



EAB

# Reckoning with Relevance

2024 State of the Sector

Strategic Advisory Services



# Education's Trusted Partner to Help Schools and Students Thrive



## Your Imperatives Determine Ours

### INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGY

#### Prepare Your Institution for the Future

Executive guidance rooted in research to support your strategic priorities

### MARKETING AND ENROLLMENT

#### Achieve Your Enrollment and Growth Goals

Tailored partnerships powered by a recruitment ecosystem with unrivaled reach to enroll your future classes

### STUDENT SUCCESS

#### Build a Student-Centric Campus

Technology trusted by 850 schools to retain, graduate, and empower more students

### DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

#### Advance DEI on Campus and in Your Community

Technology, research, and bold initiatives to strengthen your DEI strategy and eliminate equity gaps

### DATA AND ANALYTICS

#### Embrace Digital Transformation

Data and analytics solutions built for higher education to guide decisions and accelerate innovation

We partner with **2,500+** institutions to accelerate progress and enable lasting change.

**95%+** of our partners return to us year after year because of results we achieve, together.

# Joining You Today

## From our Research Advisory Services Expert Team



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### Connect with EAB

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# Whither Puppetry?

## Fate of Program Prompts Existential Angst on Higher Ed Relevance



The Chronicle of Higher Education.

- Bachelor of Fine Arts in Puppetry, West Virginia University
- 1 of 2 puppetry degree programs in US
- 3 students in major in 2021-22
- Included in WVU's approved cuts to 9% of majors

### The Case for Puppetry

"Universities are supposed to be places where esoteric disciplines persist—where students can pursue unusual passions and learn things that don't just prepare them for the work force but enrich their lives. Maybe even a place for fun. [...]"

"Though they're happy to point out employment opportunities, puppetry's supporters make a more-fundamental case for its **relevance** that has little to do with dollars and cents. "I immodestly believe that puppetry is the center point of virtually every human creative endeavor," said Bart Roccoberton Jr., who helms the University of Connecticut's puppetry program—likely the only other program in America to offer degrees."

*Emma Pettit, The Chronicle of Higher Education*

# Six Priorities Shaping Higher Ed Strategy

1 Public Perception of Higher Ed Value

2 Enrollment and Demographics

3 Sustainable Business Models

4 Student Readiness and Well-Being

5 Hybrid Campus

6 Artificial Intelligence



# Planning for Multiple Time Horizons, Stakeholders

## Key Questions for College and University Leaders by Timeframe

### Immediate Challenges

*Next 12 Months*

- What are the most pressing challenges facing our institution right now?
- What is the current impact on students, faculty, and staff?
- What difficult trade-offs do we need to make to enter next year in a stronger position?

### Long-Term Threats

*Next 5-10 Years*

- What will be the most impactful changes to higher ed this decade?
- What decisions do we have to make right now to best position ourselves for this new normal?
- What will competitive differentiation look like in an altered landscape?

## Relevant... for Whom?



Students



Parents



Faculty



Staff



Government

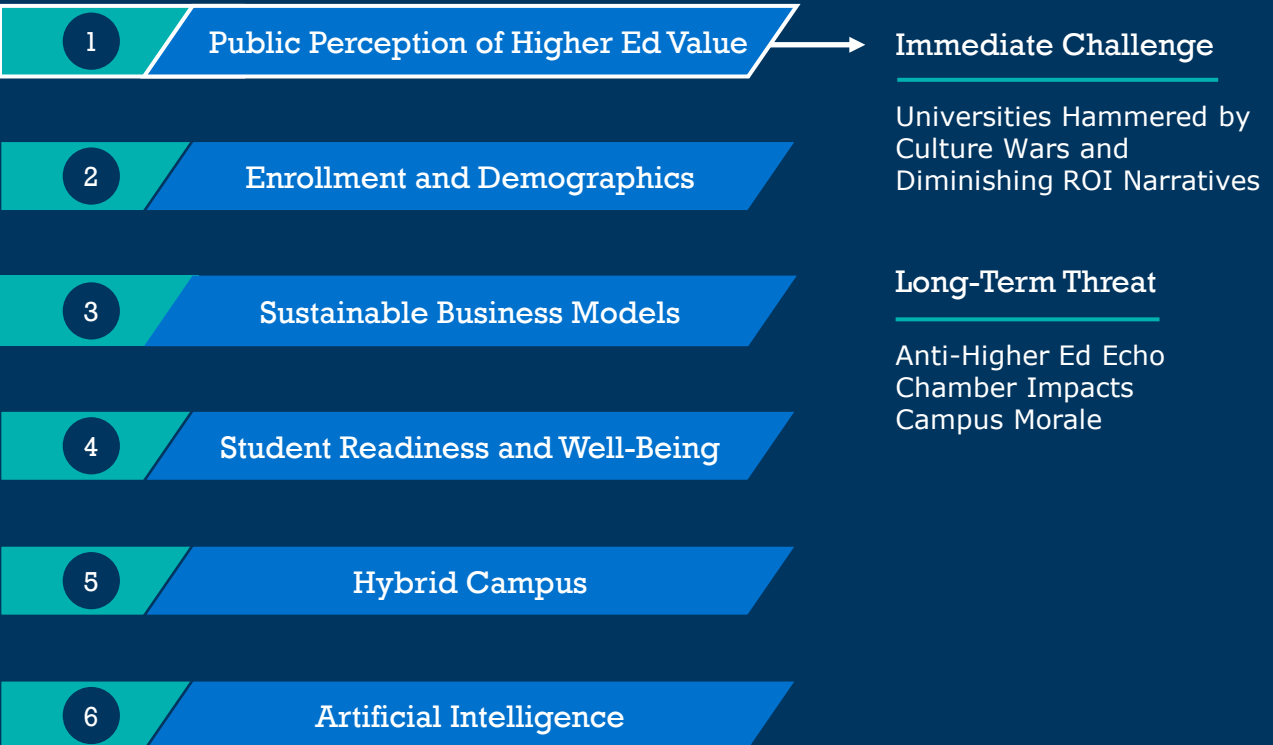


Community



Society

# Six Priorities Shaping Higher Ed Strategy



# Higher Ed Value Increasingly Called into Question

8

## Headlines Fuel Growing ROI Concerns

Why 50% of Gen Z students say they see less value in college

TIME

**How America Started to Fall Out of Love with College Degrees**

3 Ways Higher Education Can Flip the Script on Value

F

F

**Wake Up Higher Education. The Degree is on the Decline**

CNBC

College is still widely valued – although growing skeptical

FORTUNE

**Gen Zers don't see the point in getting a degree. Here's how to fix the ROI of college**

INE

Confidence in value of four-year degree

NBC

College grads earn 80% more – but only 51% of Americans see

INE

**Recapturing American higher education's lost promise**

F

"alarming" numbers of are rejecting college

EXAMINER

half of Americans see college degrees as waste of money

E

**Was your degree really worth it?**

E

Efforts to bridge the 'Diploma Divide'

Source: Burt, [University Business](#), June 7 2022; Anderson, [Time](#), April 3, 2023; Pulsipher, [Forbes](#), Jan. 10, 2023; Lederman, [Inside Higher Ed](#), April 3, 2023; Dickler, [CNBC](#), March 1, 2023; Marcus, [The Hechinger Report](#), Aug. 10, 2022; [The Economist](#), April 3, 2023; Kanno-Youngs, [The New York Times](#), May 15, 2023; Eisgruber, [The Washington Post](#), April 26, 2023; Rasmussen, [Fortune](#), Oct. 31, 2022; Busteded, [Forbes](#), Sep. 25, 2020; Hess, [CNBC](#), Dec. 20, 2019; Mintz, [Inside Higher Ed](#), July 27, 2023; EAB interviews and analysis.





# Caught Up in the Culture Wars

Expected to Solve World's Biggest Challenges...Despite Those Challenges

## International Enrolment Pushback

*Is Canada's Reputation in the International Student Marketplace in Jeopardy?, University Affairs*

## HE in the English-Speaking World in Decline

*Canada, US, Australia, or the UK: Your study-abroad paradise could turn out to be hellish - The Economic Times*

## EDI Skepticism Abound

*EDI Also Spells DIE, the Likely Result of Woke Medicine, Financial Post*



## R&D Growth, But with Strings Attached

*Canadians Have Lots of Reasons to be Skeptical about Increased Defence Spending, Carleton News*

## Israel-Palestine

*Canadian Universities Warn Protesters Against Erecting pro-Palestinian Encampments, UPI*

## Global Partnership Tensions

*Canada Tightens Security for University Research, Affecting Ties to China, Science Business*

# “Reports of My Demise are Greatly Exaggerated”



Sensationalist Headlines Don't Reflect Actual Value or Perception of Higher Ed

## Headline

## Reality

The cost of college has exploded



**Inflation-adjusted net cost has declined 2.6-4% [\[1\]](#) annually since AY19**, and only increased 1.5% annually from AY10 to AY19 [\[2\]](#)

Students are increasingly basing decisions on cost



**Low-cost options saw the greatest decline in enrollment** from 2019-21, with 2-years down 16% and 4-year regional institutions down 4% [\[3\]](#)

A college education equates to lifelong debt



**Most borrowers owe less than \$25k [\[4\]](#)**, and total student debt has declined by \$10.8B since 2017 [\[5\]](#)

The ROI of a college degree is declining



The **wage premium is at a near decades-long high**, with bachelor's degree holders earning 88% more than high school graduates [\[6\]](#)

Liberal arts degrees are a waste of money



While slower to start, liberal arts graduates typically experience **rapid wage growth** in their late 30s-40s – the fastest among any college major [\[7\]](#)

Only prestigious, selective colleges provide value



5 of the 10 top-ranked institutions based on earnings potential/economic mobility have **admit rates over 50%** [\[8\]](#)

Degree holders aren't any better off



College graduates report higher rates of **job satisfaction, financial well-being, and health** [\[9\]](#)

# “Reports of My Demise are Greatly Exaggerated”



## Sensationalist Headlines Don't Reflect Actual Value or Perception of Higher Ed

### Headline

Students and families only care about career outcomes



### Reality

Students aren't making decisions based on scorecard data [\[10\]](#), and the number of **students who made career appointments dropped 12%** from 2021-2023 [\[11\]](#)

Gen Z is more skeptical about the value of higher education



Only **54% of Gen Z believe there are well-paying jobs for HS grads**, compared to 63% of Millennials and 75% of Baby Boomers [\[12\]](#)

Perceptions of higher ed value are increasingly partisan



**Republicans are more likely than Democrats** (60% vs 50%) to agree that Americans can get an **affordable, high-quality college education** [\[13\]](#)

America doesn't trust universities anymore



Confidence in US institutions (incl. religion, banks, Congress) hit a record low (26%) in 2023, with **higher ed consistently ranked the 4<sup>th</sup> most trusted** [\[14\]](#)

Employers don't care about degrees anymore



**Job posts** in the Information sector not requiring a degree have **increased 240%** faster than those requiring one, yet **actual hiring** for these roles **is only 3%** faster [\[15\]](#)

The big move online has decreased the quality of education



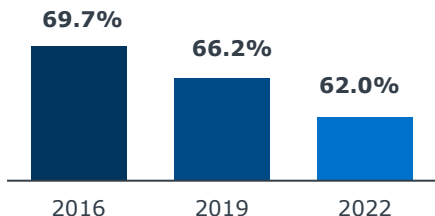
Only **29% of students feel fully online programs are worse than fully in-person programs** [\[16\]](#), and employers have an increasingly favorable view of online credentials [\[17\]](#)

# The Echo Chamber's Impact on Enrollment Decisions

## Despite Inaccuracies, Some Students Dissuaded by Negative Narratives

### Recent HS Grads Less Likely to Enroll

College-Going Rate of Recent High School Grads, Bureau of Labor Statistics



“

**I've always seen and heard things about how there's no point in going to college** [...] because you usually end up with more debt than you can make, and it rarely works out for a lot of people that want to go.”

21-year-old who did not attend college  
**EAB Non-Consumer Survey, 2023**

”

### Snapshot of Current Non-Consumers

**59%**

Male

**27%**

Hispanic

**60%**Living with  
parents or  
grandparents**\$9K**Difference in  
median household  
income between  
non-consumers and  
college-going peers**16%**Black/African  
American<sup>1</sup>**48%**White<sup>1</sup>**1 in 3**Unemployed  
or not looking  
for work<sup>2</sup>

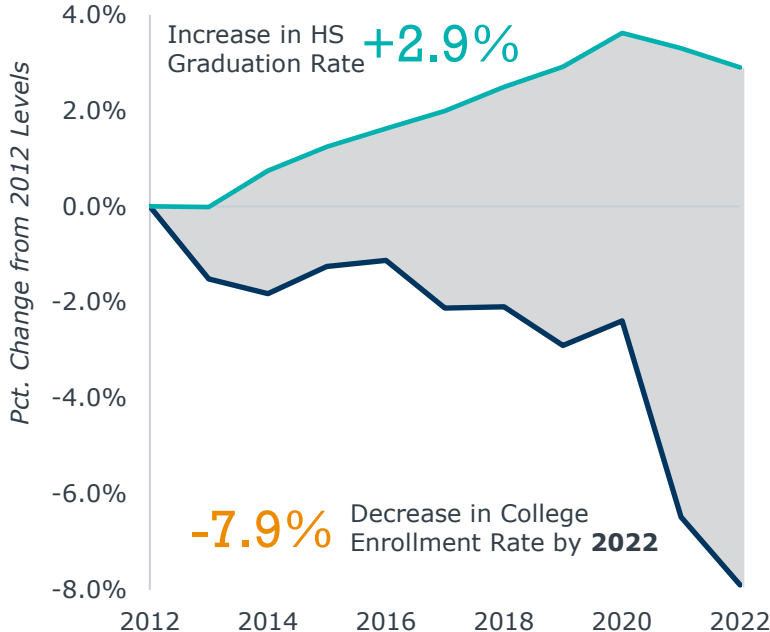
1) Non-Hispanic population.  
2) Excludes those not working due to disability

# Non-Consumption Comes to Higher Ed



## The Non-Consumer Undergraduate Market Getting Bigger Every Year

*Pct. Change in K-12 to College Pipeline (2012 to 2022)*



## Recent Data Suggests No Post-Pandemic Rebound

*Early Estimates For 2022-2023*

*WICHE<sup>1</sup> Estimates of High School Graduates*

**+37K** Increase in Number of HS Graduates

*EAB Estimates Using NSC and IPEDS data<sup>2</sup>*

**-99K** Decrease in First-Time Enrollments

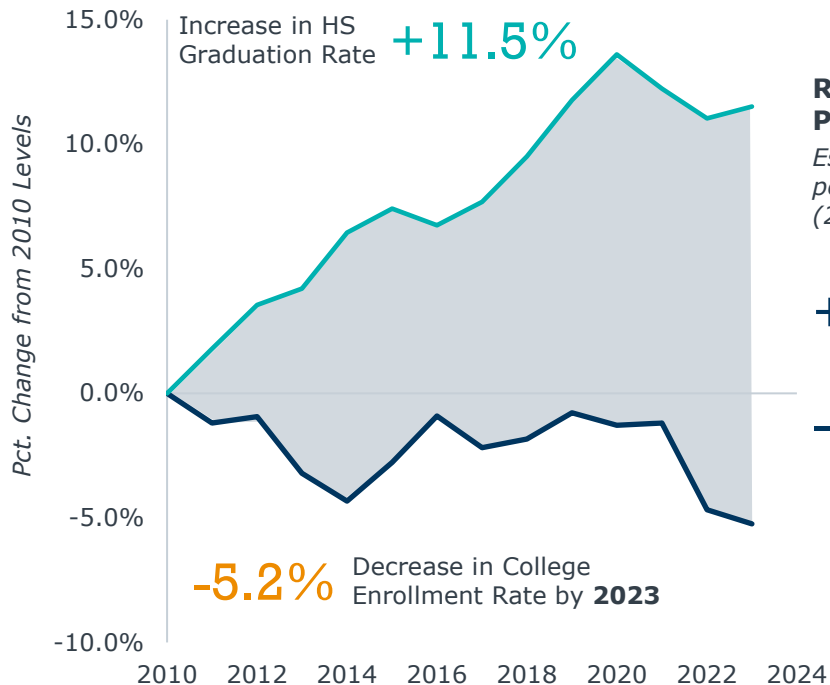
1) Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education  
2) National Student Clearinghouse 'Stay Informed' Enrollment Estimates and IPEDS First Time Enrollments

Source: EAB Analysis of American Community Survey Data; National Student Clearinghouse, *Stay Informed Enrollment Updates*, Oct. 26, 2023; WICHE Knocking at the College Door 10<sup>th</sup> Edition Data; EAB Interviews and Analysis.

# Non-Consumption Comes to HE

## The Non-Consumer Undergraduate Market Getting Bigger Every Year

Pct. Change in K-12 to College Pipeline: Canada (2010 to 2023)



### Recent Data Suggests No Post-Pandemic Rebound

*Est. change in 15-24 year olds population by ed. Attainment (2019 - 2023)*

**+101K** Increase in Number of HS Graduates

**-42K** Decrease in First-Time Enrollments

# Breaking Through the Noise

## Tailored Recruitment Strategies Needed to Appeal to On-the-Fence Students

### INDIANA COMMISSION *for* HIGHER EDUCATION

#### Value Campaign Findings

- ✓ A hard sell using data invites pushback – students react best to hearing how higher ed gives **more control over your future**
- ✓ Long-term benefits are too vague – immediate impacts viewed as more **credible, believable**
- ✓ Framing **costs as “manageable,”** rather than “affordable,” raised interest in aid, scholarship opportunities



### Use your institution's NSC report to identify non-consumer warm leads

- **3,500 students** that applied to UVU never enrolled elsewhere
- UVU launched campaign with targeted outreach and frequent messaging, resulting in **400 new enrollments**



### Pre-application scholarship guarantees increase enrollment

- UM grants HAIL Scholarship to low-income, high-achieving students in Michigan before students apply
- HAIL has **boosted enrollment at UM from 12% to 27%** among this population

“ **Higher ed isn't going to have a 'Got Milk' moment with some magical messaging that fixes everything.** We've got to start changing how we present ourselves to different groups to solve different problems.

President, Large Public University ”

Source: Beasor, Kuehr, “[Indiana's Education Value Movement](#),” SHEEO Policy Conference, Aug. 10, 2022; Dynarski et al., “[Closing the Gap: The Effect of Targeted Tuition-Free Promise on College Choices of High Achieving, Low-Income Students](#),” National Bureau of Economic Research, December 2018; EAB interviews and analysis.

# Reframing the PR Battle

Product Innovation, Community Partnership More Productive Endeavors

**Public trust is something to build locally, not nationally.**

*President Phillip Sisson  
Middlesex Community College*

**The eight most dangerous words in higher education are 'we've just got to tell our story better' because it implies that better comms are more important than actually doing better.**

*Alex Usher  
Higher Ed Strategy Associates*



- Future Scholars Program provides local low-income students and families with mentorship, campus visits, and college prep workshops
- 100% of program graduates have enrolled in post-secondary education
- Future Scholars model has been adopted by eight other universities so far



- Wichita State's collaboration with local aviation sector has resulted in new programs, research partnerships, and P3-funded mixed-use buildings
- All students have applied learning experiences with industry partners
- WSU ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> in Kansas for market share growth since 2010, and is one of the few KS institutions that grew enrollment over the pandemic





# Negative Press Piles On Engagement Woes

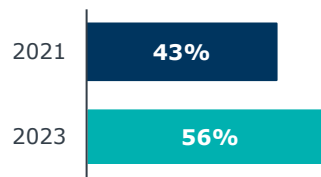


## 'Crisis of Meaning' Among Faculty and Staff

- Negative media attention
- Increased hostility from students
- Eroding trust between administration, faculty, and staff
- Increasing workloads
- Non-competitive compensation
- Rising student needs
- Inflexible work arrangements
- Caregiving responsibilities

## Disaffection for Higher Ed Showing up in Turnover, Burnout

*HE employees at least "somewhat" likely to seek work elsewhere in the next year<sup>1</sup>*



*4-year faculty feeling at least "somewhat...burned out because of work," Sep 2022 – May 2023<sup>2</sup>*



1) n=3,814.  
2) n=725.

## Key Takeaways

National narratives about higher ed's declining ROI, spiraling student costs, and link to lifelong debt **do not stand up to scrutiny.**

Nevertheless, repetition of these narratives, irrespective of how true or untrue they are, creates an "echo chamber" effect that is **dissuading on-the-fence students and families** and exacerbating higher ed non-consumption trends. Moreover, this echo chamber is impacting boards, local stakeholders, and our own employees.

Rather than attempting to "tell our story better," universities' time and energy is better spent **targeting messaging and product to critical student subsegments** as well as local education, industry, and government partners.

# How EAB Can Help You Address Challenges with **Public Perception of Higher Ed Value**

## Signature Service



### State of the Sector Presentation

Bring these insights to your campus. Equip your cabinet, board, or other stakeholders with a deeper understanding of the trends shaping higher education.

## More EAB Resources

### Immediately Available

- [Principled Differentiation and Student Value Proposition Workshops](#)
- [Employee Value Proposition Workshop](#)
- [Dynamic Strategy Resource Center](#)

### Forthcoming Resources

*Non-Consumption Research and Workshops*

- Understand the drivers of higher ed non-consumption
- Evaluate messaging strategy to counter negative narratives and reach those opting out

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## Immediate Challenge

Post-Vaccine Enrollments Stabilize But Still Show Signs of Weakness

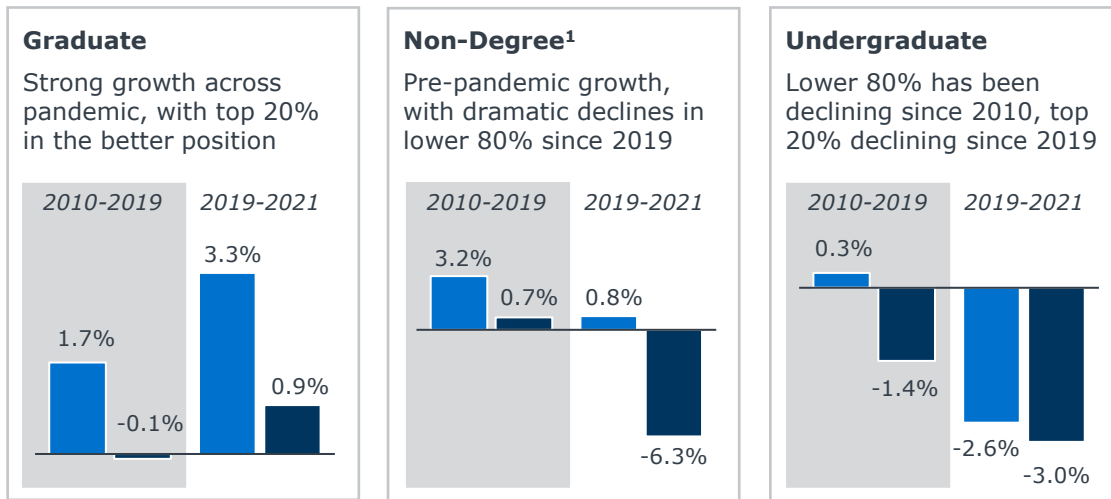
## Long-Term Threat

The Demographic Cliff "Levels Up" to Peak Population



# Where Are We Now? The Enrollment Macro-View

## Average annual percent change in enrollment, IPEDS 2010-2021



Top 20% of Market

Lower 80% of Market

*Top 20% and Lower 80% determined by top enrollment institutions in each category*

*Undergraduates account for **79%** of the \$203 billion in est. tuition revenue over AY21*

1) Undergraduate non-degree only.

# Summary of Key Enrollment Trends

- 1 Grad market grows through pandemic, expanding again in 2023.** Top of market in stronger position, with high-ranking institutions and low-cost online options experiencing largest gains. Grad certificate programs surge, growing 10% from 2021.
- 2 After persistent undergraduate declines, Fall 2023 brings potential optimism.** Most of the market shrunk 2010-2019, and nearly all institutions in decline since, with only highly selective institutions growing from 2019-2022. However, total undergrad grew in Fall 2023 for the first time since start of pandemic, with 60% of the growth attributable to community colleges.
- 3 Undergraduate non-degree enrollment grew pre-pandemic, proves volatile in 2020s.** The vast majority of institutions experienced sharp declines in lower-level non-degree enrollment this decade, even as interest in alternative credentials rose<sup>1</sup>.
- 4 Enrollment recovery strongest for youngest cohorts, variable for older cohorts.** Traditional-aged cohorts (<20) and older cohorts (30+) growing, as age groups 21-29 struggle, creating U-shaped recovery.
- 5 Large and selectives win out as efficient student sorting grows.** Students sort up through selectivity pyramid as institutions compete over smaller population.
- 6 Non-consumption on the rise.** College-going rates for high school grads have declined by ~8 percentage points since 2016, even as HS graduation rates improve.

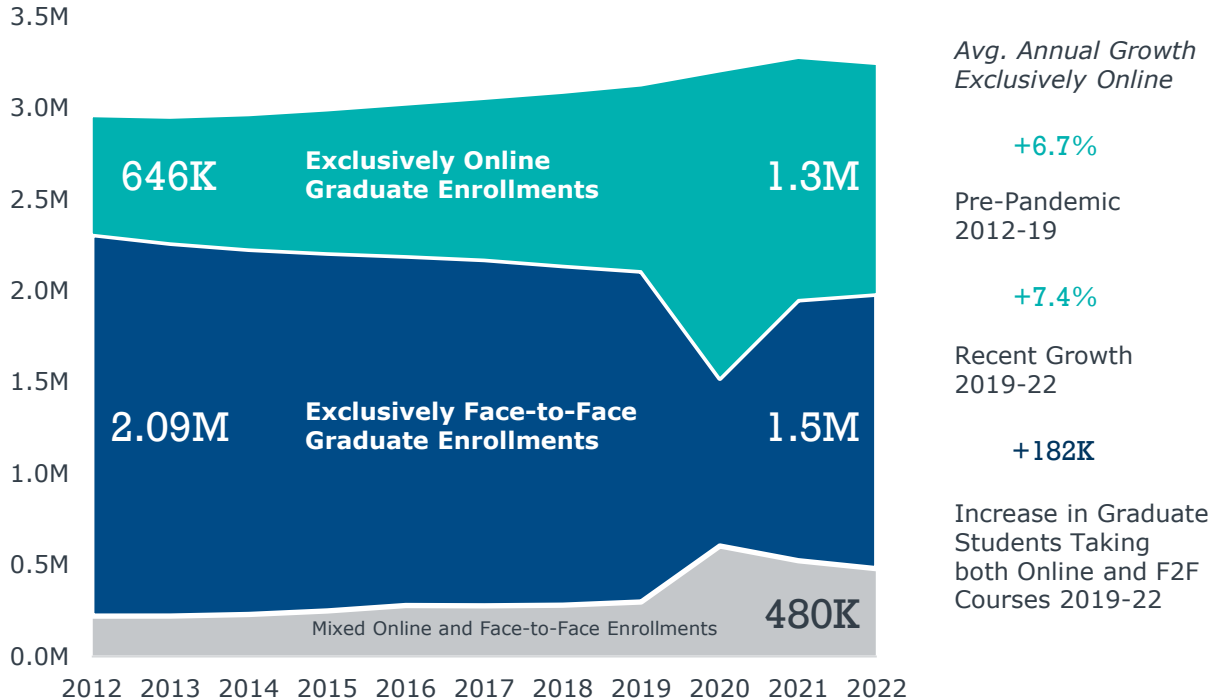
<sup>1</sup>) Undergraduate certificates grew through pandemic, but are counted as degree-seeking enrollments by IPEDS.

# No Post-Pandemic Online Paradigm Shift



## However, More Grad Students Now Enroll in a Mix of Online & F2F Courses

Graduate<sup>1</sup> Enrollments 2012-2022: Exclusively, Some, and No Online<sup>2</sup> Courses



1) Graduate students include both master's and doctoral students.

2) Recorded as 'Distance Education' in IPEDS data

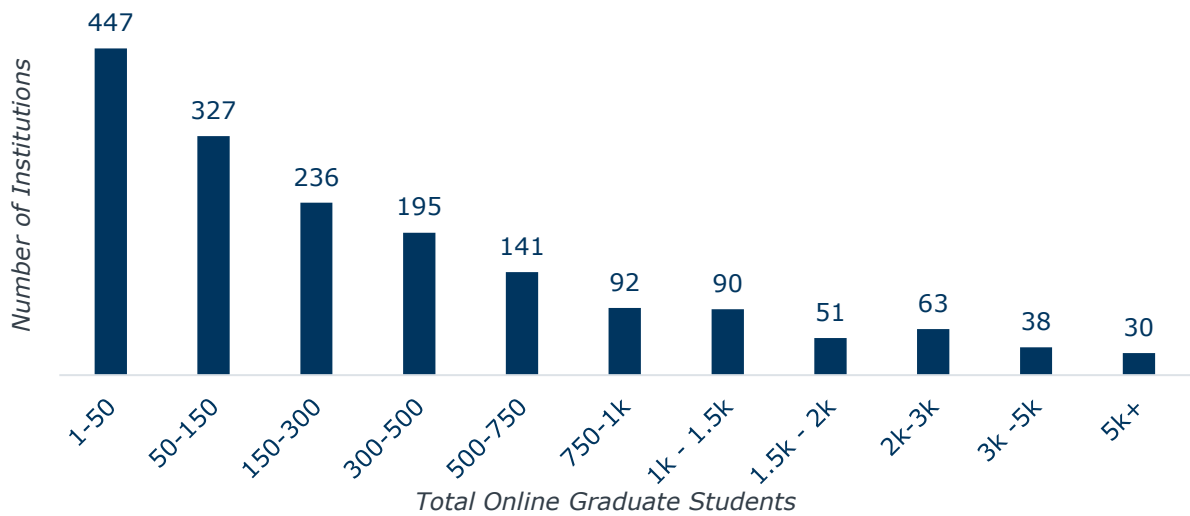
# Many Will Play—Few Will Get Big - 2022

Even after the Pandemic, Online Grad Enrollment Stays Small for Most Institutions by Total Exclusively Online<sup>1</sup> Graduate Enrollments, Fall 2022

**59%**  
Of institutions enrolled **fewer than 300 online graduate students**

**84%**  
Of institutions enrolled **fewer than 1,000 online graduate students**

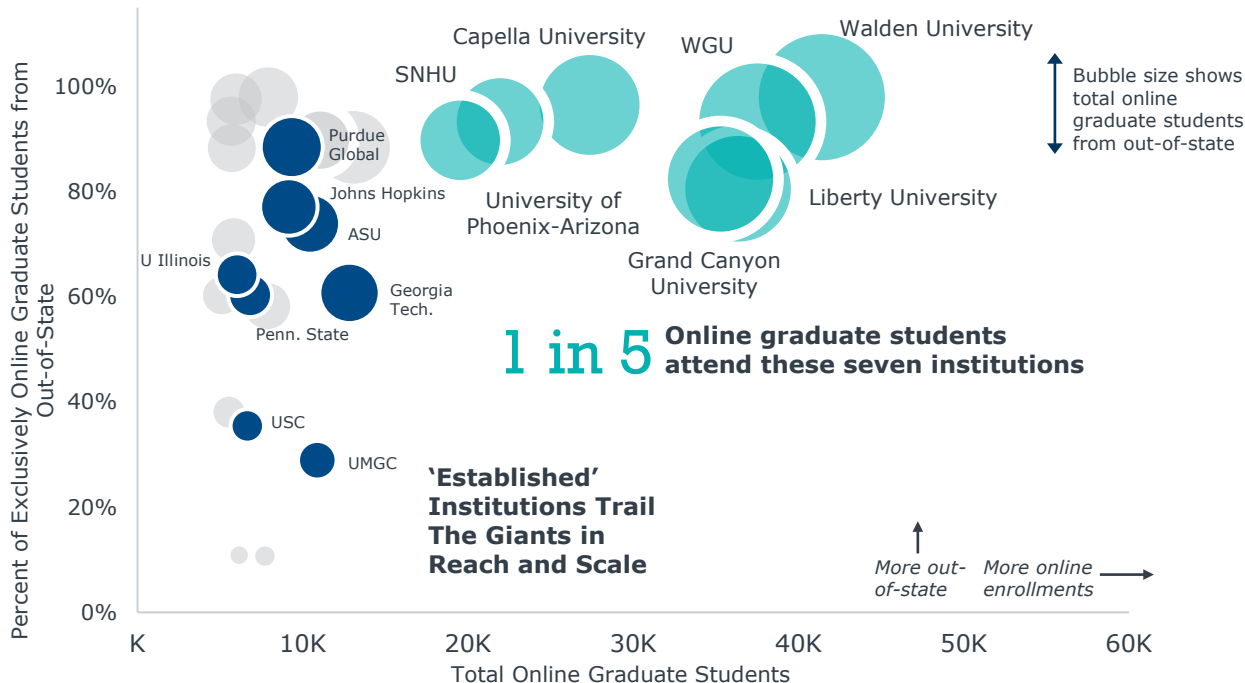
**1.8%**  
Of institutions enrolled **more than 5,000 online graduate students**



<sup>1</sup>) Recorded by IPEDS as exclusively distance enrollments.

# Then: A Few Giants Loom Over Online Grad Market

Institutions With More Than 5,000 Exclusively Online<sup>1</sup> Graduate Enrollments, Fall 2019  
 Total Exclusively Online Graduate Enrollments and Percent From Out-of-State



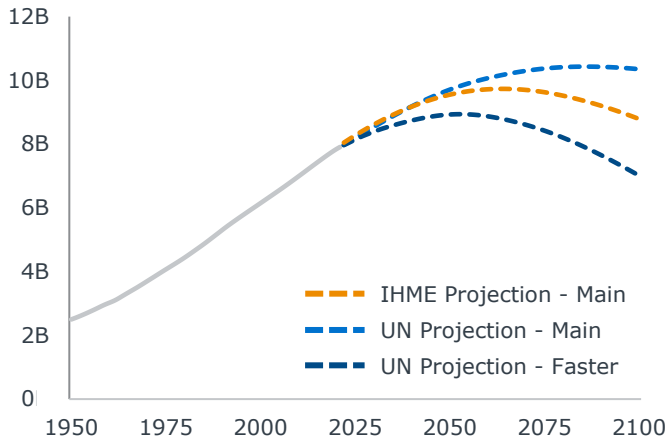
1) Recorded by IPEDS as exclusively distance enrollments.



# Population Decline Signals Global Transformation

## World Population Could Peak by 2055

*Global Population and Projections through 2100*



“ ”

Most of the world is transitioning into natural population decline. I think it's incredibly hard to think this through and recognize how big a thing it is; **it's extraordinary, we'll have to reorganize societies.**

*Christopher Murray, Director  
Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation*

## Some Countries Peaking Far Earlier



USA

**2060**

8% decline  
by 2100



Canada

**2080**

3% decline  
by 2100



China

**2022**

49% decline  
by 2100



India

**2046**

32% decline  
by 2100



Germany

**2035**

22% decline  
by 2100



Japan

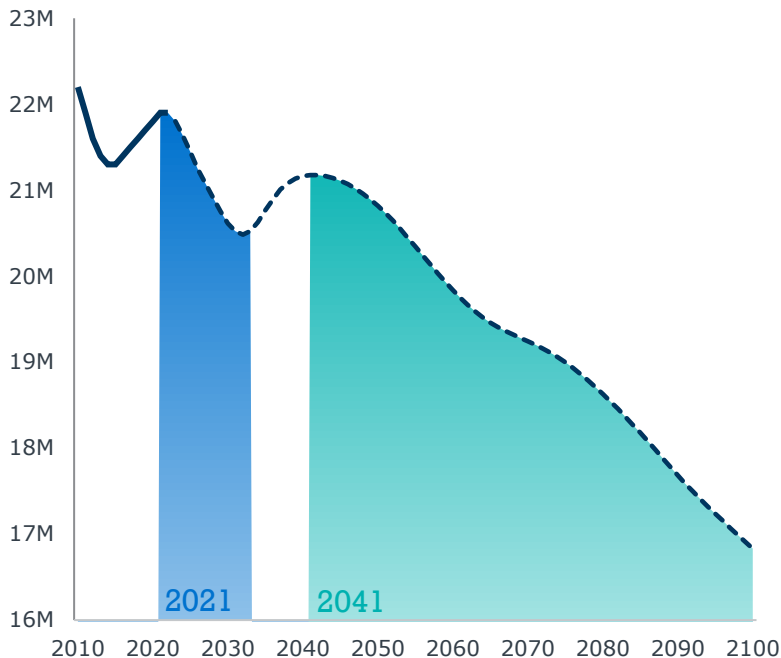
**2010**

54% decline  
by 2100

# Fewer People Means Fewer Enrollments

Demographic Cliff Followed by Even Steeper Decline Through 2100

## United States 15-19-Year-Old Population, IHME Projection



### The Demographic Cliff

**-6.3%** or **-1.4M**

*Decline in the 15-19-year-old youth population, 2021-2032*

### Peak Population

**-21%** or **-4.3M**

*Decline in the 15-19-year-old youth population, 2041-2100*

**3x**

Declines from 2041-2100 represent a reduction in the college-going population ~3x the size of pandemic-era enrollment losses

## Key Takeaways

While enrollment has stabilized post-pandemic, we are far from “back to normal.” The undergrad flight to size and selectivity continues, **leaving most institutions facing outright declines**. On the horizon, the much-discussed “demographic cliff” marks just the initial phase of a larger phenomenon.

The United States and the world will soon approach peak population, wherein total population will reach a maximum before steadily declining. The **US youth population will experience a 23% reduction by 2100**, translating to fewer students everywhere.

Beyond enrollment, this demographic change will **impact government funding and the labor market**, representing both opportunities and challenges for higher education institutions.

## How EAB Can Help You Address Challenges with [Enrollment and Demographics](#)

### Signature Service

#### [Undergraduate Enrollment Outlook](#)



Schedule a consultation to review how market forces are impacting your enrollment. The UEO reviews historical enrollment and forecasts how demographic decline, changing college-going rates, and increased competition will affect your institution through 2035.

### More EAB Resources

#### Immediately Available

- Best Bets for Enrollment Growth Workshop
- [Credential Innovation Workshop](#)
- [Custom EAB Market Insights for program development and redesign](#)

#### Forthcoming Resources

- Strategic enrollment management (SEM) planning consultations
- Enrollment Growth Strategy Resource Center
- Blueprint for Growth Executive Briefing

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## Immediate Challenge

Rising Budget Pressures  
Lead Universities to Pursue  
Host of Savings Strategies

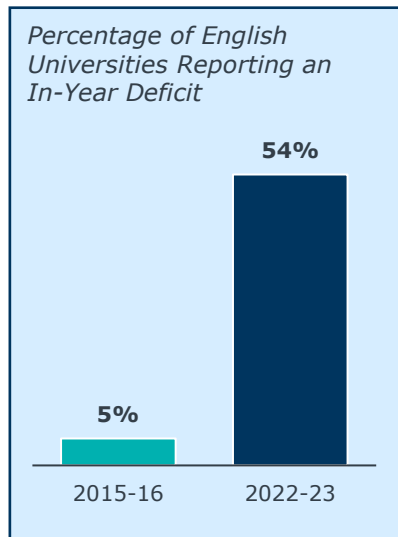
## Long-Term Threat

A "Less with Less"  
Mentality May Be Needed  
to Survive Demographic  
and Enrollment Changes



# Canaries in the Coal Mine?

## As Financial Pressures Take a Toll...



## ...Institutions Turn to Familiar Cost-Cutting Measures



- \$75M deficit [\[1\]](#)
- Approved plan to cut 28 programs, 143 staff



### University of Brighton

- £21.4M deficit [\[2\]](#)
- 103 academic staff redundancies [\[3\]](#)



- Over 500 staff redundancies [\[4\]](#)



- Over 100 jobs cut [\[5\]](#)
- Disbanded philosophy and history institutes



- £30M deficit [\[6\]](#)
- Voluntary redundancies
- Removed vacant posts



- \$33M deficit [\[7\]](#)
- 140 redundancies [\[8\]](#)
- Six courses discontinued



- \$62.8M budget deficit [\[9\]](#)
- Hiring freeze



- £3M deficit [\[9\]](#)
- Up to 50 jobs cut
- Course cuts planned

# Disciplined Tradeoffs, Not Across-the-Board Cuts



## Leaders Must Make Tough Budget Decisions to Ensure Viability

### Blanket Cuts Are Unsustainable, Can Damage Strategic Capacity

*Impacts of Across-the-Board Cuts Identified in Gartner Analysis*

43%

of organisations achieve desired savings in first year of cuts



Erode sources of persistent value

11%

of organisations able to sustain cuts over three years



Penalise efficient parts of the org



Lock in status quo processes

### IPEDS<sup>1</sup> Analysis of Institution Cost Growth Following Across-the-Board Cuts

70%

of institutions saw three-year average cost growth increase following large cut

45%

of institutions exceeded previous cost-growth trajectory within three years

# Is It Time to Embrace a “Less with Less” Mentality?

## Pivoting to a Strategic Model that Reflects Changing Market Realities

2000s

2010s

2020s

### More with More

- “If we build it, they will come” mentality fuels growth-minded boom of programs, facilities, and research expenditures
- Amenity and experience arms race requires more tech and staff to deliver
- Share-the-wealth budget decisions promote stability in times of growth

### More with Less

- Emphasis on efficiency and belt-tightening to keep output constant
- Difficult prioritization and trade-offs deferred when metrics show incremental improvement
- Growing workloads lead to staff burnout, as there’s always “more” to do

### Smaller but Better

- Intentionally decreasing “productivity” in favor of sustainable operations
- Budget decisions must reflect market realities of enrollment, funding
- Saying “no” is rewarded
- Potentially better staff experience; work is scaled to reasonable level

### “Smaller but Better”

Percentage of CBOs that said their institutions “tightened focus” and are positioned to be “smaller but better.”

4%

2022



18%

2023



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## Immediate Challenge

Academic and Mental Health Struggles Spiral Post-COVID

## Long-Term Threat

Readiness Will Continue to Decline as Youngest of COVID Generation Arrive on Campus





# Things Ain't Like They Used to Be

Shifting Landscape Ramps Up Pressure on Retention and Graduation Rates

## A Changing World



"Hybrid campus" with mixed remote and in-person staff work schedules and classroom pedagogies



Advancements in generative AI, big data, and other student- and advisor-facing tech



Volatile political landscape, with some states' policies requiring publics to dismantle org units



Challenging budget environment, with even the largest and most elite institutions facing deficits



## A Changing Student Body



Demographic shifts toward more urban areas, second-generation college students, older students



Increasingly prevalent messages around nonconsumption (though Gen Z still trusts colleges)



Greater student awareness of the role of identity, community, and mental health in education



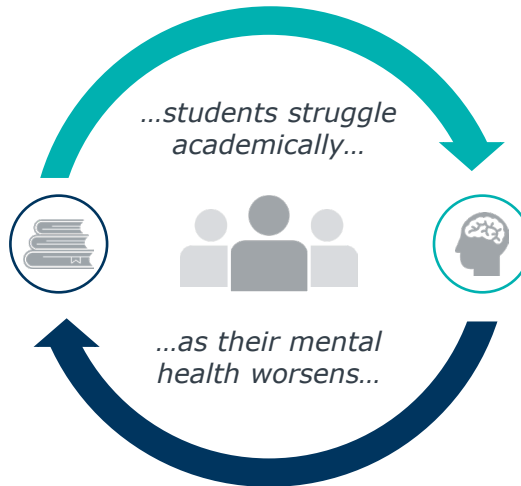
Digital natives give way to "smartphone natives": higher tech expectations, lower tech literacy



# A Vicious Cycle

Academic and Mental Health Struggles are Mutually Reinforcing

Poor grades, falling behind on assignments **lead to feelings of stress and inadequacy**, which exacerbate mental health struggles



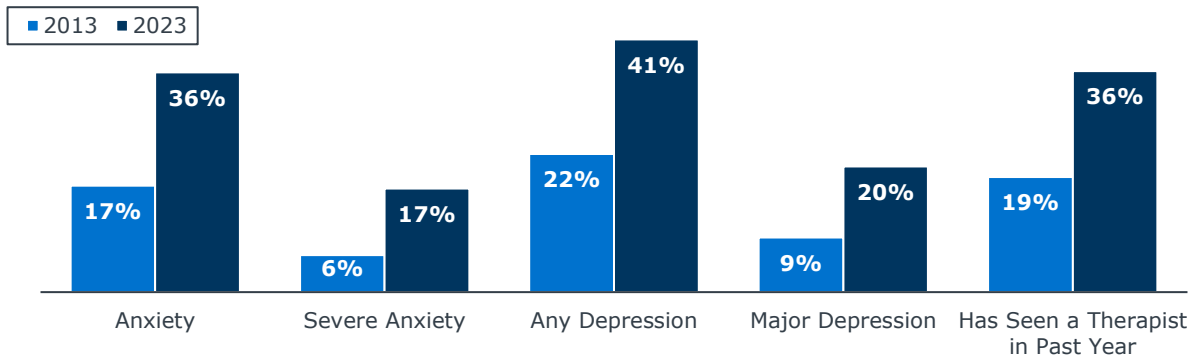
Feelings of hopelessness and anxiety cause decrease in focus and studying, which in turn **leads to poorer grades**

# Mental Health a Known and Growing Challenge



## Anxiety and Depression Nearly Doubles Among Students Over Last Decade

### Healthy Minds Study, 2013-2023



Three decades ago, the gravest public health threats to teenagers in the United States came from binge drinking, drunken driving, teenage pregnancy and smoking. These have since fallen sharply, replaced by **a new public health concern: soaring rates of mental health disorders.**

**Matt Richtel**

Author of *It's Life or Death: The Mental Health Crisis Among U.S. Teens*

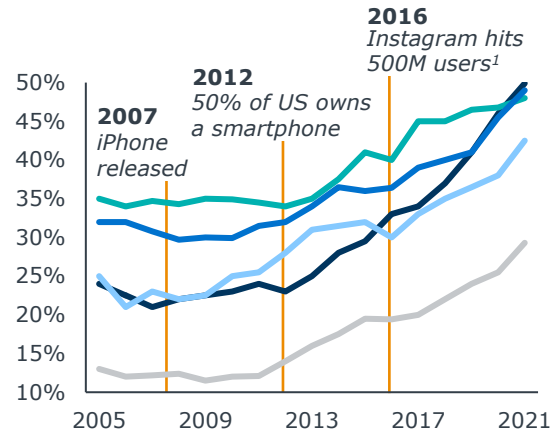


1) College students.

# Diagnosing Drivers of the Youth Mental Health Crisis

## The Smartphone Hypothesis vs. the Hellscape Theory

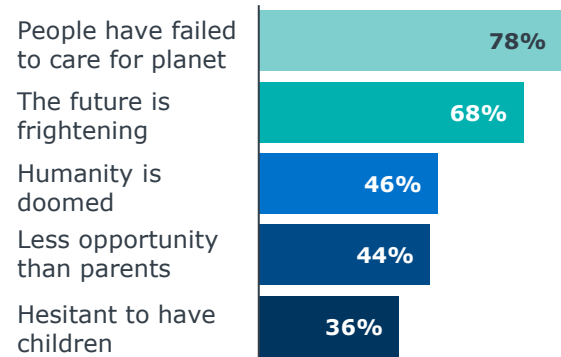
### Smartphones Associated with Less Sleep, Dissatisfaction with Life Among Teens



- Students<sup>1</sup> with <7hrs of sleep per night
- Students<sup>1</sup> that "Can't do anything right"
- Students<sup>1</sup> that "Don't enjoy life"
- Students<sup>1</sup> that "Often feel lonely"
- Depression rate of teenage girls (12-17)

### Climate Change "Doomerism" Linked to Youth Psychological Distress

*Beliefs of 16-25-year-olds in the US*



**Psychological burden of climate change "apocalypse" worsened by social media algorithms that amplify content with high click rates**

1) 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders.  
2) Monthly active users.

Source: Twenge, "Generations: The Real Differences Between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents," April 25, 2023; "Youth Risk Behavior Survey," CDC, 2022; "Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change," The Lancet Journal, 2023; Ruby, "78 Instagram Statistics Of 2023," DemandSage, Aug. 7, 2023; EAB interviews and analysis.

# Pandemic Worsened Academic Half of Vicious Cycle

## K-12 Unfinished Learning Has Arrived on College Campuses

### Challenges that Began in High School...

2/3

**of students struggled with coursework** due to home disruptions and mental health concerns from COVID

42%

of ACT-tested 2022 HS grads met **none of the college-readiness subject benchmarks** in English, reading, science and math<sup>1</sup>

2x

**The chronic absenteeism rate has doubled** from 16% in 2019 to an estimated 33% in 2022

### ...Are Now on Campus



**Chronic absenteeism<sup>2</sup>** continues to grow on college campuses



Academic struggles lead to **higher DFW<sup>3</sup> rates** in introductory courses



Institutions report incoming students struggle with **gaps in core knowledge** and **poor study habits**



**Widening expectation gaps** between faculty and students on work expected outside the classroom

1) Doubled from 26% in 2019.

2) Defined as missing 10% or more of the academic year.

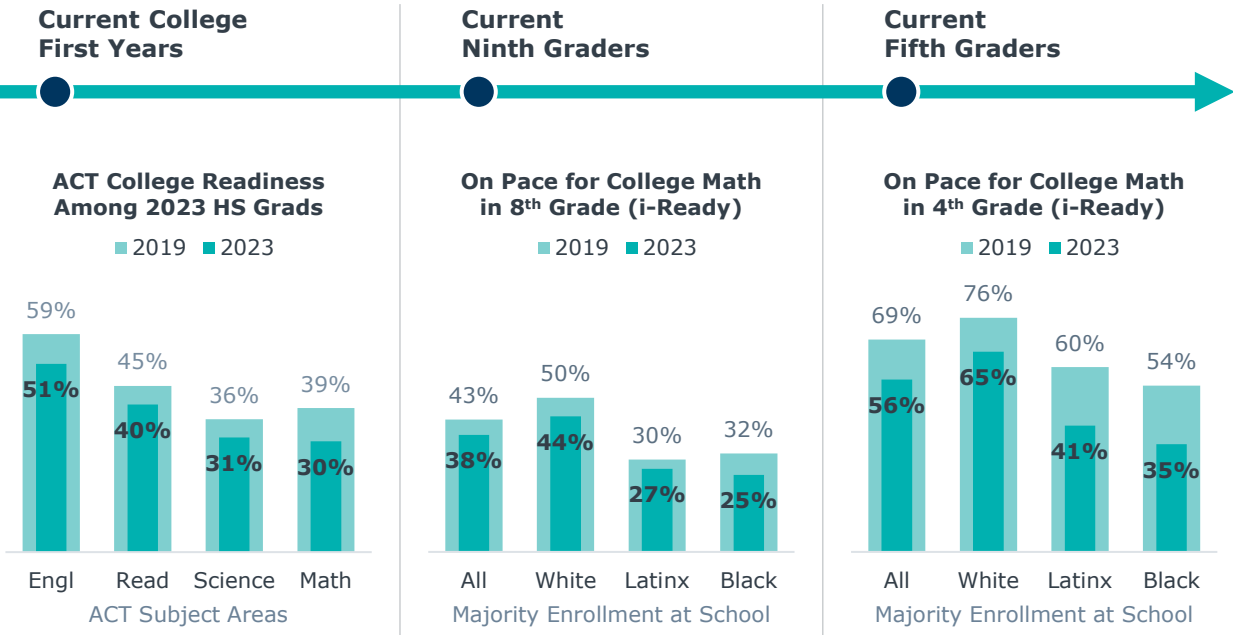
3) D grade, F grade, or withdrawal.



# It Will Get Worse Before it Gets Better

Gaps from Unfinished K-12 Learning Will Be Felt for Years to Come

## Pre- and Post-COVID Math Readiness by Age Cohort



Source: EAB analysis of data from Curriculum Associates' ["State of Student Learning in 2023"](#); ACT U.S. High School Class of 2023 Graduating Class Data; NAEP Scores 'Flashing Red' After a Lost Generation of Learning for 13-Year-Olds

# Tackling the Growing **Student Readiness** Challenge

1

## **Academic** Readiness

▶ Empower Students, Faculty, and Staff to Address Foundational Skill Gaps

2

## **Socioemotional** Readiness

▶ Lower Student Anxiety and Intimidation Barriers to Advising and Service Utilization

3

## **Financial** Readiness

▶ Triage Financial Issues to Create Easy Off-ramps from Advising to Other Services

## Key Takeaways

Student mental well-being and academic achievement are closely intertwined, with **academic struggles leading to greater stress and greater stress leading to difficulty studying**. Declining mental health is a known and growing challenge. And universities are already feeling the **impact of K12 unfinished learning** caused by emergency remote instruction, as evidenced by higher absenteeism, spiking DFW rates, and greater student demand for academic accommodation.

Importantly, **this dual challenge will get worse before it gets better**. The largest drops in test scores occurred with current 8th and 9th graders—students who will arrive at university in 4 to 5 years. Universities must prepare now to support their least academically prepared cohort in only a few years.

## How EAB Can Help You Address Challenges with **Student Readiness and Well-Being**

### Signature Service

#### [Mental Health Collaborative](#)



Join (or nominate a student affairs leader to join) a cohort of peers to learn, discuss, and plan implementation of student mental health best practices, including how to embed support, leverage data, empower faculty, and fundraise for mental health and well-being.

### More EAB Resources

#### Immediately Available

- [Adapting Student Career Development for the Gen Z Era presentation and Executive Briefing](#)
- [Mental health and well-being research catalog](#), [diagnostic](#), and [student services web audit](#)

#### Forthcoming Resources

- [Provost roundtable series featuring new research on next gen advising and career development](#)
- Best of Student Mental Health Insights Report



# Five Priorities Shaping Higher Ed Strategy

1

Enrolment and Demographics

2

Sustainable Business Models

3

Student Readiness and Well-Being

4

Hybrid Campus

5

Artificial Intelligence

## Immediate Challenge

Flexible Work Decisions  
Impact Operations,  
Productivity, and Hiring

## Long-Term Threat

Future Campuses Will  
Require Different Mix and  
Use of Space and Potentially  
Reduced Footprint

# Many Campuses Have Wrong Mix of Space

## Likely Too Little



## Likely Too Much



### Residence Halls

Residential halls shrank as a share of campus space between 2007-2021, despite students' increasing desire to be on campus



### Office Space

Office space has increased more than any other type, with NASF<sup>1</sup> per student increasing 182% from 1974-2021



### Collaboration Spaces

Students increasingly join classes remotely but study in-person



### Parking

Fewer daily commuters—employees and students—reduce need for spots



### STEM Labs

Outsized growth in STEM degrees/certificates last decade has increased the need for labs



### Lecture Hall Space

With about half of students enrolled in at least one online course, less demand for large lecture spaces

1) Net Assignable Square Feet

# Six Priorities Shaping Higher Ed Strategy

1 Public Perception of Higher Ed Value

2 Enrollment and Demographics

3 Sustainable Business Models

4 Student Readiness and Well-Being

5 Hybrid Campus

6 Artificial Intelligence

## Immediate Challenge

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Select Policies, Training  
Necessary to Navigate  
AI Transition

## Long-Term Threat

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AI-Infused Curriculum  
Required to Prepare  
Students for Future of Work



# AI's Transformative Opportunities in Higher Ed



44



- Incorporating AI into the Curriculum to Match Societal, Workplace Changes



- Provide 24/7, Personalized Student Support with One-Stop Conversational AI



- Supercharge Faculty and Staff Productivity to Pursue More Strategic Tasks



- Maximize Enrollment and Advancement Yield with Hyper-Personalized Content Generation



- Transcend Historical Bounds of Innovation in Research by Using AI to Expand Human Capabilities

# Support Faculty and Student Use of AI



## Encourage Faculty Use of AI in Pedagogy



### Institutional Statement Embracing AI

USC's Provost and Academic Senate released a statement urging faculty to encourage students to explore AI [1]



### AI Literacy Courses

Auburn offers a hands-on "Teaching with AI" course that has already been completed by ~ 700 faculty [2]



### Faculty AI Teaching + Learning Workshops

The University of Mississippi launched a paid (\$1,000 stipend) two-day AI Summer Institute for Teachers of Writing [3]

## Create AI Learning Opportunities for Students



UNIVERSITY OF  
SAN FRANCISCO

### Student Orientation Session on ChatGPT

USF developed a Zoom orientation session on Chat GPT for incoming students, focused on pros, cons, and ethics of using AI for schoolwork



### On-Demand Student Trainings

Vanderbilt offers free, extensive AI training (including workshops and online courses) for students, faculty, and staff



### Subsidized Tokens and Microcredentials

UHK pays half of course fees for students taking Coursera modules on AI and provides them with 500K AI access tokens (costing ~\$1-2 per student per month)

# Most Students Will Need Basics, Not Expertise



## Levels of AI Knowledge by Future Workforce Demand

~1%

of knowledge-sector jobs will be **advanced level**

### The AI Visionary

- Designs novel AI algorithms, optimizes model architecture, parameters, and neural networks
- Approaches AI with original ideas and imagination. A futurist thinker.

~9%

of knowledge-sector jobs will be **intermediate level**

### The AI Manipulator

- Can train AI models on sample data and has experience with frameworks like TensorFlow
- Understands learning tasks, can fine-tune AI models, and can deploy ML<sup>1</sup> models

~90%

of knowledge-sector jobs will be **basic level**

### The Common AI User

- Understands basic AI concepts
- Has used AI through consumer apps and user-friendly large language models

1) Machine learning.

# Embedding AI Across the Academy

## Generative AI Expectations from Select Syllabi



### *Business*

"I expect you to use AI (ChatGPT and image generation tools, at a minimum), in this class. **In fact, some assignments will require it.**"



### *Data Structures and Algorithms*

"Generative AI systems (like ChatGPT), if used correctly, can serve as **powerful tools for learning and idea refinement.**"



### *Teaching Humanities and Social Sciences*

"AI in education is **a vital topic** for pre-service teachers who have to navigate ongoing changes in the educational landscape."



### *Advanced Legal Writing*

"I expect you to use technology in this class. Technology can be as useful for writers as **a calculator is for mathematicians.**"



### *Social Media Marketing*

"There is a good possibility that using tools like these [Gen AI] are going to become **an important skill** for careers in the not distant future."



### *Various Geography and Teaching Methods*

"I think of [generative AI technology] as **the new Wikipedia** [...] but you, as the author, are responsible for the information and outputs."

## Key Takeaways

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) technology reached an inflection point in late 2022 with the launch of ChatGPT, which hit **100 million users in an astonishingly fast two months.**

Initial reactions among university leaders centered on academic integrity and cheating concerns. However, most quickly realized the “genie was out of the bottle,” and **shifted focus to productively incorporating AI into pedagogy.** In the short-term, investments in JIT training and short-format modules for students and faculty show promise.

More fundamentally, universities must adjust teaching and learning to **prepare students for a post-AI world**, as well consider AI applications in student success, staff and faculty productivity, and research.

## How EAB Can Help You Address Challenges with [Artificial Intelligence](#)

### Signature Service



#### [AI and the Future of Higher Ed: What Every Cabinet Needs to Know Webinar](#)

Dial up our on-demand webinar to learn how AI stands to transform higher education. Our experts explore common misconceptions, current opportunities, and how leaders like you are navigating the risks and rewards of AI.

### More EAB Resources

#### Immediately Available

- [Chronicles of Innovation: Tracing AI's Early Footprints in Higher Ed presentation](#)
- AI Strategy expert consultation
- [6 Innovative Ways Higher Ed can Embrace AI insight article](#)

#### Forthcoming Resources

- Campus AI Investment Prioritization Workshop
- Presidential Experience Lab: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work on June 4-5, 2024 | Silicon Valley



# Reckoning with Relevance



## Public Perception of Higher Ed Value

- Universities Hammered by Culture Wars and Diminishing ROI Narratives

Immediate Challenge

- Anti-Higher Ed Echo Chamber Impacts Campus Morale

Long-Term Threat



## Enrollment and Demographics

- Post-Vaccine Enrollments Stabilize But Still Show Signs Of Weakness

- The Demographic Cliff "Levels Up" to Peak Population



## Sustainable Business Models

- Rising Budget Pressures Lead Universities to Pursue Host of Savings Strategies

- "Less with Less" Mentality May Be Needed to Survive Demographic and Enrollment Changes



## Student Readiness and Well-Being

- Academic and Mental Health Struggles Spiral Post-COVID

Immediate Challenge

- Readiness Will Continue to Decline as Youngest of COVID Generation Arrive on Campus

Long-Term Threat



## Hybrid Campus

- Flexible Work Decisions Impact Operations, Productivity, Hiring

- Future Campuses Will Require Different Mix and Use of Space and Potentially Reduced Footprint



## Artificial Intelligence

- Select Policies, Training Necessary to Navigate AI Transition

- AI-Infused Curriculum Required to Prepare Students for Future of Work