



**TRANSFORMING  
STUDENTS' LIVES**  
THROUGH THE  
*power of inspired learning.*

**RESILIENCE IN ACTION**  
**REDESIGNING THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOR A NEW ERA**

Presented to the WICHE Alliance  
April 16, 2026  
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LARAMIE COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
CHEYENNE | LARAMIE | ONLINE

# ERA'S OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE US

1. **Establishment Era (1600's – 1700's)**
  - Colonial Colleges (e.g., Harvard)
2. **Expansion Era (1800's – mid 1900's)**
  - Land Grants, Community Colleges
3. **Access Era (1960's – 2000)**
  - GI Bill, Higher Ed Act
4. **Accountability Era (2000 – present)**
  - Spelling's Commission, Scorecards, Performance Funding, Gainful Employment, Earnings Test, Public Sentiment, etc.

*The Reckoning?*





FOUNDATION



## The First Gen CC's

### Built for Access

- High school graduates
- Transfer
- Local workforce training
- Semester calendar
- Tuition + state subsidy model

## The Second Gen (Emerging)

### Built for Adaptation

- Lifelong learners
- Short-cycle credentials
- Employer co-production
- Continuous enrollment
- Multiple revenue streams
- Measured by post-completion value/advantage



**The old community college gave people a chance to enter the economy.  
The new community college helps people survive the economy.**



*Intertwined Realities Higher  
Education Will Face*

# THE TRADITIONAL ECONOMIC MODEL...

For public higher education is built on a three-legged stool:

1. Public Appropriations/Funding
2. Tuition from students
3. Other revenue (grants, philanthropy, auxiliaries, contracts, etc.)

The model works when:

- There are regular increases in appropriations
- There are more students to enroll each year
- Higher education is the primary gateway to a good job
- Tuition can increase faster than inflation (people can afford it)
- Costs increases are controllable and predictable



# THE ECONOMIC MODEL IS UNDER STRESS

## Realities:

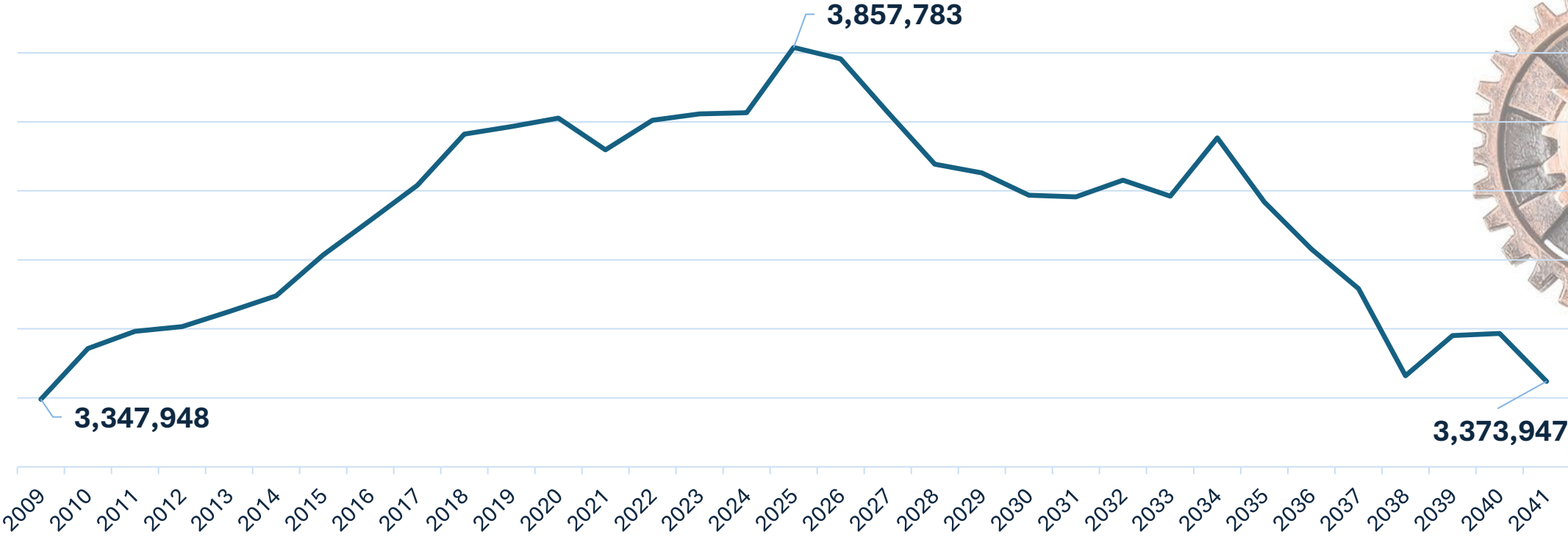
1. Declining Supply of Traditional Students
2. Demand for Education Is Changing
3. Cost Tolerance is Fracturing
4. Students are Becoming more Complex

**Any one of these would be manageable.  
All four at once will force structural change.**



# Peak of High School Grads in 2025

USA High School Graduates



Source: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (2024). *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates*. <https://www.wiche.edu/knocking>.

# DECLINE IN HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

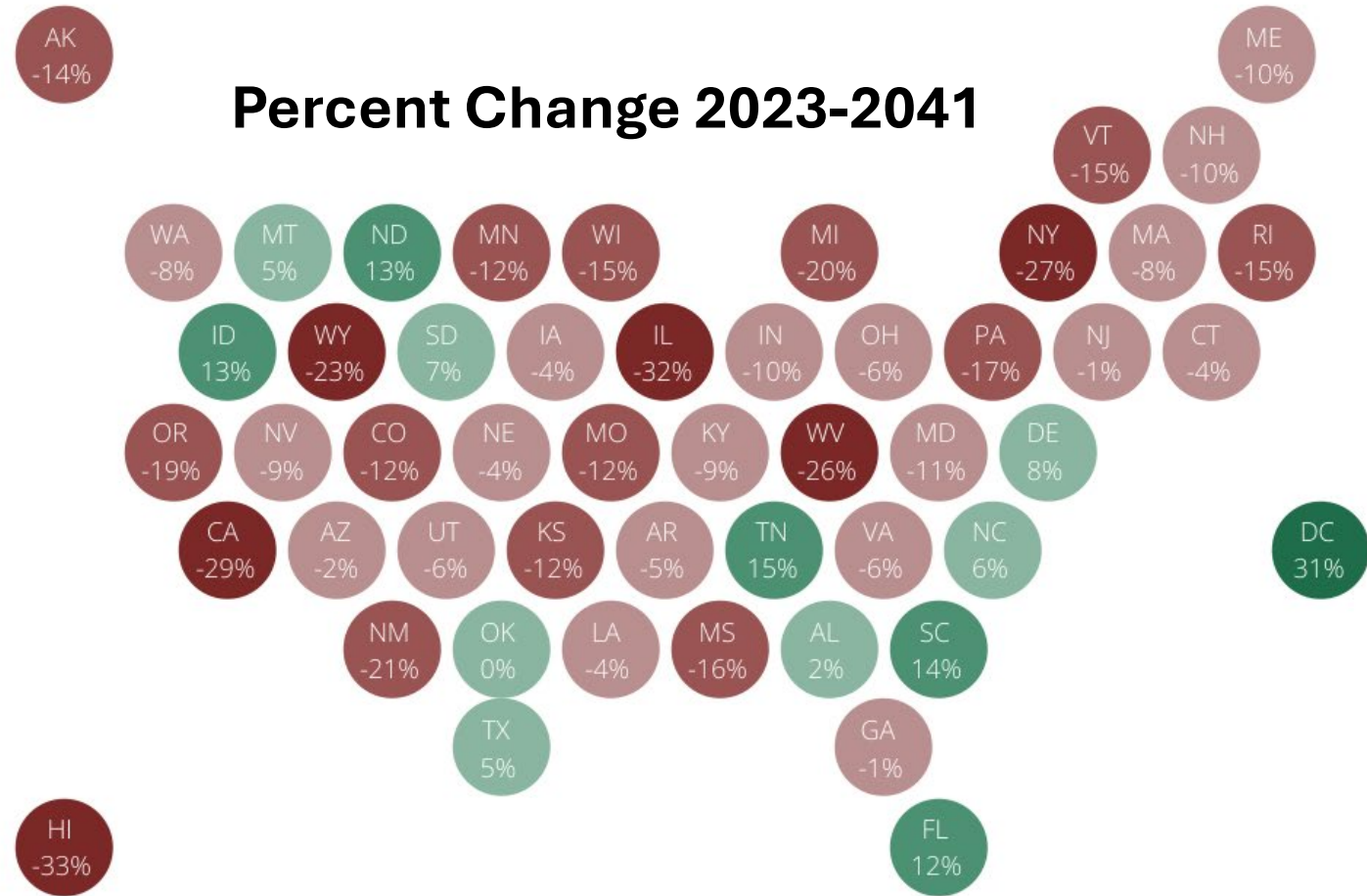
## School Type

Total

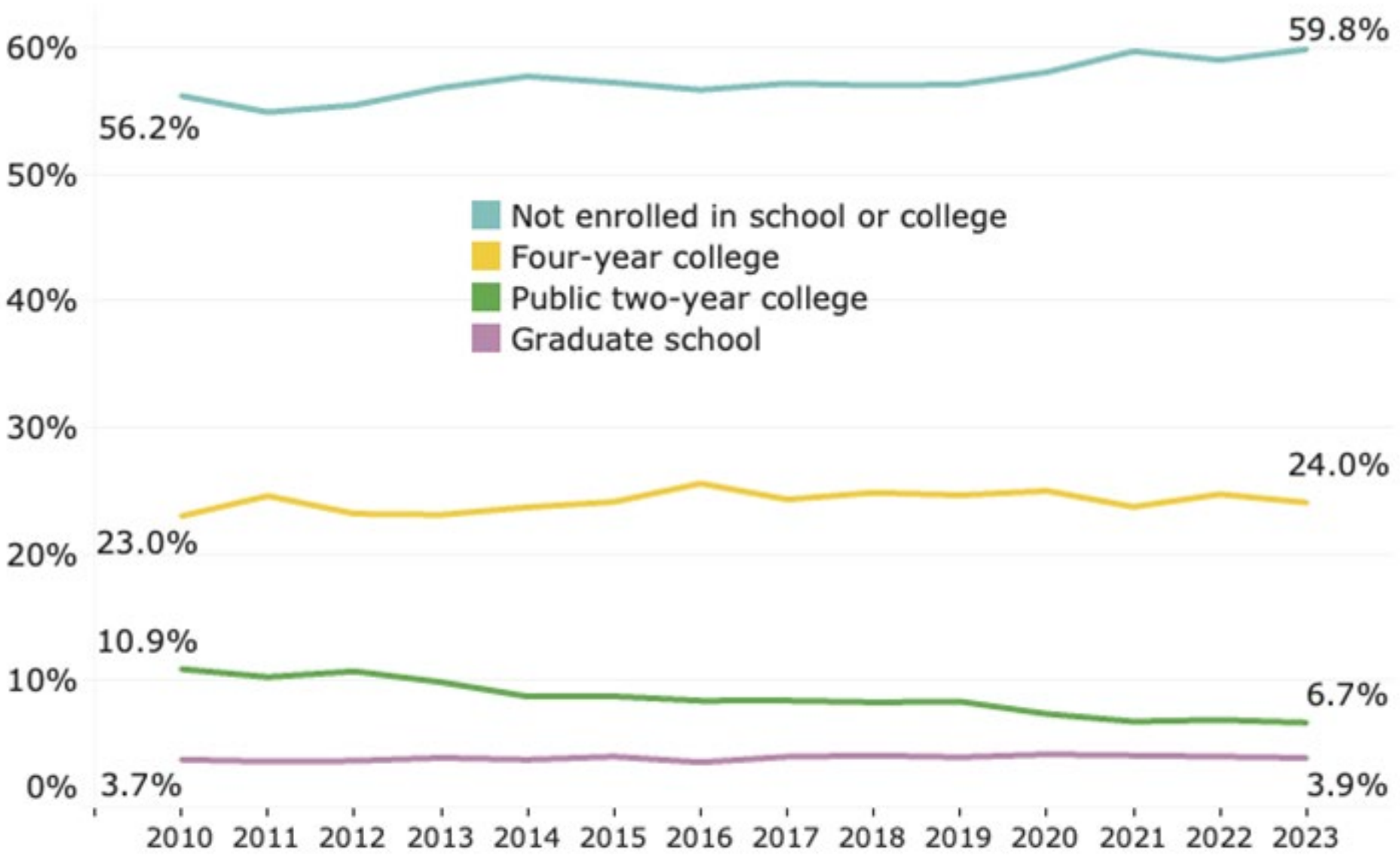
## Graduation Years

2023 to 2041

## % Change



**Figure 5. Enrollment shares for 18-25 year olds**



Source: Authors' calculations using U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey

# Undergraduate Enrollment Trends by Sector

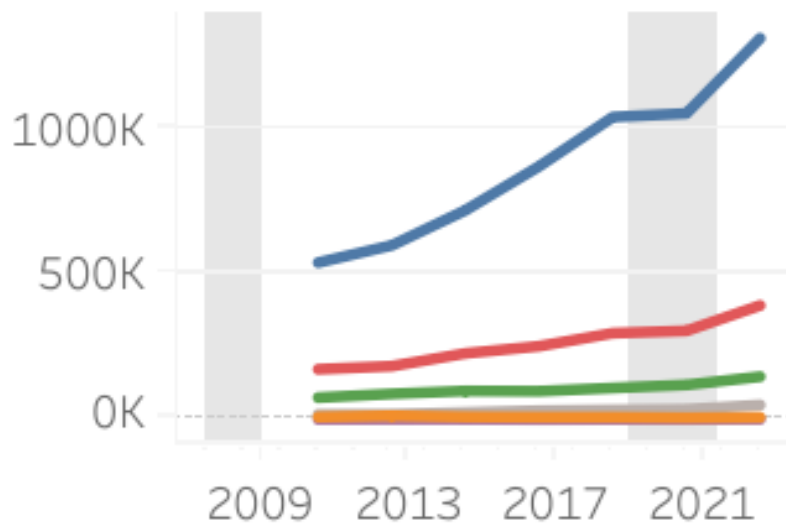
*IPEDS Data, 1996-2023*

## Fall Undergraduate Enrollments

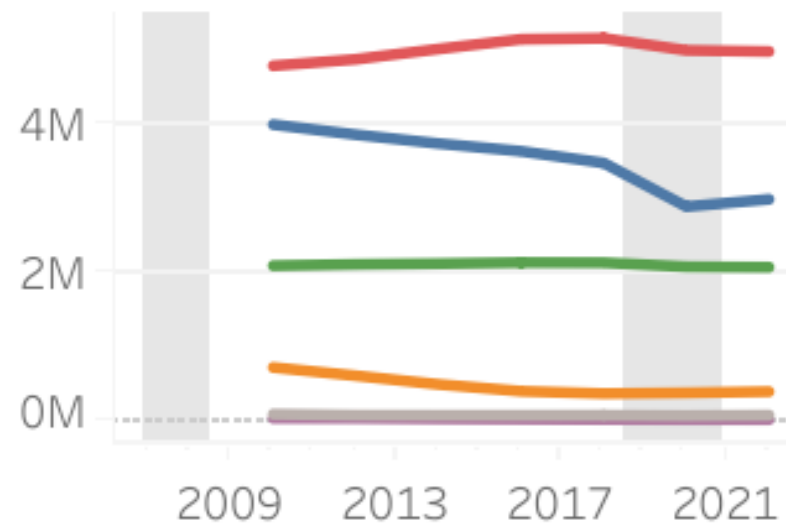
*Summary for student age and race/ethnicity*

Select Years to Display  
 2009 to 2023  
 and Null values

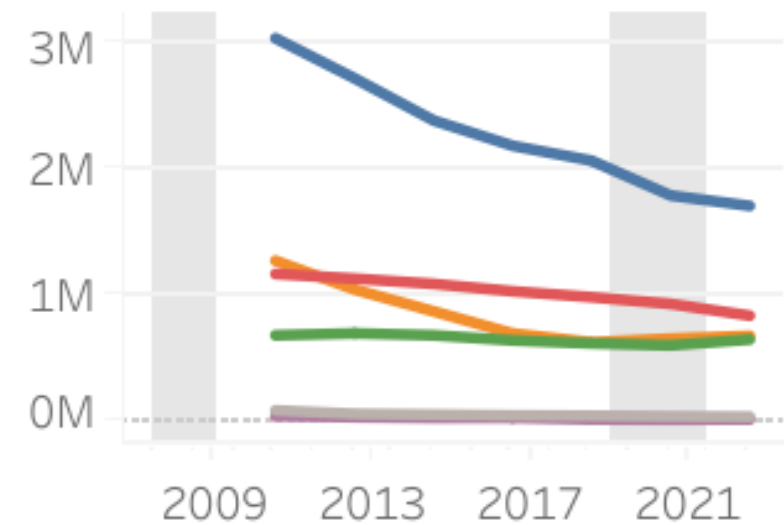
### Age: Under 18



### Age 18-24



### Age 25+

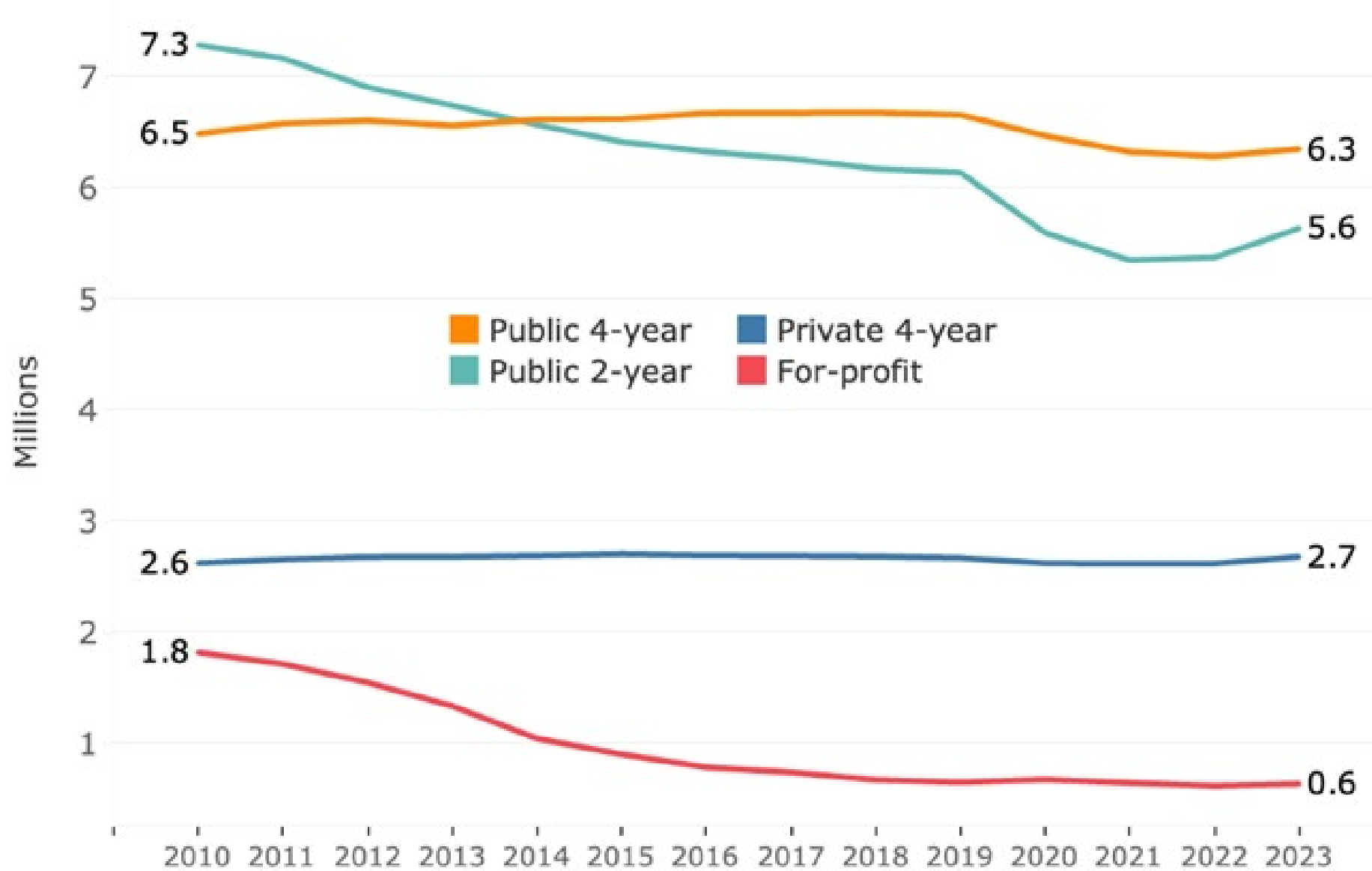


#### Sector (CCRC Definition)

- Community colleges
- Private for-profits
- Public four-years
- Other public two-years, less-than..
- Private not-for-profit four-years
- Other private not-for-profits

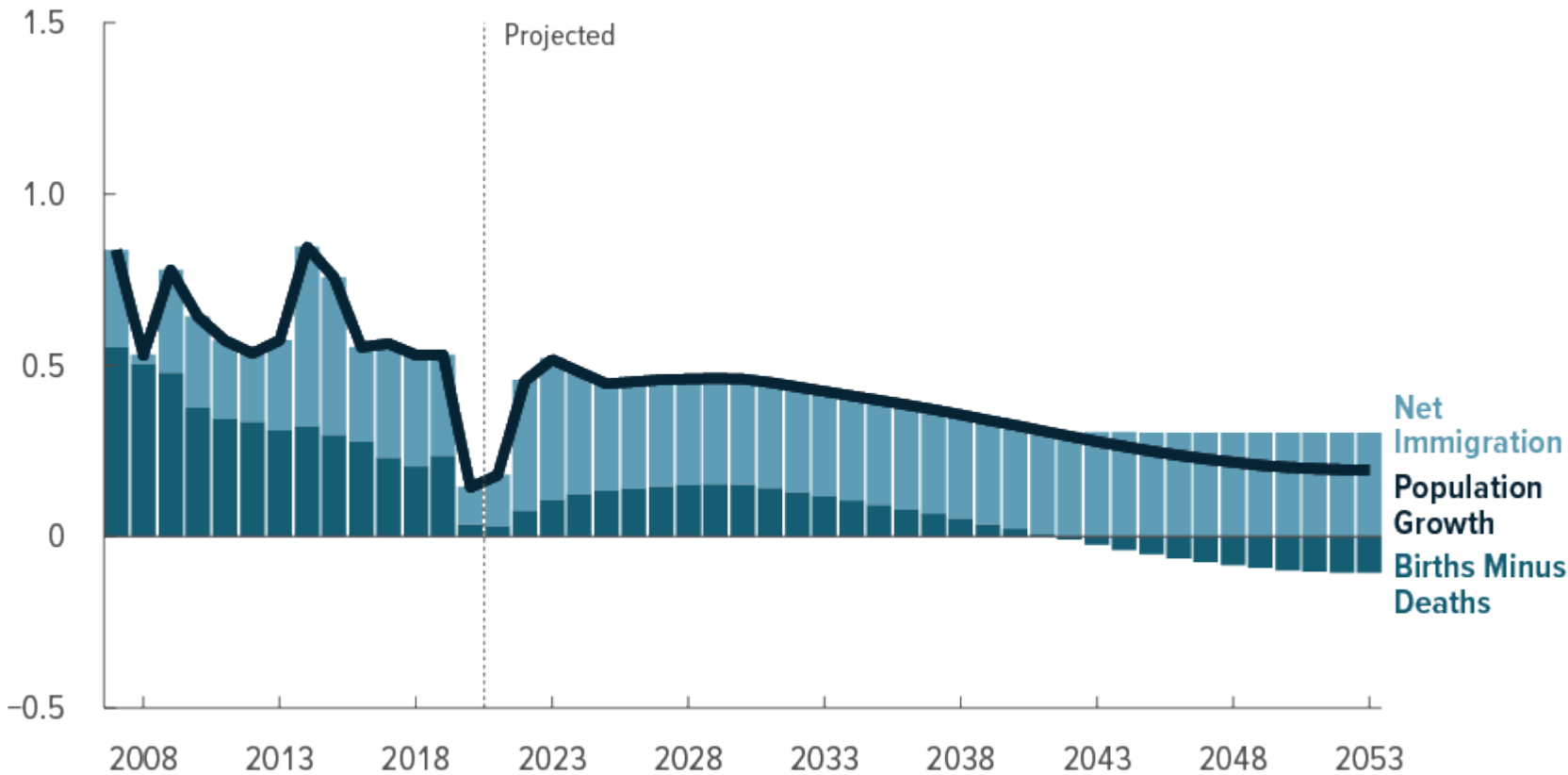


**Figure 3. Undergraduate enrollment trends, by sector of institution**



Source: Authors' calculations using National Center for Education Statistics data.

# DEMOGRAPHICS WILL CHANGE



By 2042, with the aging of the population, deaths will exceed births. Population growth from then on will be entirely by immigration.



# 1. SUPPLY OF TRADITIONAL STUDENTS IS SHRINKING

## Demographic Reality

- Declining birth rates
- Fewer high school graduates
- Aging population

### **Bottom line**

The market is no longer expanding automatically. Institutions must compete for and cultivate new learners.

We built capacity for a growing market. That market is flattening.

## Opportunity Still Exists

- Only ~60% of HS graduates enroll
- Adult learners remain largely untapped
- Dual enrollment expanding
- Lifelong learning demand growing



# 2. DEMAND FOR EDUCATION IS CHANGING

## Credentials are Diversifying

- Shorter credentials
- Certificates
- Skills-based hiring
- Stackable pathways
- New focus on apprenticeships

## Learning Expectations Are Changing

- Faster pathways
- Flexible schedules
- Hybrid learning
- Experiential learning
- Earn while U learn

## New Competitors Are Entering

- Employer training
- Boot camps
- Online platforms
- Industry credentialing



## Opting Not to Come

- Non-consumption

### **Bottom line**

The degree is no longer the only product in the education marketplace.  
Or the only way to get into the Job Market.



# 3. COST TOLERANCE IS FRACTURING

## Families

- Wonder can they afford it
- Student debt
- ROI concerns

## States

- Competing priorities
- Fiscal pressure
- Skepticism about institutional efficiency
- “Woke” worries

## Taxpayers

- Aging population
- Fewer direct connections to higher education
- Increasing tax sensitivity

### **Bottom line**

The model assumed continuous expansion and cost growth. The public appetite for that model is weakening.



# 4. STUDENTS ARE MORE COMPLEX

## Today's learners are:

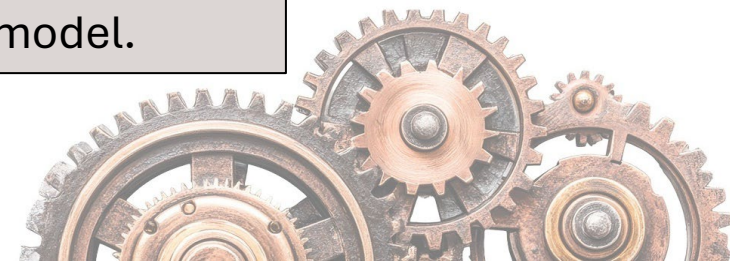
- More likely to work
- Older
- Balancing family responsibilities
- More diverse backgrounds
- Seeking personalized pathways
- Requiring additional supports

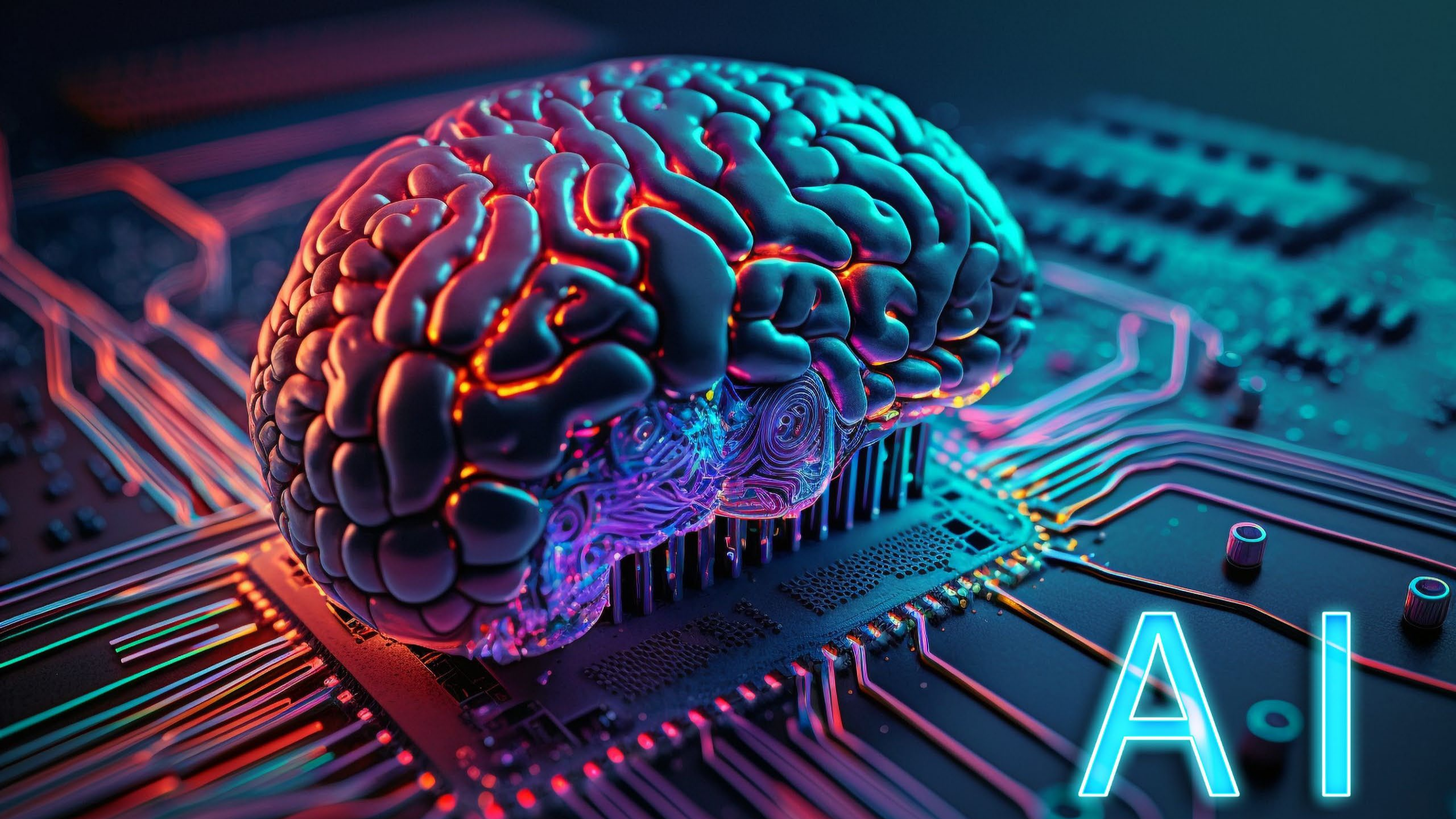
## This changes:

- Advising
- Scheduling
- Program design
- Student services
- Pedagogy

### **Bottom line**

Our systems were designed for students who would fit their lives into ours. Most of today's students will not tolerate that model.





AI

# A 5<sup>TH</sup> REALITY RUNNING THROUGH EVERYTHING: AI

## Emerging Impacts of AI & Tech:

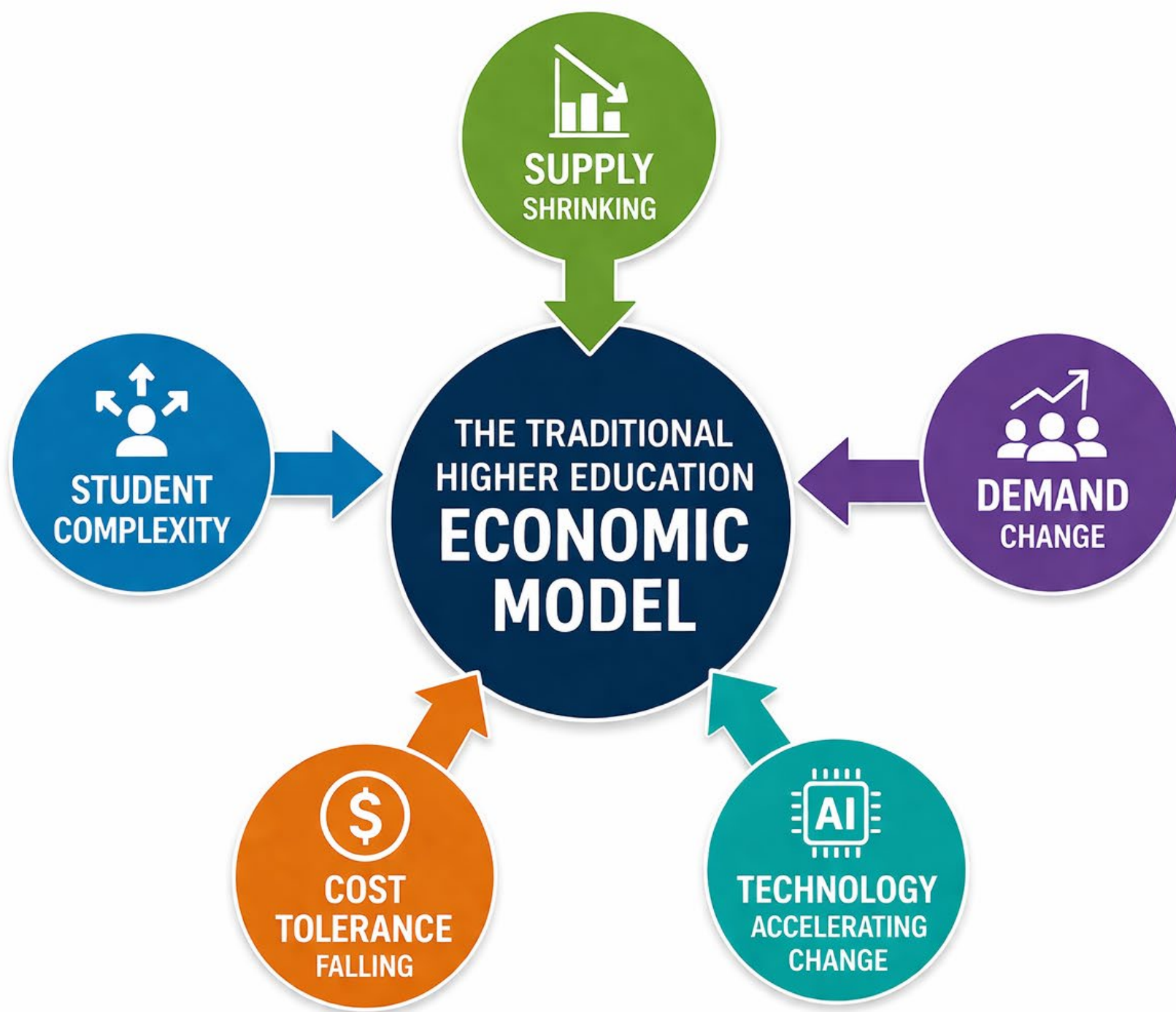
- Demand (skills needed in workforce)
- Competition (new education providers)
- Costs (operational efficiency opportunities)
- Instruction (how learning occurs)




### **Bottom line**

Artificial intelligence may not replace higher education, but it will reshape how knowledge is created, taught, and applied.





# *Lessons of Resilience*



**Higher education has spent 100 years becoming oak trees. Permanent, immovable, tradition-bound, structured around semesters, departments, and buildings.**

**Community colleges, almost by accident, became bamboo.**

- **We start programs quickly.**
- **We stop programs quickly.**
- **We change who we serve.**
- **We change when we serve them.**
- **We change where we serve them.**

***We were built to bend.***

# RESILIENT COLLEGES ARE DESIGNED TO BEND

The most resilient colleges are not the ones with the best plans.

They are the ones with the most flexible cultures and structures.





# RESILIENT COLLEGES INNOVATE WITH WHAT THEY HAVE

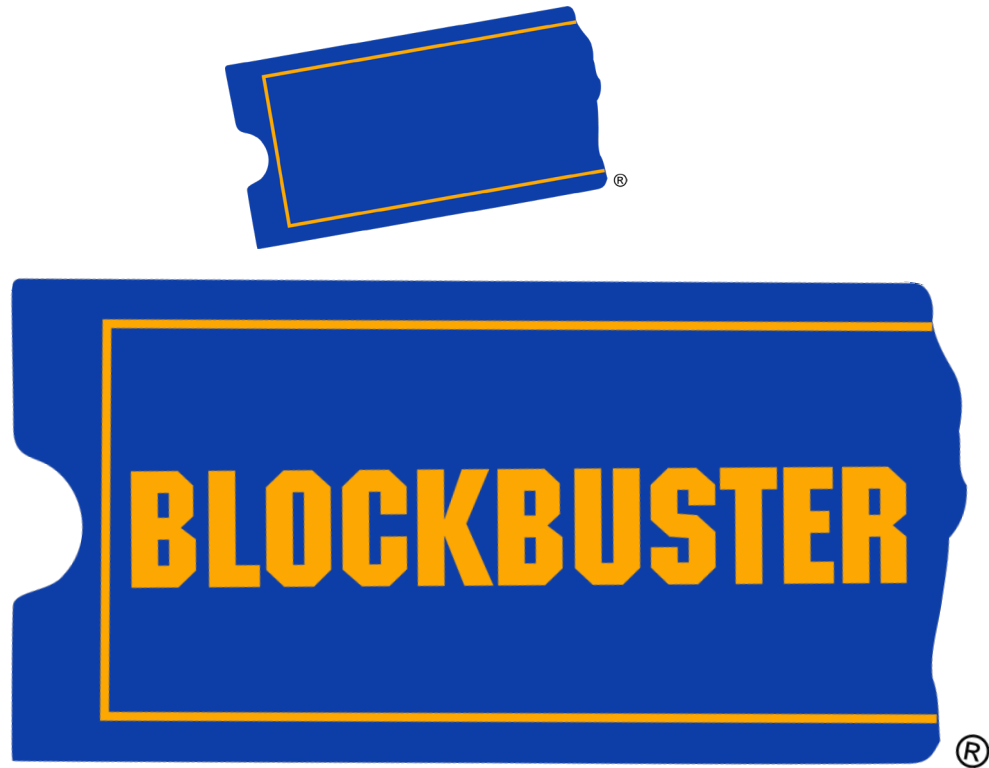
NASA did not invent anything new to save Apollo 13.  
They reorganized what they already had.

## **Think what we have:**

- We already have faculty/staff
- We already have buildings
- We already have employers/partners
- We already have students
- We already have money

Resilience is about resource reconfiguration, not resource expansion.





They tried to innovate.

- They added more movies.
- They improved late fee policies.
- They remodeled stores.

Blockbuster asked:

“How do we rent more movies?”



# NETFLIX

They innovated the product.

- Netflix didn't innovate the product.
- Netflix changed the business model.

Netflix asked:

“How do we provide home entertainment?”



 **BlackBerry**<sup>®</sup>

**NOKIA**

**xerox**



**yahoo!**

zenith



# WHAT BUSINESS ARE WE IN?

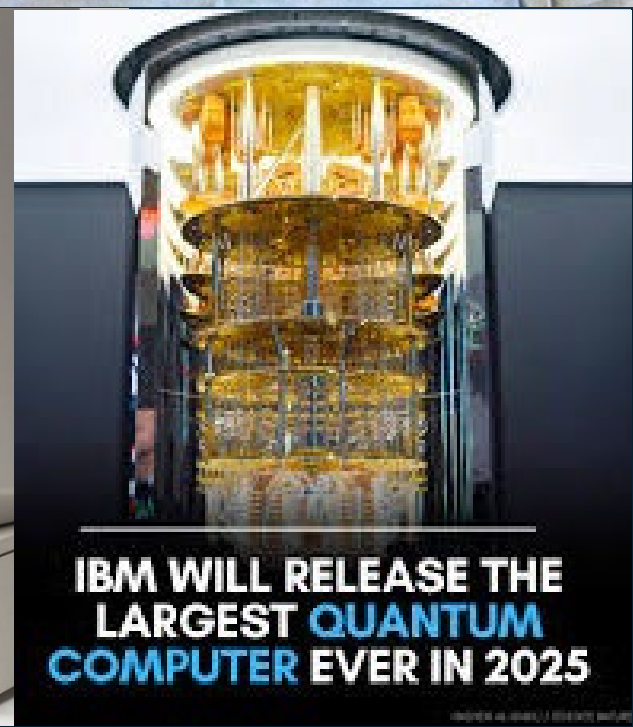
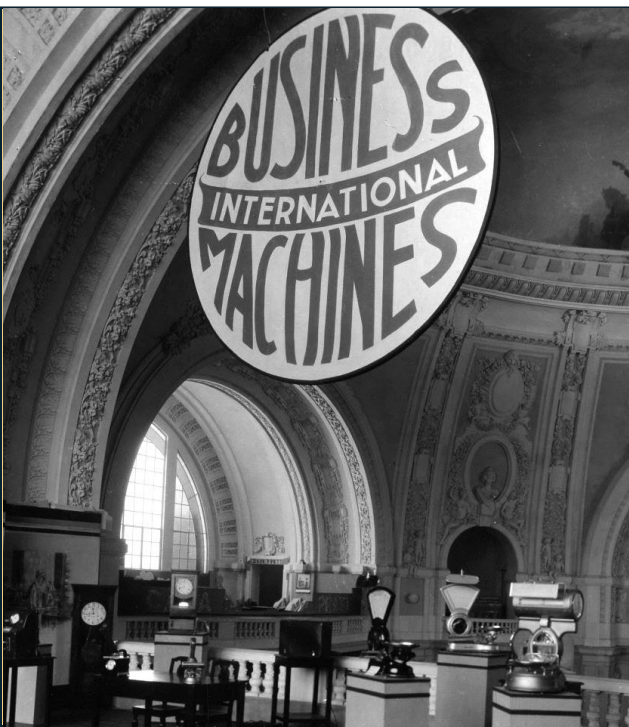
**Most colleges are trying to innovate programs.  
Resilient colleges are innovating their operating model.**

- Accelerated terms
- Subscription tuition
- Year-round enrollment
- Competency-based education
- Credit for prior learning
- Credit/non-credit integrations
- Learn while you earn
- Industry certifications embedded
- Innovative partnerships
- Shared programming
- Lifelong learning accounts
- Public Private Partnerships (P3's)
- Diversifying revenue streams





More branches  
or more fruit?



**IBM WILL RELEASE THE LARGEST QUANTUM COMPUTER EVER IN 2025**

For 50 years, higher education has asked:

“How do we grow?”

The next 20 years will require us to ask:

“What are we willing to stop doing so that we can do what matters most?”

# “40% OF COLLEGES ENROLL FEWER THAN 1,000 STUDENTS. DO THEY SURVIVE?”

In the future, resilient community colleges might:

- Measure success not by enrollment, but by community impact.
- Offer fewer programs, but with post-completion value.
- Operate fewer buildings, but more efficiently used.
- Have fewer semesters, but more start dates.
- Have fewer silos, but more partnerships.
- Serve fewer 18-year-olds, but more 28–48 year-olds.
- Run smaller campuses, but larger service areas.
- Others...?

**The goal isn't to be bigger or more.  
The goal is to be essential.**



# KEY TAKEAWAYS



Principle	Story	What it Means for Colleges
Flexibility	Bamboo	Change structures to bend and adapt.
Reconfiguration	Apollo 13	Reconfigure the way you use existing resources.
Reinvention	Netflix	Break and innovate the business model.
Focus	Pruning Tree/IBM	Don't do more, do essential.



*Community colleges were built to grow access.*

*Now we are be called to curate opportunity.*

*Not bigger colleges.*

*Not smaller colleges.*

*More purposeful colleges.*



**THANK YOU!**

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