

RESEARCH REPORT

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OPPORTUNITY GRANT AND I-BEST PROGRAMS: ENROLLMENT AND OUTCOMES

The Opportunity Grant (OG) program is the Washington community and technical college system's dedicated financial aid program designed to help low-income students enroll in and complete programs leading to high-wage, high-demand careers. Funding for OG began with pilot colleges in 2006 and was expanded in 2007 to serve students in all colleges in the system. Career pathways eligible for enrollment using Opportunity Grant funds are those that provide a minimum beginning wage of \$13 per hour/\$15 in King County.

Washington's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) program is a nationally recognized model for students pursuing professional-technical programs. It integrates literacy, work, and college-readiness skills so students can move through school and into living wage jobs as efficiently as possible. It utilizes a team-teaching approach that combines job training and basic skill instruction in math, English and reading so students get the help they need while training for the career they want. Like OG, programs approved under the I-BEST model must lead to high wage jobs of \$13 per hour /\$15 in King County.

The primary goal of both the OG and I-BEST programs is to support students as they enroll in and efficiently and cost-effectively progress through programs leading to living wage jobs. Low-income, historically underserved students of color, and students with low academic readiness are the target populations to benefit from the programs.

The following report is an evaluation of enrollments, demographics trends, completions, and employment outcomes for students participating in the OG, I-BEST, and both programs to answer the following questions:

- What are the enrollment trends for students in each program, and how many participate in both?
- Who is accessing the programs? What are the demographics of students in each program and those who participate in both?
- What programs of study are students in each program enrolling in? What are the demographic trends in each program of study?
- What types of credentials do students who participate in the programs complete?
- What are students earning after they participate in the programs? Is there a difference by program of study and type of credential?
- Is there is a difference in earnings for students before enrollment in college and after they leave, with or without a credential?

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Key Findings

- Opportunity Grant (OG) has the larger program enrollment (3,925 in 2016-17), but enrollment has declined approximately 11 percent over the past five years. Enrollment in I-BEST (3,828 in 2016-17) has increased significantly over the past five years (39 percent). The number of students who participate in both OG and I-BEST is only a few hundred each year and has declined over time.
- Students who participate in OG are primarily female (two-thirds) and the most common age range is 20-29 (39 percent of all enrollments). I-BEST is 54 percent female and also 39 percent aged 20-29. I-BEST students are more likely to be in the lowest age category (under 20, 11 percent) than OG (4 percent). Students who participate in both programs are 60 percent female and slightly more likely to be older than OG or I-BEST alone.
- Forty-four (44) percent of students in OG are historically underserved students of color (HU-SOC) (African American, Hispanic, Native American, or Pacific Islander). This number has increased 5 percent in the past five years. HU-SOC represent 38 percent of students enrolled in I-BEST while 48 percent of HU-SOC students participate in both programs. The primary population within HU-SOC is Hispanic in both programs (20 percent in OG and 18 percent in I-BEST).
- Students in OG and I-BEST participate in a variety of programs that meet the goal of leading to a living wage job. The most common program of study for OG is business management, followed by health services, and nursing. Students in I-BEST are also most likely to enroll in business management, but early childhood education training, and manufacturing are the next most common.
- The pattern of demographics for program of study tends to follow the traditional career paths by gender. Females make up the majority of all enrollments, but in some fields (such as architecture, agriculture, information technology, and manufacturing) male students make up a greater proportion of students. Very few males are enrolled in the education field.
- HU-SOC make up 44 percent of OG and 37 percent of I-BEST enrollments and are generally represented across the programs of study. Examples where this group has lower representation compared to the average include health technology, information technology, manufacturing, and marketing. One clear pattern in I-BEST is the overwhelming majority (65 percent) HU-SOC in agriculture, food, and natural sciences.
- Of the OG students who exit college in a given year, more than half leave with a credential. The majority of those credentials are degrees, primarily registered nursing and the Associate in Arts direct transfer agreement.
- For I-BEST students, just under half exit college in a given year with a credential, but that credential is most likely to be a less than one year certificate. The majority of I-BEST students who complete a degree earn the Associate in Arts direct transfer agreement, followed by early childhood education.
- Students who participate in both I-BEST and OG are the most likely to exit with a less than one year certificate. Nursing assistant and early childhood education make up the majority of certificates earned at this level.
- Students who exit college with a certificate or degree earn more than those who do not earn a credential. OG students who complete a degree earn \$18.27 an hour, a certificate \$15.15, and no credential \$14.06. Students see positive wage growth as compared to prior to their enrollment in both certificate completers (15 percent) and degree (31 percent).
- I-BEST students who complete degrees earn \$16.88 an hour, certificate completers earn \$14.23, and those who exit without a credential \$12.49. Similar to OG students, I-BEST completers see wage gains when compared to before their enrollment: 15 percent for certificates and 34 percent for degrees.
- Overall, students participating in Opportunity Grant and I-BEST who complete credentials move on to employment which exceeds the wage goals of the program. The highest wages come from health care programs at both the certificate and degree levels. The programs with the lowest wages for graduates include early childhood education and other social science programs, as well as health care assistants such as nursing and medical assisting. The disparity in earnings between the lower and higher credential requirements in the health care fields reinforce the need for colleges to ensure a strong pathway is built from entry to high wage exit.

Enrollment and demographics

Figure 1 describes enrollments over the past five years in Opportunity Grant (OG), I-BEST, and those students who participate in both programs. OG has the largest enrollment, but participation has declined slightly over the years. During the same time period, I-BEST enrollment has risen to where, in 2017, there are nearly as many students in I-BEST as OG. The number of students who participate in both programs is comparatively rather small – a few hundred. That number has declined from 729 in 2013 to 594 in 2017.

Figure 1. 5-year enrollment in Opportunity Grant, I-BEST, and both programs

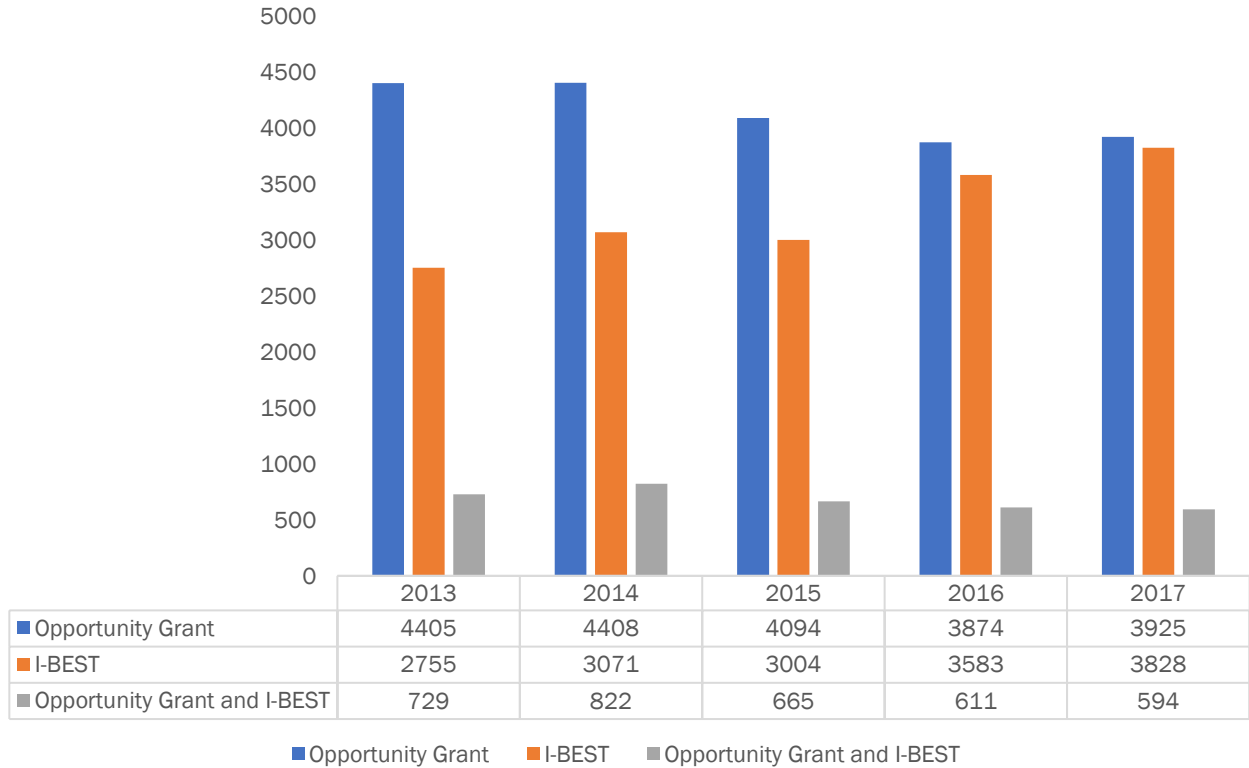


Table 1 displays the demographic breakdown by gender, age, and race/ethnicity for students in each of the programs. The percentage of students in OG is two-thirds female, while I-BEST is closer to 50 percent female. Very few students under the age of 20 participate in OG while those youngest students represent 11 percent of I-BEST enrollment. The distribution of 20-29 year-olds is the same in OG as I-BEST (39 percent), with a slightly lower percent participating in both programs (37 percent). There are more students aged 30-39 participating in OG (31 percent) and in both programs (32 percent) than in I-BEST (24 percent). Students aged 40 and above make up about a quarter of all students in each of the programs.

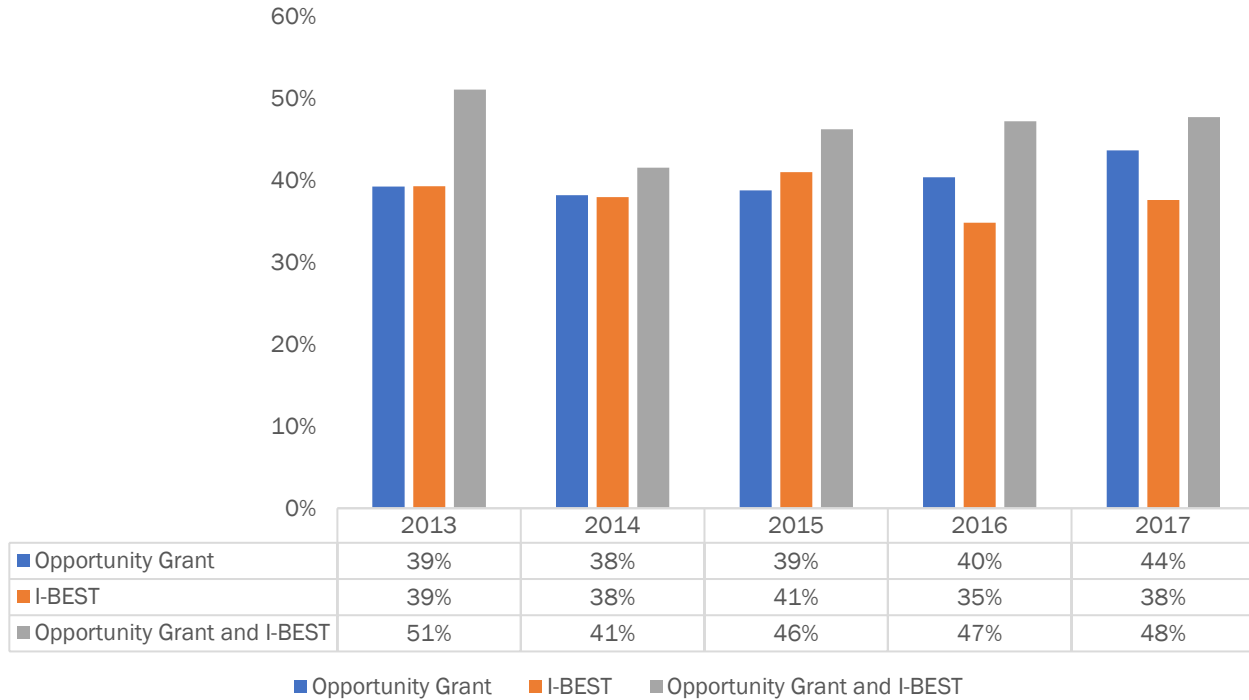
Table 1. 2016-17 distribution of enrollment by demographic in Opportunity Grant, I-BEST, and both programs

Demographic	Opportunity Grant	I-BEST	Both programs
Male	34%	45%	40%
Female	65%	54%	60%
Under 20	4%	11%	5%
20-29	39%	39%	37%
30-39	31%	24%	32%
40 or above	25%	25%	26%

Figure 2 shows the distribution of historically underserved students of color (HU-SOC) (defined as African American, Native American, Hispanic, and Pacific Islander) enrolling in each of the programs over time. Students enrolling in both OG and I-BEST are by far the most diverse, with over 50 percent HU-SOC in 2013. This number dropped slightly to 48 percent in 2017. The overwhelming majority of this group is Hispanic at approximately 22 percent in 2017. Hispanic is

also the primary group enrolling in I-BEST (20 percent) and OG (18 percent). Diversity has not increased as a whole in the I-BEST program over the five-year time period, but has gone up by 5 percent in OG. Enrollment among students identifying as Hispanic and Native American have both increased, while Pacific Islander and African American has remained constant.

Figure 2. 5-year enrollment of historically underserved students of color



Programs of study

This section describes the populations of students by demographic within the “career cluster” programs of study¹. The goal of this analysis is to assess which programs students participating in OG, I-BEST, and both programs most commonly enrolled in and if there are differences by demographics. Table 2 provides a summary of enrollments by program type in 2016-17 as a high level overview.

Students utilizing OG are most commonly enrolled in business management (19 percent of all enrollments), followed by health services, and nursing (separate from health services). Students in I-BEST programs are also most heavily enrolled in business management. Very close behind is education and training, and manufacturing. These individual program enrollments each represent about 16 percent of all enrollments (nearly 50 percent total), with health services and transportation both representing about 14 percent of all enrollments. Health services is the most common program for students participating in both OG and I-BEST, followed closely by business administration. For all three groups, very few students enroll in the arts, hospitality and tourism, and STEM areas.

¹ Career Clusters are the 16 standardized programs of study in the National Career Clusters Framework. The framework provides standard language and structure as an organizing tool for program planning and career mapping.

Table 2. 2016-17 distribution of enrollment by program of study and Opportunity Grant, I-BEST, and both programs

Program of Study	Opportunity Grant	I-BEST	Opportunity Grant and I-BEST
Agriculture, Food & Natural Resource	23	116	3
Architecture & Construction	160	157	29
Arts, Audio Visual & Communication	9	6	0
Business Management & Admin	737	617	106
Education & Training	400	615	78
Health Services	558	521	113
Health Tech	204	51	11
Hospitality & Tourism	16	10	2
Human Services	235	220	35
Info Tech	266	73	14
Law, Public Safety, Corrections & Security	79	48	3
Manufacturing	376	601	95
Marketing, Sales & Services	33	32	3
Nursing	524	178	17
Science, Tech, Engineering & Math	15	17	2
Transportation, Distribution & Logistics	290	510	83
Total	3925	3812	594

Figures 3, 4, and 5 further describe program of study enrollment by gender and historically underserved students of color (HU-SOC). Programs with less than 20 enrollments are removed because the percentage breakdowns can be skewed by small numbers and do not include records where gender or race is unknown. The blue line on each graph represents the average for female students and the orange line represents the average for HU-SOC. The programs that show bar values above the line demonstrate a greater proportion of that group in the given program.

Figure 3 shows the distribution by program of study for students in the OG program. Overall enrollment is 66 percent female and 44 percent HU-SOC. Most of the programs show females with a higher than average representation. The exceptions are agriculture, architecture, information technology, manufacturing, and transportation. In the education field, only 23 out of 392 students are male. HU-SOC make up 44 percent of all enrollments for OG, and most programs approximately reflect the average. Programs where these students have significantly lower representation than the average include health tech, information technology, manufacturing, and marketing.

Figure 4 demonstrates the distribution by demographic for I-BEST program enrollment. Overall enrollment is 55 percent female and 37 percent HU-SOC. Female students show a similar pattern in I-BEST as in OG and are overrepresented in most areas with the same exceptions in the trades areas and information technology. HU-SOC are relatively even across I-BEST programs and not significantly underrepresented in any one area. They are much more likely to be enrolled in agriculture, food and natural resources (65 percent), as well as education and training (55 percent)². Finally, students enrolled in both OG and I-BEST are 61 percent female and 47 percent HU-SOC. The patterns are the same for where females are underrepresented and HU-SOC continue to be close to the average for most programs, with the exception of architecture and manufacturing.

² The next section of this report will further study employment outcomes in these areas. It is important to determine if program enrollment for these students groups is yielding the high wage outcomes, which is the goal of the programs.

Figure 3. Opportunity Grant distribution of program enrollments by gender and race/ethnicity

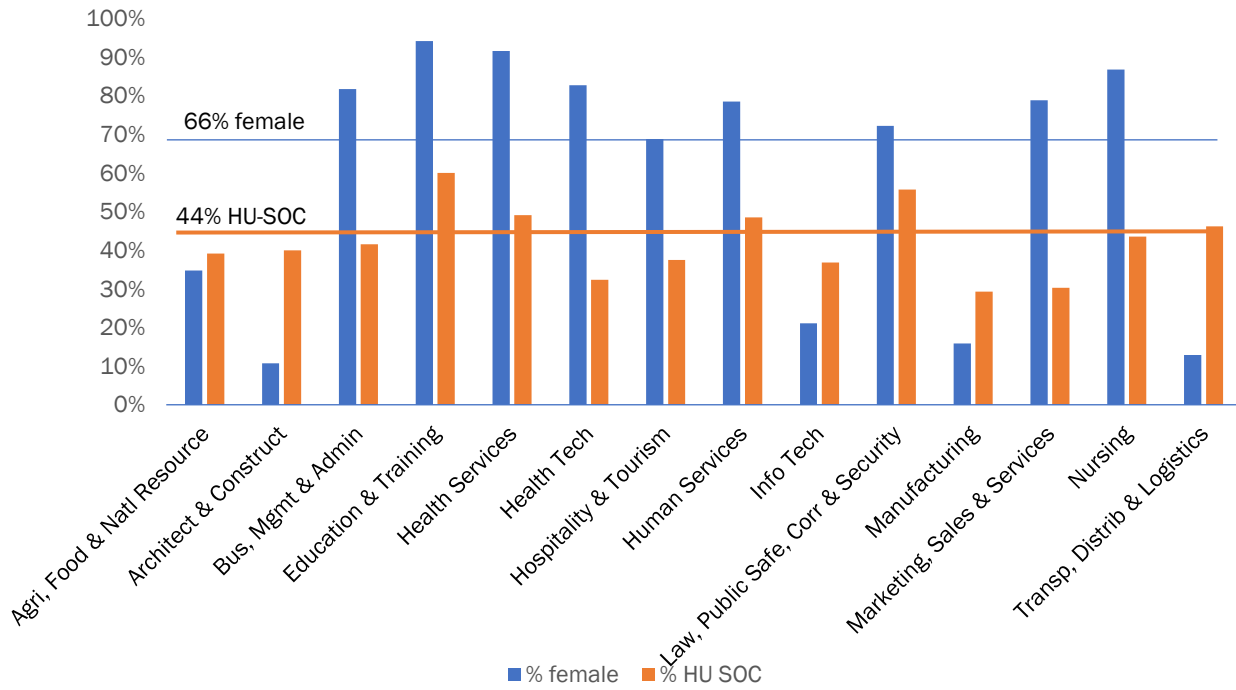


Figure 4. I-BEST distribution of program enrollments by gender and race/ethnicity

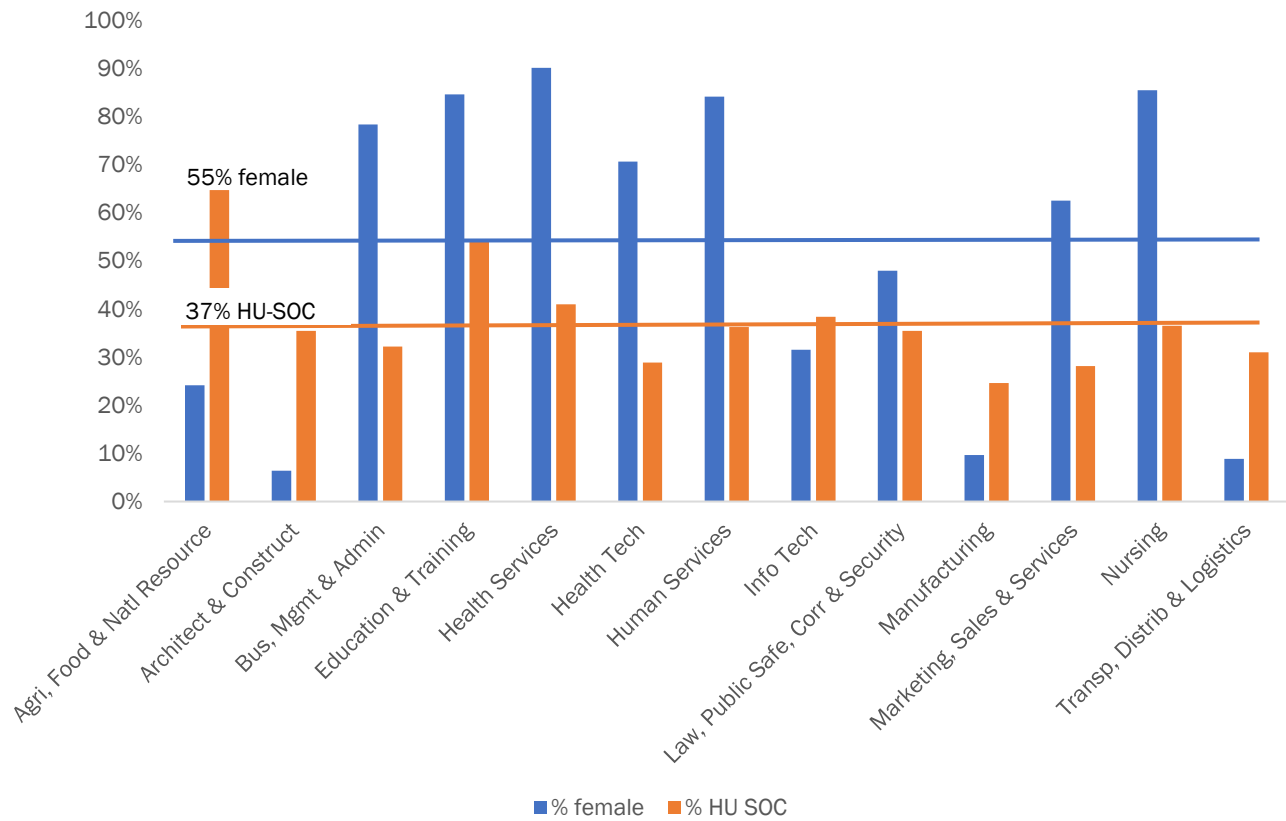
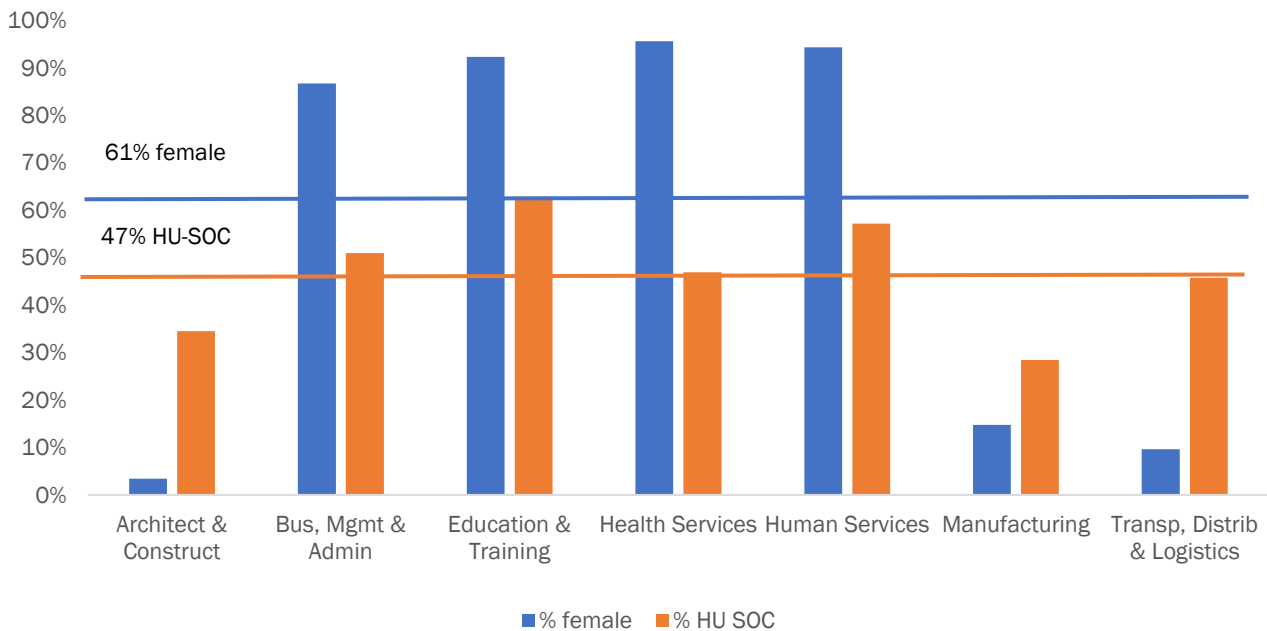


Figure 5. Opportunity Grant and I-BEST distribution of program enrollments by gender and race/ethnicity



Credential completions and employment outcomes

This section describes completions and employment outcomes for students who exited college in the 2015-16 academic year. This population does not include every student who completed a credential or participated in the OG or I-BEST programs in that year. Limiting this analysis to that year’s exiters provides a clear snapshot in which to measure outcomes. The group of exiters for analysis are categorized as participants in OG or I-BEST if they were coded within either program at any time within the previous eight years.

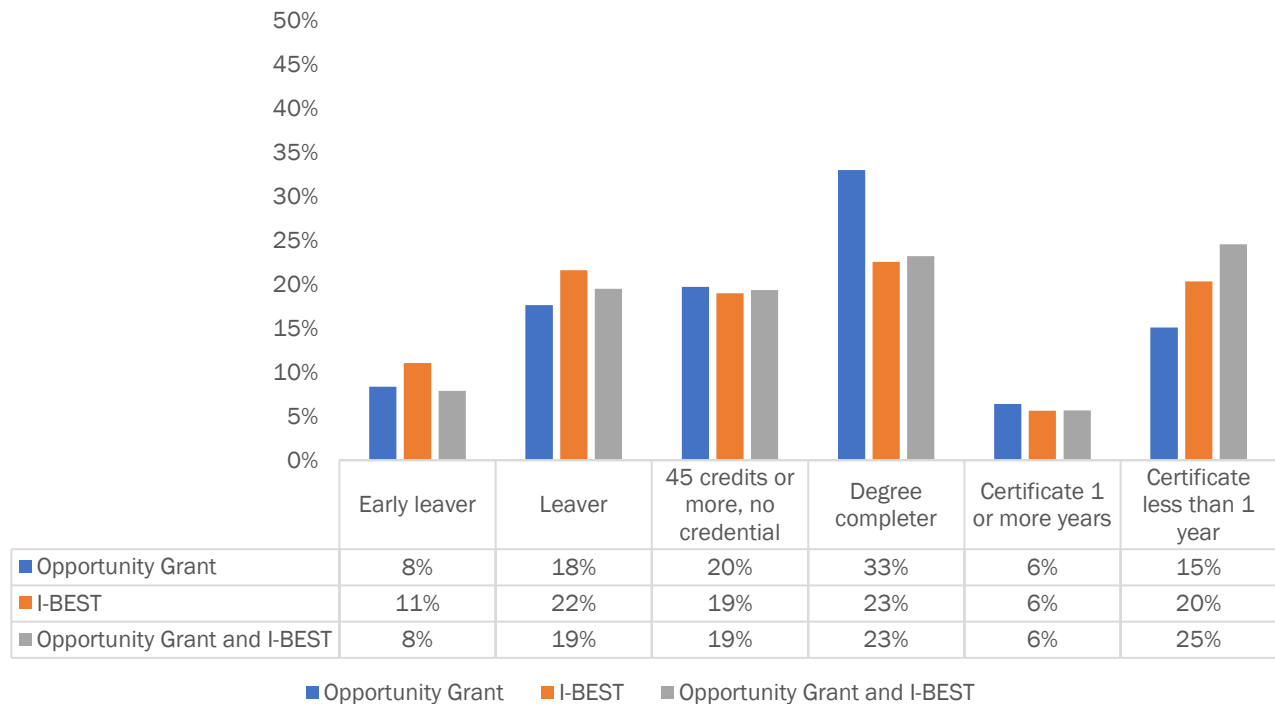
Completions

In an exiting cohort, each student is given a “status” at the benchmark point of three quarters after leaving the system. This benchmark is used to describe if students exited with or without a credential and, if a credential was earned, the type earned. The definitions are as follows:

- Early leaver: less than 10 credits earned and no credential
- Leaver: more than 10 and less than 45 credits and no credential
- Leaver with year or more of college: 45 or more credits and no credential
- Degree completer: associate degree
- Long certificate: one or more year certificate
- Short certificate: less than one year certificate

Figure 6 describes the distribution of exit status for each of the groups of OG, I-BEST, and both students. Of students who were in OG, more than half exited college with a credential, the majority with a degree. Another 20 percent left with more than a year of college credits. For students in I-BEST, just under half exited with a credential, but the majority were short certificates. For students who participated in both programs, more than 50 percent exited with a credential, and similar to I-BEST alone, the most common award was a short certificate. I-BEST students have the highest rate of leaving without a credential at about one-third of all exiters.

Figure 6. Credit and credential status of students exiting the colleges



The types of programs students complete vary depending whether the goal is a degree or certificate, and between OG and I-BEST. For OG, the most common degree program completed is registered nursing, following by the general Associate in Arts degree. These two programs comprise more than a third of all degrees. For I-BEST, the most common degree by far is the Associate in Arts at 20 percent of all degrees, following by early childhood education at 9 percent. Students who participated in both OG and I-BEST are most likely to complete the Associate in Arts degree (15 percent) and an additional 22 percent complete early childhood or medical assisting.

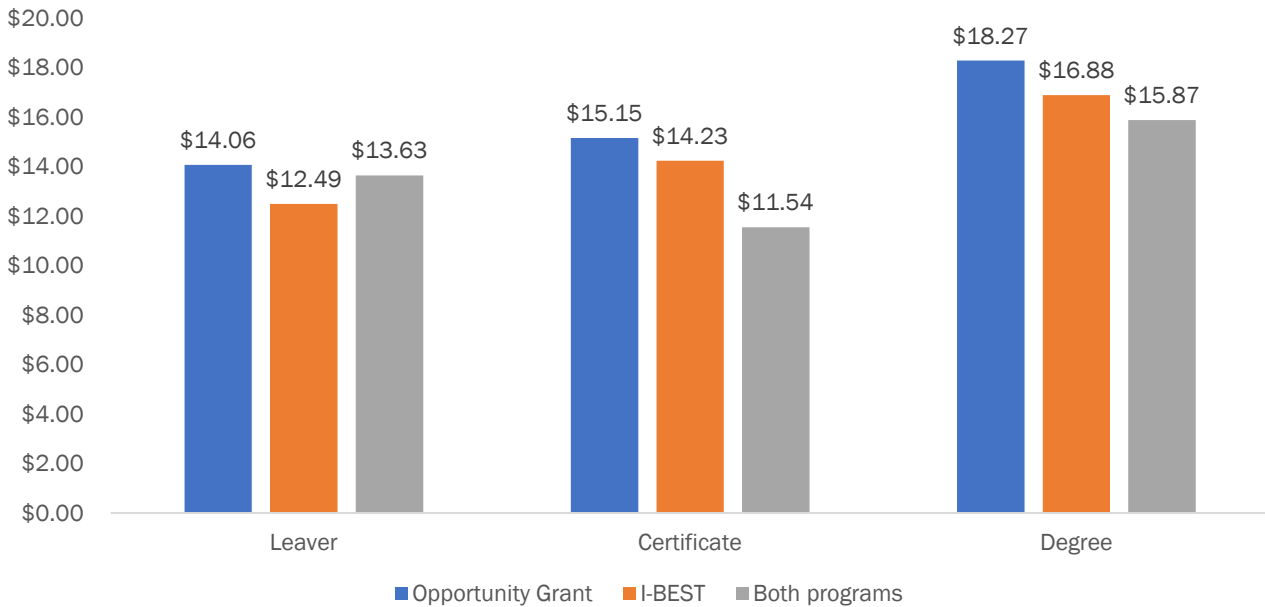
Certificates show a different pattern for program type than degrees. Certificates also show a different pattern across OG and I-BEST. In OG, nursing assistant is the most common (15 percent), early childhood education next (13 percent), followed by medical assistant (7 percent). For I-BEST, early childhood education is the most common with nursing assistant second. These two programs make up a larger proportion of all certificates than for OG students (23 and 20 percent, respectively). Following the early childhood education and nursing assistant programs are more certificates in auto mechanics and manufacturing, but they are less common. The certificate pattern is not as different for students participating in both programs, with nursing assistant and early childhood making up about 43 percent of all of these credentials.

Employment

As mentioned previously, the focus of both OG and I-BEST are only programs that result in high wage job fields. This section evaluates the wages for students participating in OG, I-BEST and both programs at the third quarter after exit. Additionally, we compare those wages to those earned after exiting the college for students who had an employment record three quarters prior to enrolling. All wage data is set to a baseline of 2009 (for comparison across years) and then adjusted to the inflation rate for the first quarter of 2017. Data is broken down by students who exited, credential completers, and by program to highlight the program areas that seem to be doing the best at meeting the OG and I-BEST goal.

Figure 7 provides the group’s median wages three quarters after exit. The data show progressively higher wages as level of education increases. Students in the OG program show higher wages overall in each of the exit status categories than students enrolled in I-BEST. For degree and certificate completers in both programs, the aggregate median wages exceed the programs’ target of \$13/hour. The only exception is the small group of students who participate in both programs and earn certificates. Their wages are \$11.54 an hour.

Figure 7. Median wages by Opportunity Grant and I-BEST by exit status



The next set of data evaluates the change in wages from before enrollment to after enrollment for students who had an employment record in both time periods. This analysis is limited to just certificate and degree completers to best evaluate the possible effect of the OG or I-BEST-supported credential. Students who participated in both programs are also excluded due to a low number who had both pre- and post- wages. Table 3 demonstrates positive wage gains for students in both programs and at both the certificate and degree levels. Students completing certificates saw an increase of approximately 15 percent regardless of whether they were enrolled in OG or I-BEST. Students completing degrees had higher wages to begin with than those earning certificates, but they saw an even greater increase in wages three quarters following the program (31 percent for OG and 34 percent for I-BEST). These data demonstrate strong positive outcomes coming from the programs supported through OG and I-BEST.

Table 3. Pre- and post- program enrollment median wages by Opportunity Grant and I-BEST graduates

	Certificate completers			Degree completers		
	Number	Pre wages	Post wages	Number	Pre wages	Post wages
Opportunity Grant	331	\$13.79	\$15.81	414	\$14.28	\$18.66
I-BEST	327	\$13.14	\$14.99	226	\$13.08	\$17.49

The last set of data is an overall wage comparison for students regardless of OG or I-BEST broken down by credential and program type. The highest and lowest wages for certificate graduates is in Table 4 and the highest and lowest for degree graduates in Table 5. The goal of this review is to show which programs appear to result in the highest and lowest wages and at what level. This information should be helpful to colleges as they think about how best to guide students who participate in OG and I-BEST.

Table 4. Highest and lowest wage programs by certificate graduates from Opportunity Grant and I-BEST

Program	Number	Median wage
Licensed practical nurse	33	\$25
Truck and bus driver	50	\$19
Manufacturing tech	25	\$18
Pharmacy assistant	14	\$18
Dental assistant	29	\$17
Early childhood education	119	\$13
Corrections	14	\$13
Viticulture and enology	16	\$13
Nursing assistant	164	\$13
Office and clerical	27	\$12

Table 5. Highest and lowest wage programs by degree graduates from Opportunity Grant and I-BEST

Program	Number	Median wage
Registered nursing	199	\$32
Occupational therapy assistant	10	\$26
Surgical tech	16	\$24
Licensed practical nurse	34	\$24
Diesel mechanics	17	\$20
Early childhood education	60	\$14
Auto mechanics	38	\$14
Substance abuse/addiction	16	\$14
Medical administrative assistant	28	\$13
Mental/social health	13	\$12



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