



# Adaptive Enrollment

## Evolving Enrollment for Today's Learners

**The Council of Independent Colleges  
2026 State Councils Annual Conference**

**David Macoubrie  
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Portrait of Aunt Pepa

Completed 1896

Realism





Guernica

Completed 1937

Cubism

# What does Picasso have to do with enrollment?



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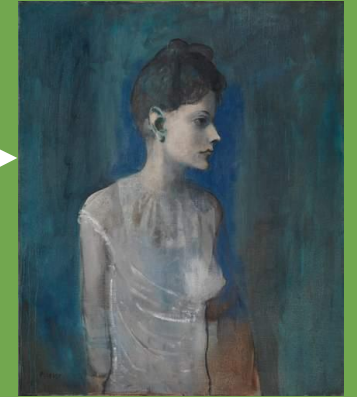
# What does Picasso have to do with enrollment?



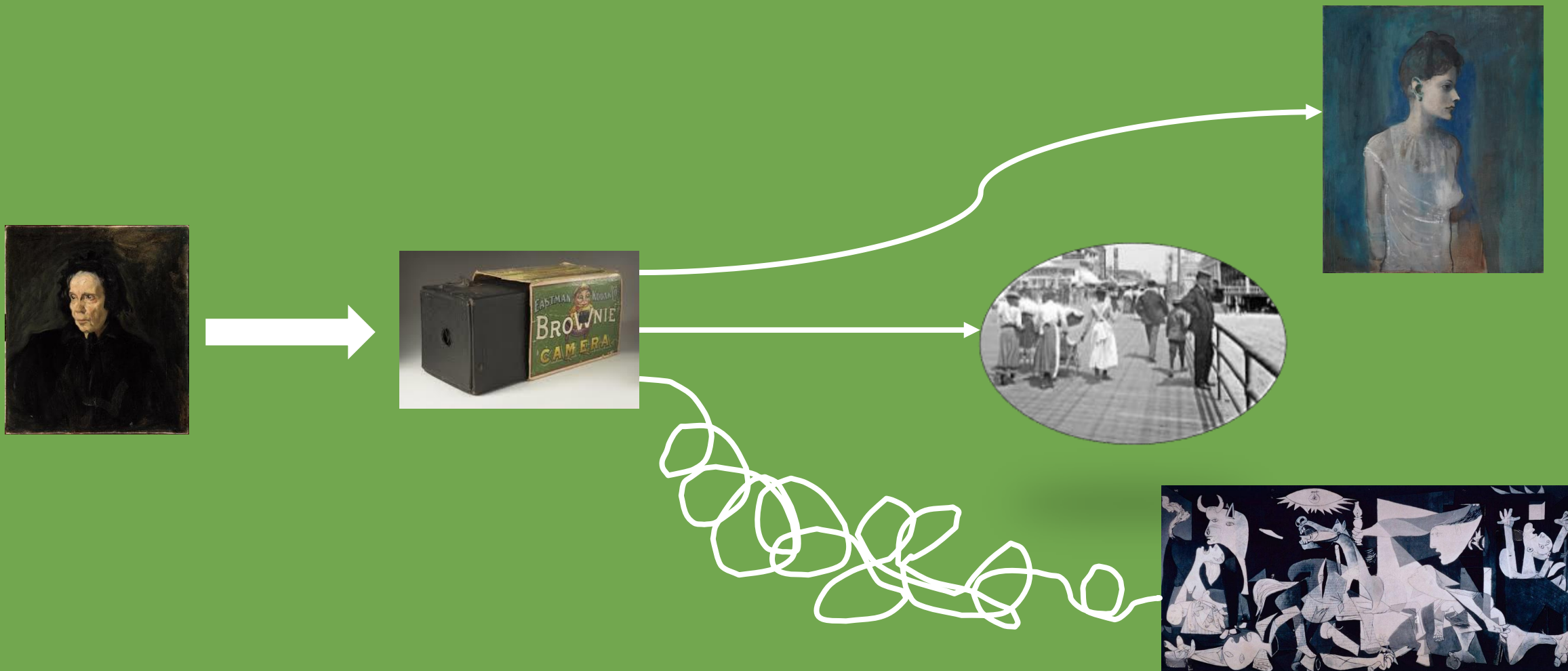
# The world is changing



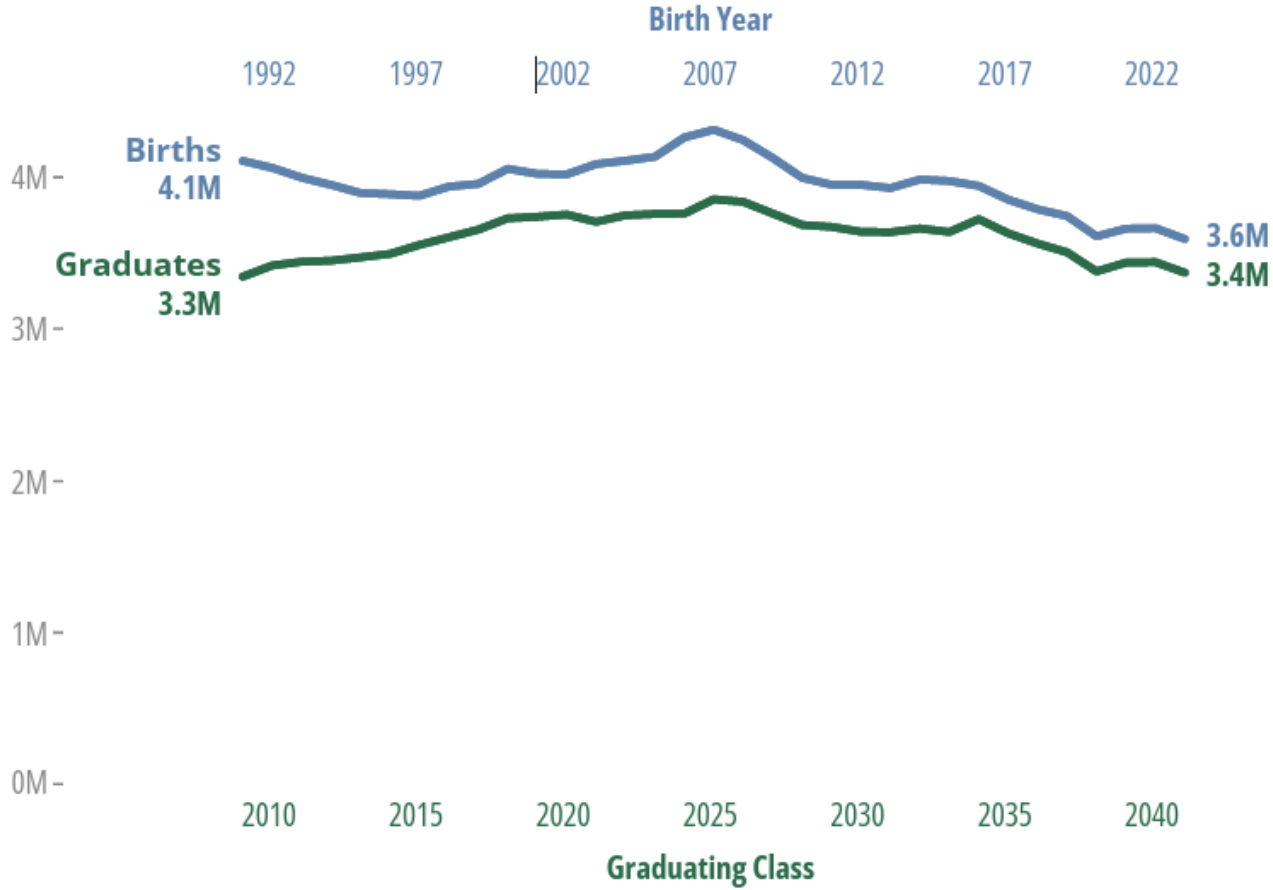
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# Births and projected high school graduates 18 years later

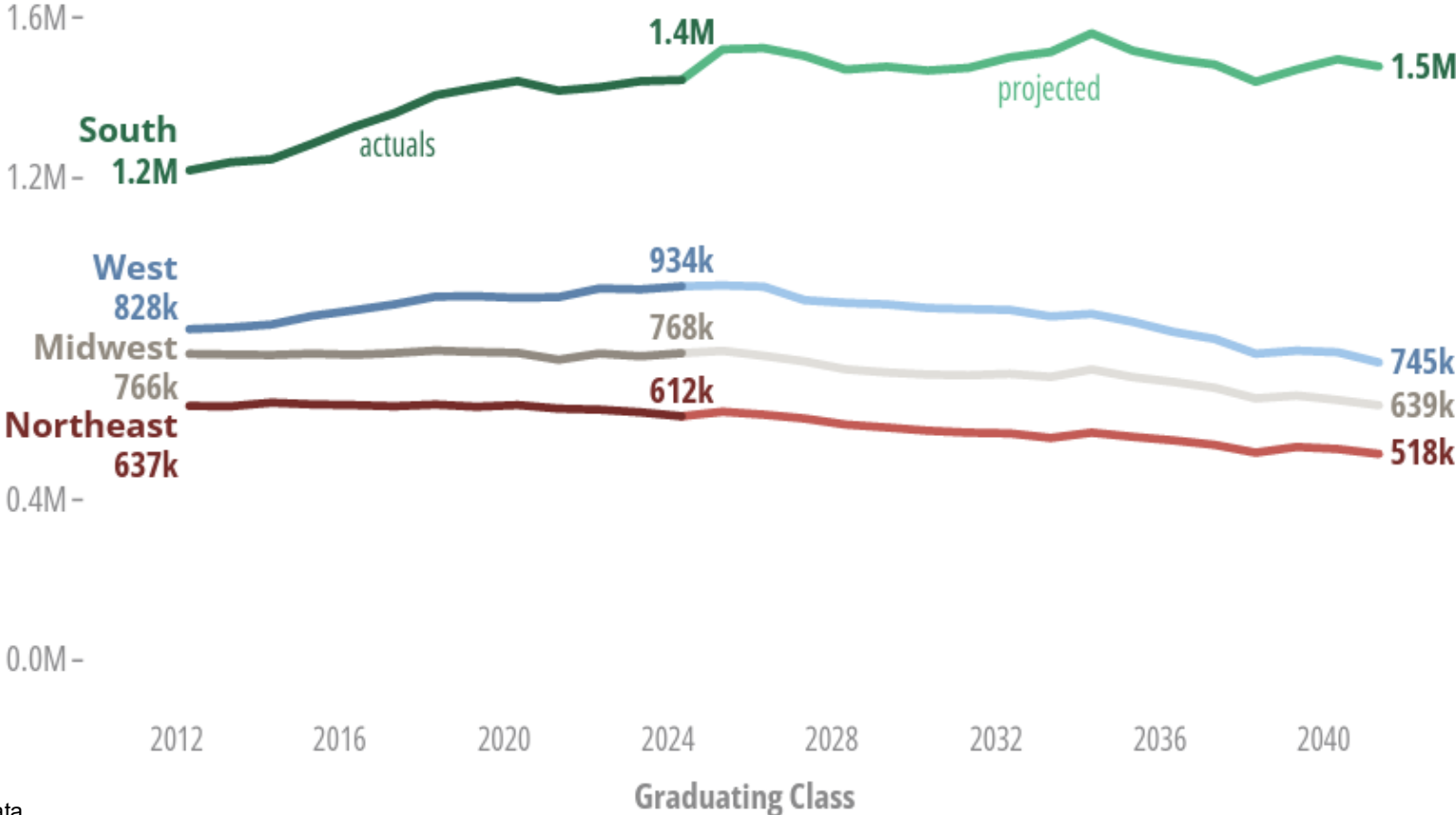


Sources: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Births, provisional data for 2023" and WICHE analysis of state graduation data.

<https://www.wiche.edu/knocking/>

# Reported and projected high school graduates by region

Figure 18. Reported and projected high school graduates by region



Source: WICHE *Knocking at the College Door*, December 2025, analysis of state graduation data .



FREE TUITION



## State Initiatives

### Free Tuition

- Tuition waivers designed to specifically support low- and middle-income families
- Approximately 17 states offering free community college
- Almost all 50 state have a "Promise" type program

## Community Colleges Offering Bachelors Degrees

# International Student Enrollment

- **Increased Volatility**
- **International Competition**
  - U.K. universities accepted 10% more U.S. undergraduates (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service Report 8/14/2025)
  - Australia universities accepted 7% more U.S. Undergraduates (IIE's 2025 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange)
- **What can be done?**
  - Assume policy volatility is the new normal
  - Reduce exposure to any one country
  - Explore partnerships with dual international enrollment or online classes
  - Retain the existing students

# A Path Back to Completion



- 36 million students with some credit, no degree
- State Initiatives:
  - Project Kitty Hawk
  - Michigan ReConnect
- Invite previous students who stopped out to re-engage

# Activating Your Stop-Out Pipeline

- Preferred partner for adult learners
  - Private colleges are a family for families, you're not a number here
  - Flexible schedules for classes, we understand your work and family needs
- Streamlined re-admission
  - Credit audits completed upfront
  - Clear path to completion
- Financial aid initiatives
  - Small balance forgiveness
  - Completion scholarships
  - Flexible payment options



# AI Is Reshaping College Search

- What's changing:
  - Search → Conversation
    - Emphasis on value and outcomes based on a series of questions versus one search
  - Lists → Answers
    - No more blue links, now synthesized answers
    - If you don't show up in an answer you are invisible
  - Websites → AI summaries
    - Website is not always the front door
    - What is student's first impression if not on website?

***Institutions are  
being  
represented by  
AI, whether they  
are ready or not.***

# AI Is Reshaping College Search

## *Website must:*

- Optimize for AI Discovery. AI tools don't "browse" like humans, they extract and synthesize structured information.
  - Clear and structured program information
  - Transparent pricing and outcomes
  - Strong, consistent message
- Focus on outcomes and value. AI tools prioritize, graduation rates, job placement, and ROI.



***Students are no longer searching for colleges, they're asking AI to decide with them.***

# Value Proposition – Cost vs Worth

- Lead with Outcomes, Not Inputs
  - Students don't enroll in inputs, they enroll in outcomes
- Differentiate Through Mission and Experience
  - Strong community and deeply aligned mission
- Lean Into Strengths
  - Define who you serve best and focus on them

“The best way to predict  
the future is to create it.”

— Peter Drucker

*Focused on students. Committed to completion.*



# Questions