

# Declining College-Going Rates

Third Academic Year of Covid-19

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# INDIANA'S 2020 COLLEGE-GOING RATE

- ▶ **53% of high school graduates went to college the following year**
  - ▶ 12 percentage point decline from 2015 to 2020
  - ▶ National context: 62.7% of American high school grads, about a 6 percentage point decline from 2015
- ▶ **81% of 21st Century Scholars go to college**



# INFO FOR SCHOOL OFFICIALS & PARTNERS

- ▶ **887 customized versions of the Readiness Report available on [CHE's website](#)**
  - ▶ Statewide – 1 report
  - ▶ Counties – 92 reports
  - ▶ School corporations – 289 reports
  - ▶ High schools – 505 reports



# INCREASING THE VALUE

- ▶ College-going rate has been steadily declining
- ▶ Value of higher education has been continually questioned
- ▶ Commissioner Lubbers charged us with understanding **WHY**
- ▶ Discover a better **HOW** in communicating the value
- ▶ We cannot increase the value of education beyond high school if Hoosiers do not understand – or if they actively dispute – its value

# COMMUNICATING THE VALUE: A MOVEMENT

- ▶ Undertake in-depth research and talk with Hoosiers about their thoughts and feelings about higher education
- ▶ Use the findings to craft new communications plans and tactics
- ▶ Collaborate with people and organizations to promote the value of higher education by providing everyone with the tools and resources based on our research
  - ▶ State agencies, legislators, executive branch
  - ▶ Higher education
  - ▶ K-12 educators and school counselors
  - ▶ Community partner organizations
  - ▶ Philanthropy
  - ▶ Employers and business associations

# WHERE WE'VE BEEN

- ▶ **Multi-stage research included:**
  - ▶ Reviewing research pieces, conducting interviews, analyzing 1.4 million tweets, posts, threads and news articles
  - ▶ Creating concepts and tactics to test
  - ▶ Testing messaging with focus groups: high school students, parents, adult learners; and in-depth interviews with educators
  - ▶ Survey of 1,200+ Indiana residents
- ▶ **Outcome:** key findings, language strategy and messaging recommendations



# WHAT WE FOUND: TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ **Cost** – whether real or perceived – is the No. 1 factor and barrier for people
- ▶ **“Rugged individualism”**: No one wants to be told what to do – or that their life isn’t good enough
- ▶ People hear **“college”** and think of **four-year degrees**
- ▶ Government and higher ed are **NOT** trusted messengers to deliver the value proposition of postsecondary education/training
- ▶ **Data and facts** aren’t moving people who are skeptical; generational differences exist
- ▶ Majority of Hoosiers still **“feel favorable”** toward higher education

# TRUSTED MESSENGERS WANTED

Please indicate how trustworthy you believe each of the following people/institutions are when it comes to providing guidance, advice and resources about education beyond high school

Federal government	22%
State government	27%
My local government	27%
Representatives from colleges and universities	44%
Community organizations/non-profits	58%
School counselors/teachers	66%
My friends	70%
My family	77%





# BUSTING MYTHS

- ▶ **College is the only thing that gives people a leg up**
  - ▶ 87% of Hoosiers believe education is a personal choice that looks different for everyone
- ▶ **College is just four-year degrees**
  - ▶ Education opportunities beyond high school; or be specific (short-term certification, trade school, two-year or four-year degrees)
- ▶ **Unicorns exist, but that's not our concern: dispel college = 4 years, \$200K myth**
  - ▶ Four-year degrees are right for some, but not all; focus on career relevance
- ▶ **Audiences get emotional when we focus on data: \$1 million with college degree...**



# LANGUAGE STRATEGY

- ▶ **What:** We need to make it feel relevant: “You’re talking to someone like me.”
  - ▶ Focus on many paths; emphasize individualism and choice; expand the definition of “college”
- ▶ **Why:** We need to make it feel valuable: “I’ll gain something from putting in the work; it’s worth it.”
  - ▶ Start broad, talking about the benefits of all education and then talk about college; emphasize near-term benefits before long-term ones; focus on access to opportunity and flexibility
- ▶ **How:** We need to make it feel accessible: “I have the support I need to make my plans a reality.”
  - ▶ Create a loud, consistent drumbeat around the range of financial aid/scholarships/grants; emphasize mentorship, tools and resources

# WHAT WORKS TO SHOW VALUE?

- ▶ All audiences reacted positively to the idea of education “**opening doors**” or providing them the way to get their “**foot in the door**”
- ▶ Why does this work?
  - ▶ It feels immediate. People are taking an action step to benefit themselves right now
  - ▶ It leans into the notion of choice. We’re not telling people which door to pick or where to go
  - ▶ It takes the pressure off for people who don’t know what they want to do
- ▶ Opening doors now leads to **long-term flexibility** and provides people with **more control**

# WHY WE CAN'T JUST FOCUS ON \$\$

- ▶ Almost three-quarters of people believe it is **overwhelming** to sort through financial aid options
- ▶ Less than half believe state financial aid programs are within their reach
- ▶ Almost 80% believe more support is needed to help people navigate options
- ▶ Less than one-third believe programs are easy to find and apply for
- ▶ FAFSA and scholarship application processes: difficult, tedious, confusing
- ▶ The word “affordable” is less credible than “manageable”



# HELP NEEDED TO NAVIGATE THE PROCESS

- ▶ **Message:** “From finding programs that will help lead to the career you want to connecting you with the right financial assistance opportunities, there are mentors, counselors, and people who’ve been there before, who can help you navigate the process”
- ▶ **Show, don’t just tell:**
  - ▶ Providing new and updated resources to Indiana’s K-12 counselors and educators
  - ▶ Refreshing the Learn More Indiana site and suite of offerings
  - ▶ Connecting students and families to support organizations such as INvestEd, the CHE Outreach team and others

# SUMMARY

- ▶ **Elevator pitches:**

- ▶ After high school, you decide what comes next – and there are endless paths you can take. But whatever you want to pursue, education can help open doors and expand options, today and tomorrow.
- ▶ Wherever you want to go, there's no one way to get there. Education can help open doors, and leave them open, providing you with flexibility and control now and in the future.

- ▶ **Tone:** Be outright, be optimistic, be open-minded

# WHERE WE'RE GOING

## Trainings

- Live, in-person and virtual trainings
- CHE, GWC, VOX, outreach teams

## Playbook

- FAQ on higher education options
- Messaging and talking points
- Quick sheet: Say this, not that

## Campaigns

- Developing campaign concepts to:
  - Disseminate language framework
  - Communicate value to the public

## Measure

- First survey as a baseline
- Future surveys to determine how messaging is working



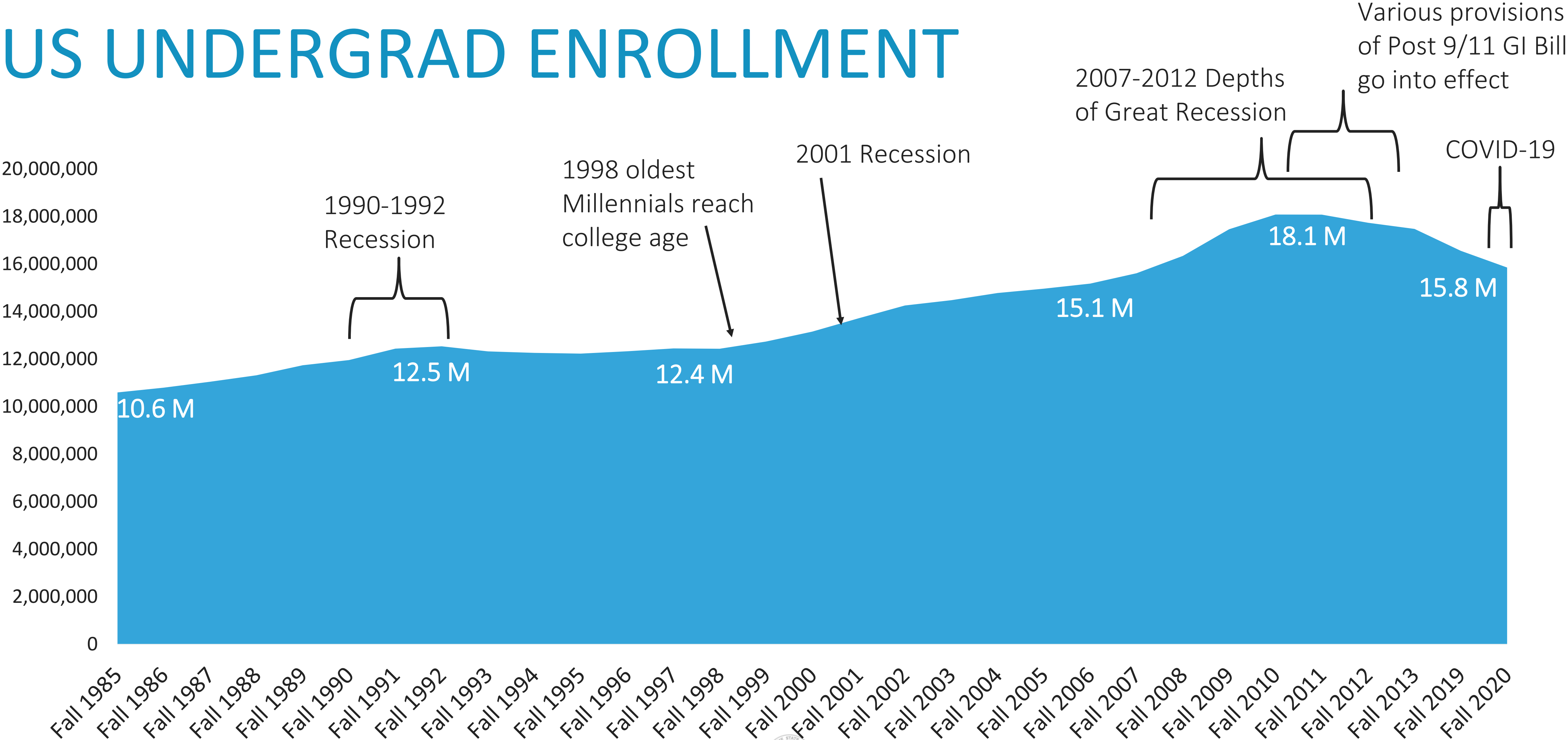
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# THE PANDEMIC AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

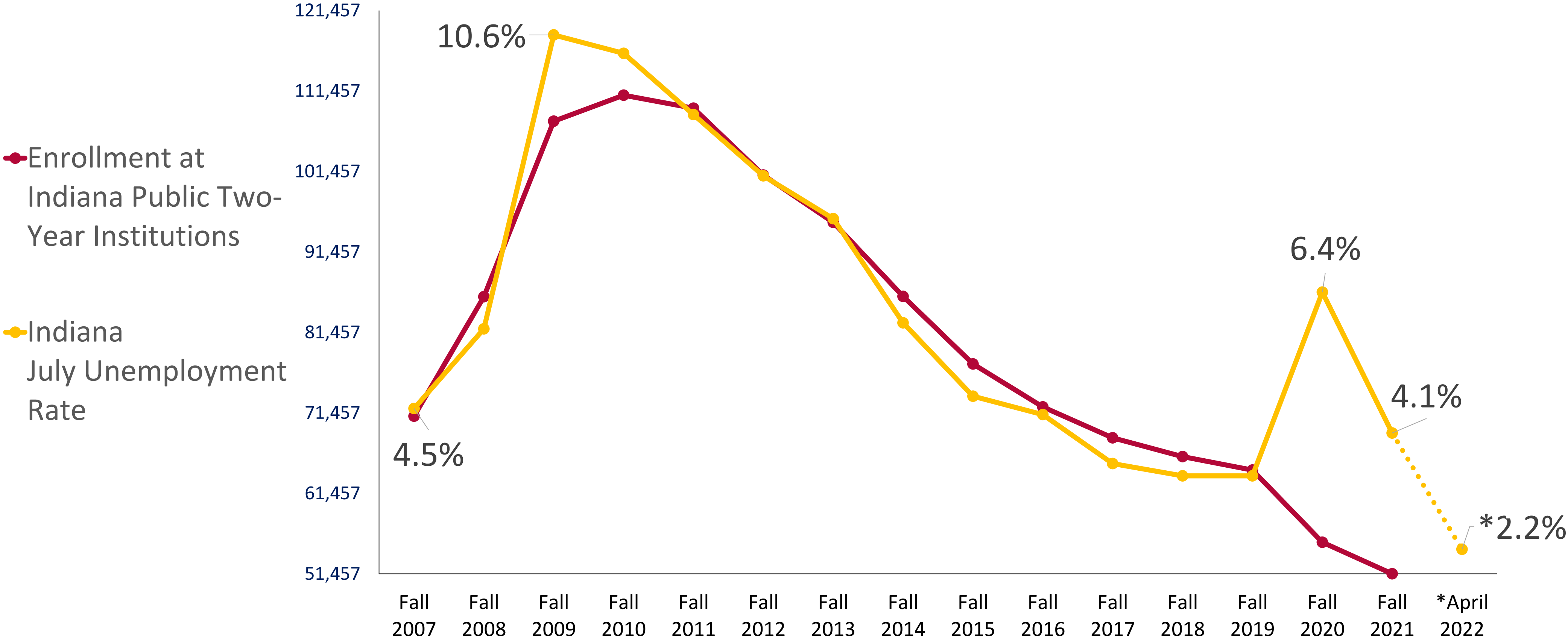




# US UNDERGRAD ENROLLMENT



# UNEMPLOYMENT RATE & 2-YEAR ENROLLMENT (SCALED)



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# THE GENDER GAP



# INDIANA'S GENDER GAP

- ▶ **61% of Hoosier women compared to 46% of Hoosier men**
  - ▶ National context: 66% of American women and 59% of American men
    - ▶ The last time the national rate for women was at 61% was in 1988
    - ▶ The national rate for men has dipped below 50% only three times since 1960
- ▶ **The gender gap in Indiana grew from 8 percentage points in 2010 to 14.5 percentage points in 2020**
- ▶ **Women are more likely to earn Academic Honors Diplomas in high school**
- ▶ **¼ of women major in a health profession**



**INDIANA COMMISSION *for***  
**HIGHER EDUCATION**