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The Changing Landscape of Undergraduate Physics

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The National Task Force on Undergraduate Physics was convened by APS, AAPT and AIP to study the steep decline in the number of physics majors that occurred during the 1990s. The Task Force conducted project SPIN-UP (Strategic Programs for Innovations in Undergraduate Physics) to investigate why some departments were thriving while others are losing majors. With support from the ExxonMobil Foundation, we conducted site visits to 21 "thriving" departments and have worked with the AIP statistics program to survey the 562 departments that grant undergraduate degrees in physics. The results of the study identified key ingredients in thriving departments and essential elements needed to make changes that respond to the changing environments in which physics departments find themselves. Today, enrollments in undergraduate physics are climbing again. We need to ensure that this positive trend continues and ensure that we attract women and members of underrepresented groups to the study of physics.