



Proposed Study Questions: Opportunity Scholarship and Opportunity Expansion Programs

State of Washington Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee

April 2018

JLARC will evaluate two programs promoting college degrees for high-demand fields: Opportunity Scholarships and Opportunity Expansion

In 2011, the Legislature passed the Opportunity Scholarship Act (ESHB 2088). The Act was intended to mitigate tuition increases and meet market demands for skilled workers in high-demand fields. These fields include science, technology, engineering, math, and health care.



Opportunity Scholarships:

Serve low- and middle-income college students in high-demand fields (e.g., technology, health care).

Opportunity Expansion:

Fund new programs in high-demand fields at WA colleges and universities.

The Act:

- Created the Opportunity Scholarship and Opportunity Expansion programs.
- Established the Opportunity Scholarship Board to oversee the programs.
- Directed the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) to evaluate the programs.

Four study questions address program participation, funding, and outcomes

JLARC staff will address the following for the Opportunity Scholarship and Opportunity Expansion programs.

- 1) What was the approach used to select the students and institutions that received funds? How many received funds?
- 2) What were the sources and amounts of funding? How much has been spent on scholarships, expansion awards, program administration, or other costs?
- 3) How many students receiving scholarships or benefiting from expansion programs earned degrees in high-demand fields? What are their employment outcomes after graduation?
- 4) How much has the scholarship program reduced the cost of higher education for students, and how do costs compare to accepted measures of affordability?

Study team to deliver preliminary report in September 2019

Preliminary Report: September 2019

Proposed Final Report: December 2019

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Programs created after task force recommended public-private collaboration for higher education funding

In 2011, Governor Gregoire's Higher Education Funding Task Force issued a report that suggested public-private collaboration for higher education funding programs. The Legislature incorporated some of these ideas into the Opportunity Scholarship Act.

- The Opportunity Scholarship program is funded by a combination of private contributions and state match.
- The Opportunity Expansion program was previously funded through voluntary contributions from businesses that received a tax preference for high technology research and development. Until the preference expired in 2015, businesses could donate the amount of the credit to the Opportunity Expansion Program.

Opportunity Scholarships provided to students from low- and middle-income families who pursue certain undergraduate degrees

Eligible students must be Washington residents, meet eligibility criteria including family income limits, and be seeking a bachelor's degree in science, technology, engineering, math, or health care.

Students may receive annual scholarships for up to five years. The maximum total award amount is \$22,500. The program also offers services such as mentoring, career counseling, and professional development for students.

In 2018, the Legislature passed bills to expand the program (e.g., available to students seeking a professional or technical degree). Due to timing, the impact of this legislation cannot be evaluated in this study.

Opportunity Expansion funds awarded to colleges and universities

Colleges and universities can use Opportunity Expansion funds for new programs that offer undergraduate degrees in high-demand fields. Three institutions received awards in 2016.

Opportunity Scholarship board and program administrator oversee the programs

The Governor appoints the 11-member board of directors to oversee the Opportunity Scholarship and Expansion Programs. As set in statute, the board contracts with a private nonprofit program administrator to manage the programs. The board and program administrator provide an annual report to the Legislature that includes information such as applicant characteristics, scholarships awarded, and program funding.

JLARC Study Process

