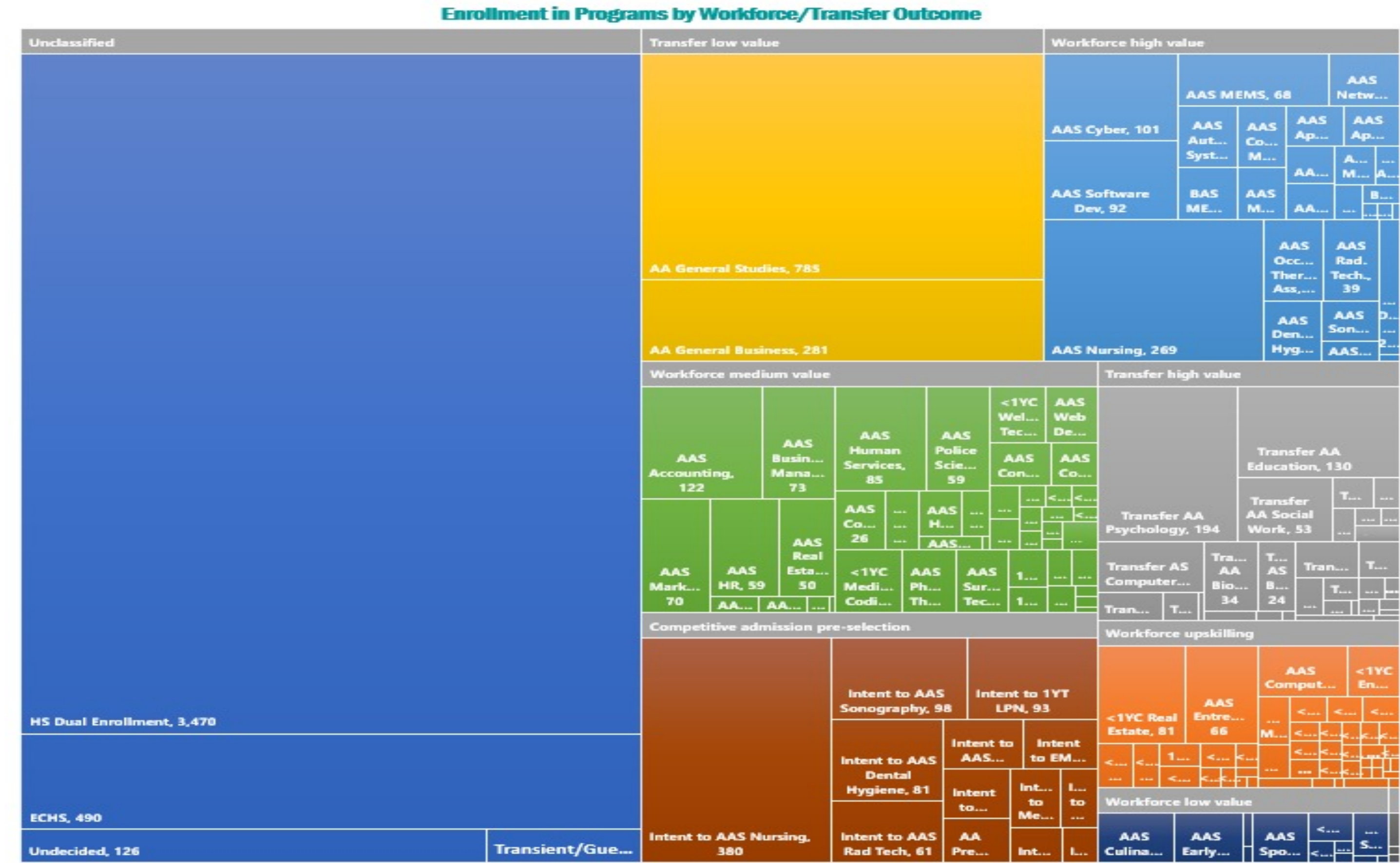
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Classifying Programs: Set a Living Wage Standard and Examine Transfer Outcomes

1. What programs are our students enrolled in? What programs are our students completing?
2. Among programs aligned directly to the workforce, what jobs do they lead to? Which pay a living wage, and which do not?
3. Among programs intended to lead students into a bachelor's program, which enable students to transfer in their major field of interest with no excess credits? Which lead to higher levels of bachelor's attainment?
4. Among programs that lead to bachelor's degrees, what is the transfer rate to four-year universities in each program? Among those students that transfer, what is the bachelor's attainment rate in each program?
5. Are specific groups of students underrepresented in high-value programs or overrepresented in low-value programs relative to the college's student body and the community it serves?
6. Where are there opportunities to expand access and success in programs with high value for employment and transfer for students from underrepresented groups?

Classifying Programs: How Our Tool Works



Unlocking Opportunity: Network Goals & Strategies

Josh Wyner, Founder and Executive Director,
Aspen Institute College Excellence Program



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

Strengthen workforce programs

- 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 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

Panel Discussion

Leigh Goodson, President, Tulsa Community College

Davis Jenkins, Senior Research Scholar, Community College Research Center

Josh Wyner, Founder and Executive Director, Aspen Institute College Excellence Program

The Next Phase of Unlocking Opportunity

Josh Wyner, Founder and Executive Director,
Aspen Institute College Excellence Program

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Access the application
to join the network



<http://as.pn/UOapp>

Watch the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence Ceremony

Register to watch the ceremony live on April 17



<http://as.pn/Prize25V>

Thank You



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