

2020

ONLINE COLLEGE STUDENTS

*Comprehensive Data on
Demands and Preferences*

WILEY
EDUCATION SERVICES

Education
Dynamics[®]

ONLINE COLLEGE STUDENTS 2020

Comprehensive Data on Demands and Preferences

A joint project of Wiley Education Services and Aslanian Market Research, a division of EducationDynamics

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Foreword

Now in its ninth year, the Wiley Education Services' annual *Online College Students* report, in partnership with Aslanian Market Research, a division of EducationDynamics, is the latest culmination of market-leading insights into online learner perceptions, behaviors, and the evolving online education landscape.

Throughout the years in which we have produced our reports, more than 15,000 fully online learners have been surveyed. We are pleased that the data continue to shape administrative decision-making and have become instrumental in empowering institutions to better understand and adapt to changing student behaviors. Each yearly report has been downloaded more than 2,000 times and has served as the benchmark for numerous college administrators' decisions surrounding online learning.

Year-over-year, we've found that many trends have remained consistent. For example, online learners continue to prefer institutions close to their home, along with making decisions based on factors such as affordability or reputation. On the other hand, newer trends have emerged in recent years, such as the overwhelming preference for alternative modes of access to online coursework and communications.

This year, our report's findings are decidedly more relevant considering COVID-19, which has impacted and will continue to impact higher education in meaningful ways. Now more than ever, it is important to understand who the online learner is and what their preferences are, as many colleges and universities may be preparing to transition more programs online soon.

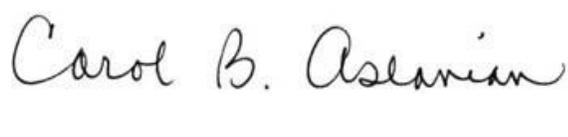
It should be noted that this year's report findings reflect online learners surveyed in January and February of this year and are focused on the traditional population of learners seeking to enroll or who have enrolled in online programs. Therefore, findings are not representative of students who are now experiencing remote or online learning as a result of COVID-19. This is a distinction worth noting as you continue reading.

We hope this report supports you in better understanding online education and in delivering programs that best fit the needs of learners today and in the future.

Be Well.



Todd Zipper,
President, Wiley Education Services



Carol Aslanian,
President and Founder, Aslanian Market Research,
a division of EducationDynamics



INTRODUCTION

The higher education marketplace has been in an unprecedented decline for close to a decade.¹ However, despite the struggles of the broader industry, online enrollment continued to grow for much of this time.² Given the sustained growth of online programs, competition continues to rise as more institutions launch online offerings. More than 70% of colleges and universities expect to launch one to four new online undergraduate programs over the next three years.³

Online learners are different from those who typically enroll in campus-based, face-to-face programs. This report provides higher education leaders with the data they require to help recruit, maintain, and graduate online college students from their respective institutions.

Programs and institutions must stand out among competitors in order to continue long-term growth and success. We hope the data in this report can help institutions decide what their unique value proposition is for their segment of the broader marketplace.

This is the ninth edition of *Online College Students*. This year's report is based on a survey conducted by Wiley Education Services and Aslanian Market Research, a division of EducationDynamics, in early 2020 of more than 1,500 past, present, and prospective online college students across the nation. The survey that underpins this report has evolved. Some questions remain nearly every year, while those with more consistent responses rotate to identify significant shifts in attitudes. We urge colleges and universities interested in serving the online student population to review the past Online College Students reports as well. Please visit edservices.wiley.com/resources and www.educationdynamics.com/e-books to access those reports.

We hope online education leaders will find the following information useful in expanding access and improving the quality of their programs. Recommendations for online programs based on survey findings and our collective experiences are presented throughout each section.

KEY FINDINGS

Below is a summary of key findings within this report.

Based on this survey and previous surveys, we know the top factors for learners when choosing to invest in their online education include the following:



COST IS NOT THE ONLY FACTOR INFLUENCING STUDENTS' CHOICES.

More than half of students cite affordability as their most important factor when evaluating online programs. Colleges and universities could take multiple steps to provide their students with value, including lowering their tuition if possible or adjusting other elements that add cost to a program.

For example, the length of the program influences affordability. Schools could minimize the total credits needed to graduate or try to accept as many credits as possible from past student learning via prior learning assessments, American Council on Education credits, credit by exam, and more. Two-thirds of undergraduate students have credits that could transfer.

Scholarships are another option for institutions to consider. They were the second most popular affordability factor in terms of influence. A \$500 annual scholarship could be enough to sway 26% of students to choose one school over another.

In the end, 78% of online college students believe their program was worth the overall cost.



ONLINE STUDENTS WANT TO FEEL PRIDE IN THEIR INSTITUTION.

Reputation has consistently been the second most important factor for online college students when selecting a school or program. Sixty-four percent of students are willing to pay more in tuition if they feel they are gaining something from it. Thirty-nine percent of respondents would consider that gain to be the reputation of the school.

Although they study online, many students want to visit campus or associate themselves with the institution. Seventy-five percent of respondents chose a school within 50 miles of their home address. Their proximity to the school allows them to tout their local credentials to employers. The proximity also allows more than 10% to attend on-campus sporting events and 9% to participate in student activities on campus.

This bond with campus and desire to affiliate with the overall reputation of their institution compels 12% of past students to donate to their alma mater, 22% of them to refer new students to the school, and more than one-third to enroll in additional courses once they complete their degree.



LEARNERS SEEK THE QUICKEST PATH TO COMPLETION.

The third most important factor for online college students is the ability to apply transfer credits toward their degree program. This attribute intertwines with affordability, as well as time to completion of degree programs.

Online college students are interested in speed during all aspects of their program, from the point of starting their search to submitting their first application. Forty-seven percent of respondents submit their applications in four weeks or less. On average, learners consider one or two institutions, which makes providing them with all the needed information during the enrollment process paramount to successful recruitment.

Hurdles that schools can attempt to reduce for students include financial aid processes and transfer credit policies, both of which influence time to completion.

IF YOU DO NOT BUILD IT, THEY CANNOT COME.

More than half of online college students note that if their online program were not available at their chosen school, they would look for a similar online program elsewhere. Notably, they would not consider enrolling in an on-campus program or pursue another field of study at their chosen college or university.

ONLINE LEARNERS EXPECT SPEED AT ALL POINTS OF THE PROCESS.

As noted earlier, 47% of online college students submit their first application within four weeks of beginning their search. They value speed throughout their enrollment and studies, including the acceptance of transfer credits to help accelerate their time to completion. Online college students are motivated by their careers, including career changes or earning raises. Therefore, they are looking for the quickest way to achieve their goals.

THE MYTH THAT ONLINE STUDENTS DON'T NEED CAREER SERVICES IS FALSE.

More than 80% of institutions offer career services in some form for online learners. Up to half of online college students take advantage of at least one of these services. Online college students are career professionals, but they still need career guidance. Although three-quarters are employed at least part-time, nearly half are looking to start a new career and need support.

MOOCS REMAIN ON THE PERIPHERY.

Although massive open online courses (MOOCs) were a hot point of discussion in higher education not long ago, the number of current or prospective students who have enrolled in a MOOC previously remains low at just 13%. Of those who have enrolled in a MOOC previously, more than half are unsure if they are a proper route to their goals or if their employers value them. When comparing the value of a MOOC to a course that was part of their degree program, 38% of respondents felt a MOOC was on par with a credit-bearing course.

STUDENTS WANT TO LEARN ON-THE-GO.

Seventy-four percent of online college students want to use their mobile devices, such as a phone or tablet, to help them progress through their courses no matter where they are. Most of these on-the-go students use these devices to complete readings or to view videos. Some communicate with their instructors or fellow students. These interactions with faculty or classmates are crucial to student success, as highlighted in *Online College Students 2019*.

SECTION 1

UNDERSTANDING THE ONLINE COLLEGE STUDENT



Choosing a School and Program

In the past seven reports, affordability has been the most significant factor for online college students. That remains the case in this edition. About half of respondents said it was the most important factor to them.

Reputation continues to be the second most important aspect for students when they are choosing where to enroll. Being awarded academic credit for life experience and a quicker path to completion are vital factors for learners, as well.

What are the most important factors in your decision about the school in which to enroll for an online program?

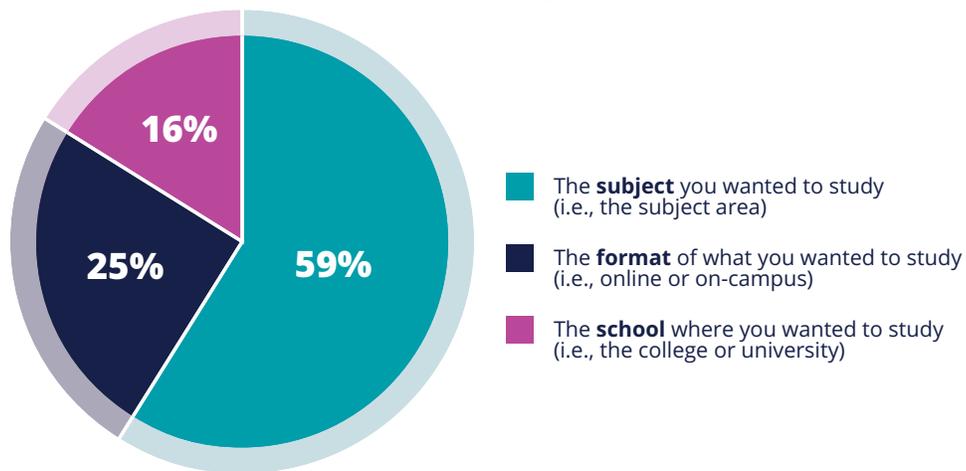
Affordability	51%
Reputation of the school/program	36%
The school awarded academic credit for my work/life experience	29%
Offered quickest path to a degree	28%
I can take both online and on-campus courses during my program	27%
Proximity to where I live or work	22%
Quality of faculty	21%
Had favorable admissions requirements	15%
Recommendation of people I respect	15%
The school's mission/values align with my values	14%
Familiarity with the school	13%
Positive interactions with staff during my search process	12%
My employer had a relationship with the school	11%
Alumni achievements	4%
Something else	2%

Deciding to Study Online

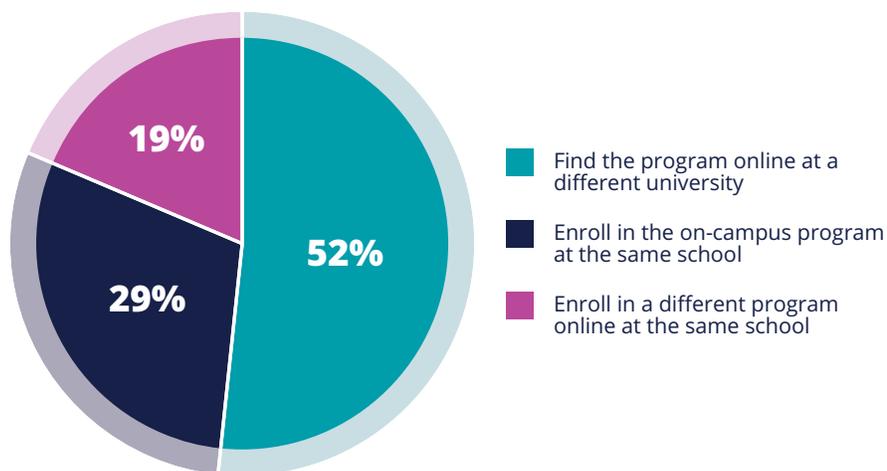
When deciding to go back to school, students stated their chosen subject of study was more important than the format or institution. Other factors are not enough to sway learners if their program of choice is unavailable. Therefore, colleges and universities must offer programs students want.

When asked about the importance of having the right program as well as an online format, 52% of respondents note that they would rather seek out a school with the right program and format than attend an on-campus program (30%) or choose a different area of study (19%).

When deciding to go back to school, which of these were most important to you?



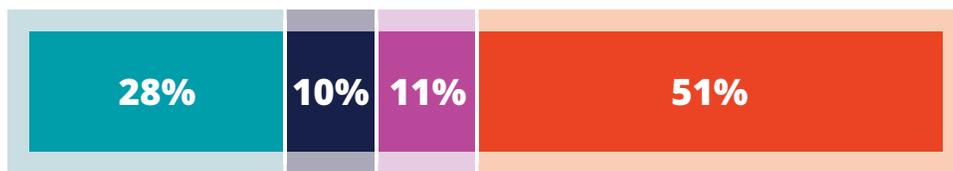
If the program you wanted to enroll in was not available in an online format, would you:



Experience with Online Study

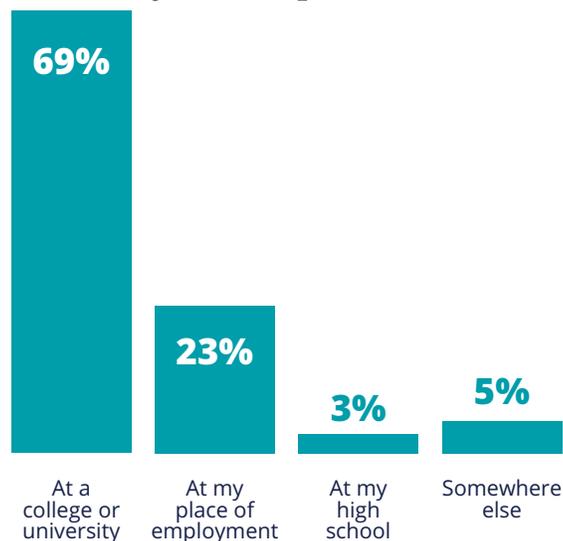
Nearly half of online college students had previous online learning experience, either in the form of individual courses or a completely online degree program before enrolling in their current online program. In a follow-up question to learn where these experiences occurred, nearly 7 in 10 students had completed online study at a college or university. Almost a quarter completed online learning at their place of employment. Despite the growth of online high schools and high school students taking online courses, just 3% of students received online learning experience in high school.

Prior to your online study, had you enrolled in fully online courses or programs previously?



- Yes, I completed individual online courses
- Yes, I completed another fully online program
- Yes, both online courses and programs
- No

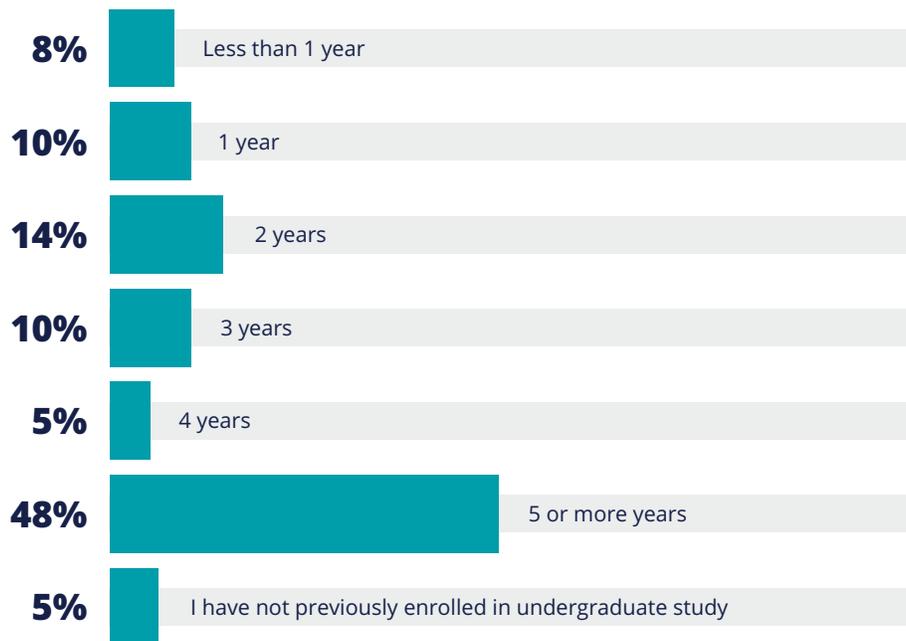
*Where did you complete your most recent online learning?
(if “Yes” to previous)*



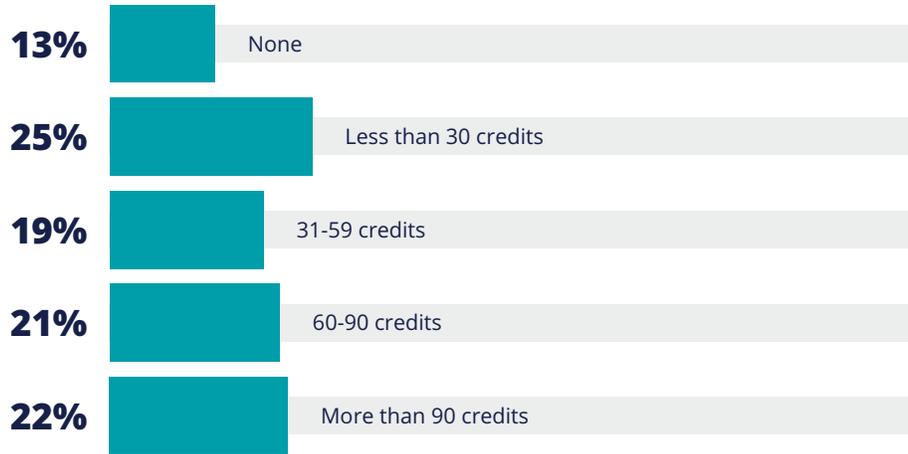
Transferring Undergraduate Credits

Online college students come from varied backgrounds. Unsurprisingly, our respondents were split almost evenly between those who have been out of school for more than five years and those who have been out for less than five years. Eighty-seven percent of undergraduate students entered their program with transfer credits from an average of one to two institutions. These credits were primarily from face-to-face classroom courses rather than online coursework.

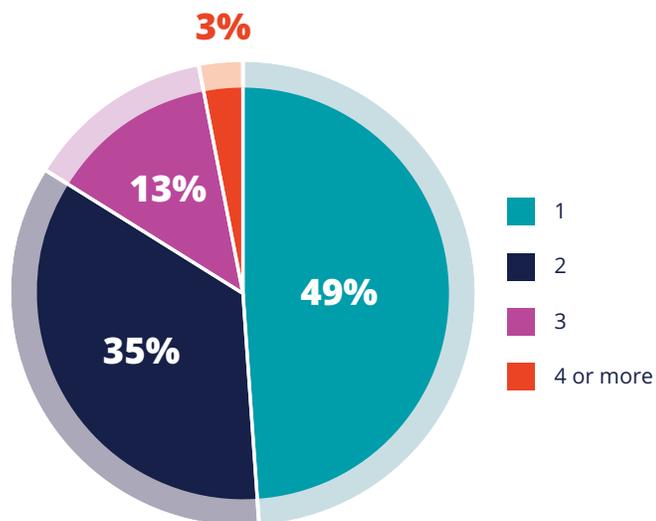
How long has it been since you were last enrolled in undergraduate study?



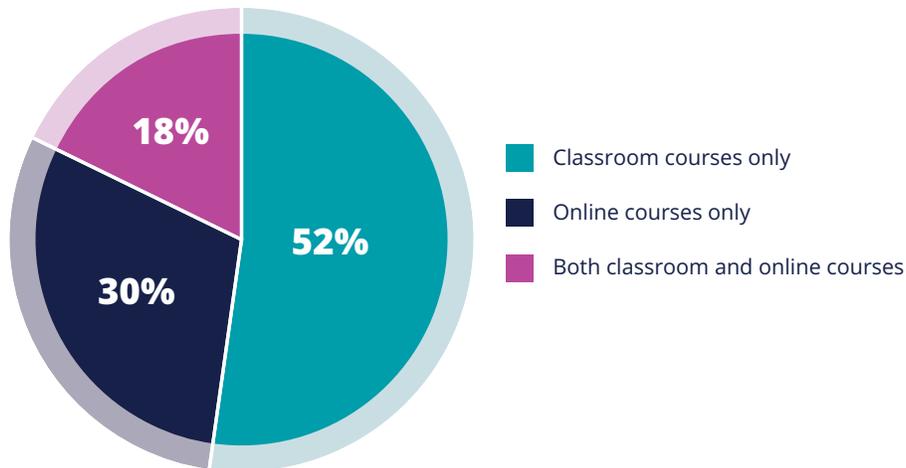
How many undergraduate credits did you earn?



At how many institutions have you previously earned undergraduate credits?



How did you earn your previous credit?



Recommendation

Schools should streamline the transfer credit process as much as possible for undergraduate students. This includes providing examples on the school's website of degree plans for programs and clear transfer credit policies that outline sources of accepted credit. Staff who interact with potential students should be well versed in these policies, as well as average turnaround time for credit assessments.



Program of Study

Survey respondents showed strong interest in business as their desired field of study for online undergraduate and graduate programs. Arts and humanities programs, along with STEM programs, have grown in popularity with our respondents. This year's survey had fewer respondents in education programs at the graduate level.

What was the subject area of your degree?

	Undergraduate	Graduate
Business	29%	26%
Arts & Humanities	15%	9%
Computers & IT	14%	11%
Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics	10%	13%
Health & Medicine	10%	8%
Social Sciences, Criminal Justice, Law	9%	9%
Education & Teaching	8%	20%
Counseling, Human Services	4%	4%
Other	1%	0%



Career Motivations

More than 90% of those surveyed have professional objectives they want to achieve with their program. Nearly half of the students surveyed hoped to change their careers with their new degrees. Career changers were split between those who want a career that better aligns with their interests and those who want to earn more money in their new career. Graduate students are more focused on promotions within their profession than undergraduates. Undergraduates are more likely to be focused on starting a new career.

What is your primary career objective for earning this online degree?

	Total	Undergraduate	Graduate
To start a new career to earn more money	25%	28%	20%
To start a new career more aligned with my interests	24%	24%	23%
To get a promotion within my current profession	14%	10%	21%
To get my first professional/salaried job	13%	15%	11%
To increase my salary within my current profession	10%	9%	11%
It is required by my employer/to keep my current job	6%	5%	7%
Something else	3%	2%	3%
I do not have a career objective for this degree	6%	7%	4%
Recommendation of people I respect	6%	7%	4%

SECTION 2

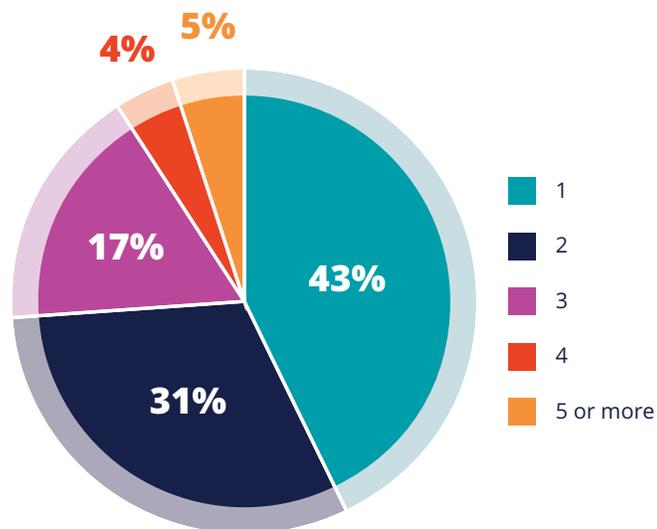
THE ONLINE COLLEGE STUDENT **ENROLLMENT PROCESS**



Number of Schools Contacted

Nearly 60% of online learners contacted multiple institutions when going through their college selection process. Still, more than 40% of online learners requested information from just one school during their selection process. On average, students contacted two schools.

How many schools did you contact or request information from about their online programs?



Application Timeline

More than 40% of online college students decided where to submit applications in less than a month, with 21% deciding in less than two weeks. This rapid decision-making process emphasizes the need for quick and thorough responses from institutions when students first reach out to them.

How long did it take you from the time you first started your search for an online program to completing your first application?



Hurdles in the Enrollment Process

Financial aid and the overall financial process remain the most challenging parts of enrollment for online students to navigate. Eighteen percent of respondents noted the financial aid forms were the most difficult part of enrollment for them. An additional 18% of respondents said determining how they would pay for their education was the most difficult part. Not far behind was transferring credits. The more schools can do to simplify these points in the enrollment process, the easier it will be for potential students to make well-informed decisions about where to enroll.

What was the most difficult part of your enrollment process?

Completing financial aid forms	18%
Determining how to pay for school	18%
Getting previous credits transferred	15%
Completing the application	11%
Gathering transcripts	10%
Understanding the enrollment process	7%
Scheduling courses	7%
Writing essays	5%
Registering for courses	5%
Gathering recommendations	3%
Something else	1%

Recommendation

Institutions should provide preliminary transfer credit assessments, explain scholarship opportunities, and discuss the overall affordability of the program before asking students to commit fully. This information, if presented as non-binding and preliminary, provides students with knowledge about what they may need to finance for their education and allows them to make the best-informed decisions possible.

Influential Sources of Information

When considering what institution to attend, online college students seek information from several sources. When weighing feedback, learners found information from third parties, such as online reviews or the opinions of friends or employers, more influential than direct communication from the school. Placed advertisements, whether on websites, social channels, or billboards, had little influence on potential online college students.

Which of the following were most influential in selecting a school? [Select up to three]

Online reviews of the school	29%
Friends' opinions	21%
My employer	17%
Direct mail from the school	15%
Community college I attended	13%
Emails from the school	10%
College fair or event	9%
TV commercials about the school	8%
Ads on websites I visit	7%
Videos on YouTube	6%
People/groups I follow online	5%
Posts on Facebook or other social media sites	4%
Ads on apps that I use	3%
Podcasts	2%
Billboards	2%
Radio commercials about the school	2%
Ads on Pandora or Spotify	2%
Ads on streaming services such as Hulu	2%
Something else	7%



Frequent Online Activities

Though respondents did not find ads on Facebook and YouTube to be the most influential sources of information, they are likely to see them. Fifty-one percent of learners said they access Facebook daily, and 30% said they visit YouTube daily. Nearly a third of respondents spend time on Instagram or Twitter weekly. Twenty-five percent access LinkedIn weekly, but 32% of respondents did not have a LinkedIn profile. Online students are likely to frequent these platforms and see ads, but institutions should not assume these ads are converting potential students into applicants.



SECTION 3

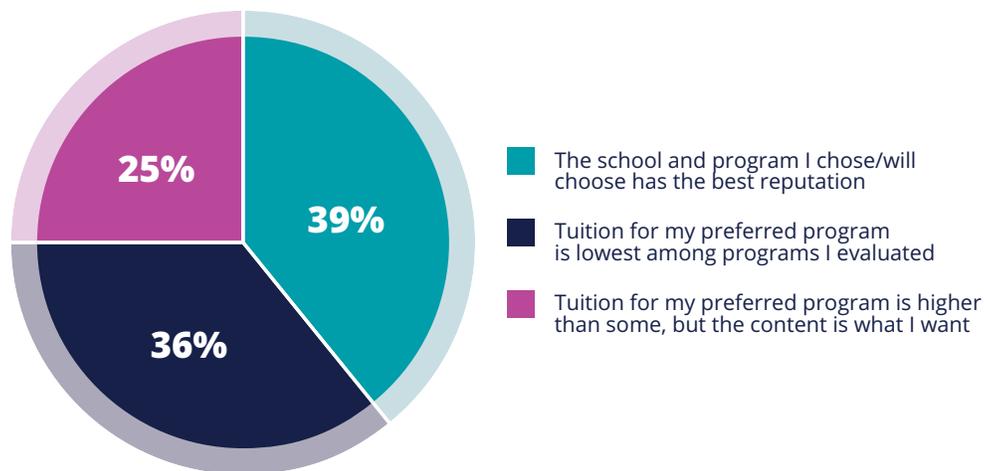
**INSIGHTS ON
VALUE AND COST**



Price and Return on Investment

Thirty-six percent of online college students chose the least expensive program they found during their selection process. For them, the price was the ultimate deciding factor. However, 64% of students would spend more for a perceived return on their investment, such as the reputation of a school or program or a program aligning with their needs.

Which one of the following statements about tuition is closest to how you made or will make your most recent enrollment decision?



The Importance of Scholarships

Given the importance of affordability for online college students, institutions can create value and savings for learners in a variety of ways. Online students appreciate free courses, as well as scholarships. More than a quarter of respondents said a \$500 annual scholarship would influence them to choose one institution over another. Forty-seven percent would be influenced to choose one school over another for \$1,000 or less. The influence of scholarships illustrates the importance of affordability. It also highlights a lack of differentiation among online offerings that allows students to default to price as a leading factor in their decisions.

Which would be the most attractive way a school could influence you to select it over another school?

Free course	30%
Scholarships	26%
Tuition payment plan	19%
Free textbooks	8%
Audit a class for free	8%
Free technology equipment (computer, tablet, etc.)	6%
Alumni discount	4%

The annual scholarship amounts that may sway the online student to enroll in one school over another.

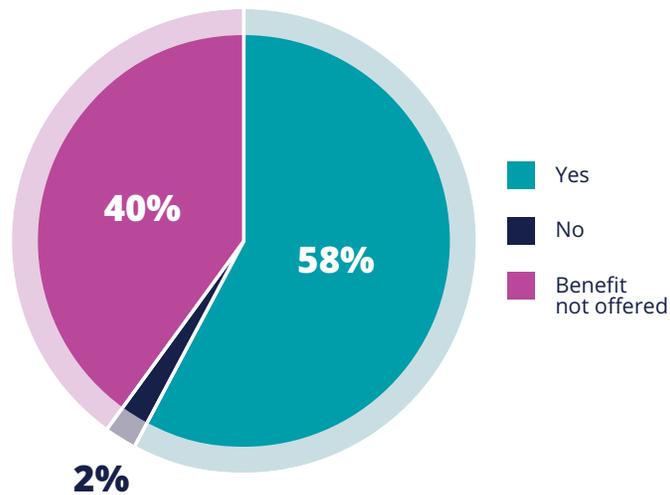


- At least \$500
- At least \$1,000
- At least \$2,500
- Greater than \$2,500

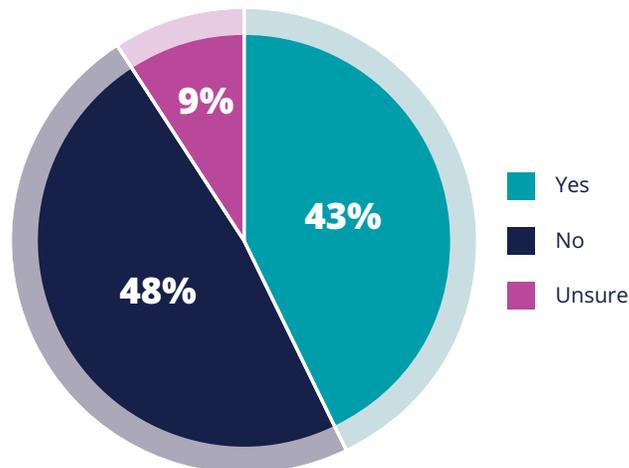
Tuition Benefits and Discounts

Of those learners who were employed, 60% were offered tuition reimbursement from their employers. Nearly all who could use that benefit took advantage of it. Additionally, a significant portion of survey respondents noted that the school they chose offered a tuition discount to their company.

Did you use employer tuition reimbursement?



Did your school offer tuition discounts for employees at your company?



Recommendation

Students want to maximize their benefits. Schools should ask local employers to direct potential students to their school in exchange for a discount on tuition for their employees. If employees can pair those discounts with their tuition reimbursement benefits, they may choose that institution over another. A savings of just \$500 annually could sway as many as 26% of students.

Payment Routes and Debt Incurred

Twenty-eight percent of online college students reported they did not incur any debt from their online degrees. Of those who did obtain debt from their degree, more than a quarter reported it was \$5,000 or less. Forty percent took on more than \$15,000 of student debt. The sources of their debt include credit cards and student loans. Students often rely on employer benefits and scholarships to help pay for their online programs.

How much debt did you incur from earning your online degree / certificate?



*How did or do you plan to pay for this program?
[Select as many as apply]*

Credit card	27%
Employer tuition benefits	24%
Scholarships from the school	22%
Student loans	20%
Scholarships from outside of the school	13%
Private loan	11%
Family member	9%
Other	10%

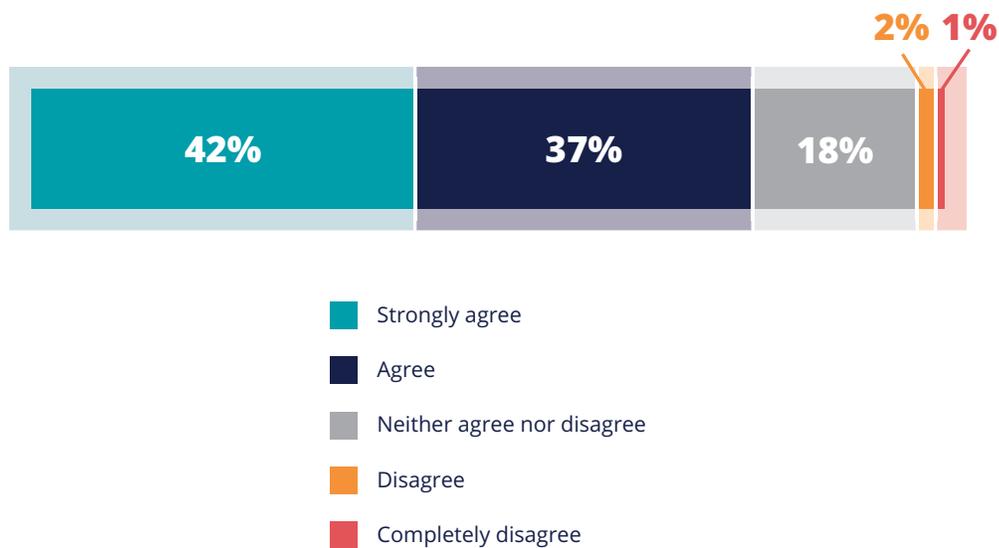
The Perceived Value of Online Learning

Seventy-eight percent of online students who have also learned in a face-to-face setting feel their online experience was the same or better than their classroom experience. Overall, 79% of those who completed their online degree agree or strongly agree that it was worth the cost.

*How would you compare the instruction of your college-level online learning experiences with your college-level classroom experiences?
Online learning is:*

Better	41%
About the same	38%
Not as good	15%
I have not yet enrolled in any college-level online study	4%
I have not enrolled in any college-level classroom study other than my online program	2%

My online education was worth the cost.



SECTION 4

FEATURES OF ONLINE PROGRAMS

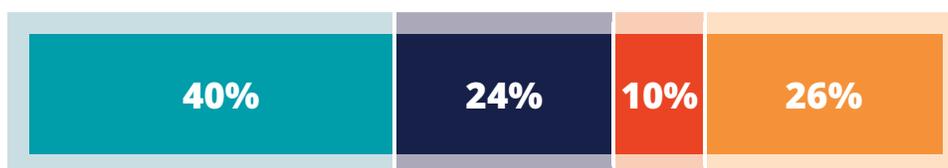


The Use of Mobile Devices for Online Learning

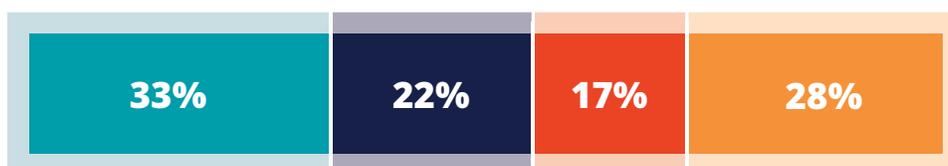
Seventy-four percent of students in online programs want to use their mobile devices, such as a phone or tablet, to help them progress through their courses. Sixty-one percent of our respondents used mobile devices, while 13% wish they could have used their mobile devices to access their course materials. Learners surveyed used these devices primarily to complete readings or to view videos. Respondents also reported using these devices to communicate with their instructors (25%) or fellow students (23%).

Do you complete any of your actual online course-related activities using your mobile device (a phone/tablet but not a laptop)?

UNDERGRADUATE



GRADUATE



ALL



- Yes, most of my course-related activities
- Yes, some of my course-related activities
- No, but I would have liked to
- No, and I would not want to

During your online studies, how do you use a mobile device (phone/tablet but not a laptop)? [Select all that apply]

Completing digital readings	47%
Completing videos or other multimedia learning	35%
Completing practice activities	32%
Completing graded activities	27%
Communicating with professors	25%
Communicating with other students	23%
Researching additional information	21%
Participating in a discussion forum	13%
Something else	1%

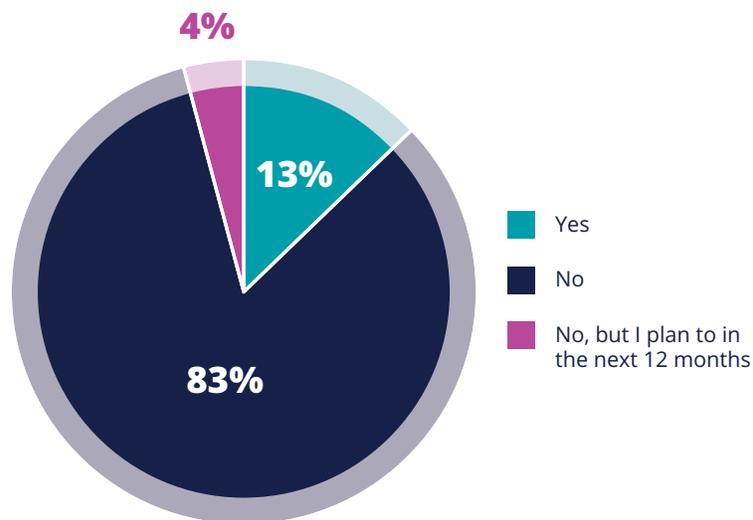
Recommendation

The importance of mobile devices in online learning cannot be overlooked. Today, learners primarily want to complete their readings on mobile devices. However, they will soon want to complete more of their online coursework and class communication in the same way.

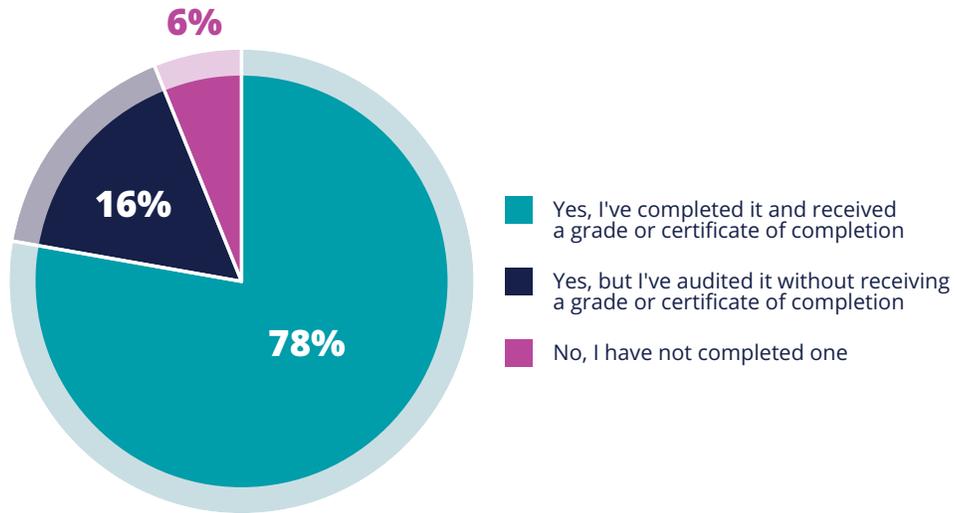
Familiarity and Participation in MOOCs

MOOCs have played a role in higher education for nearly a decade. They have evolved as a vehicle for teaching specific skills and leading students into a certificate or degree program. Despite enrolling thousands of students in a single course, fewer than one in five online college students have enrolled in one. Of the 13% who did enroll, 94% completed the course, even though MOOCs generally have low completion rates. However, most students remain unsure if MOOCs are suitable for obtaining new skills.

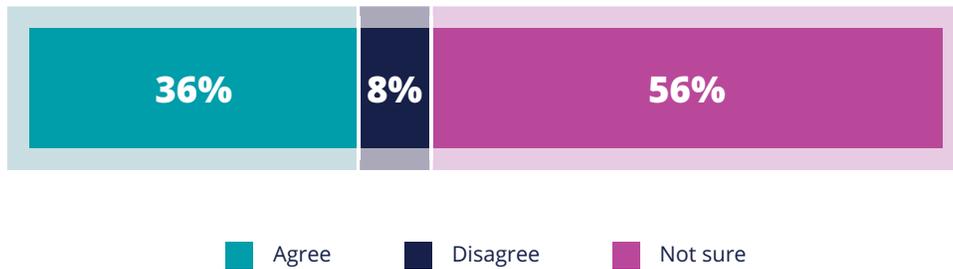
Have you ever enrolled in a massive open online course (MOOC) through Coursera, edX, Udacity, FutureLearn, NovoEd, or similar platform?



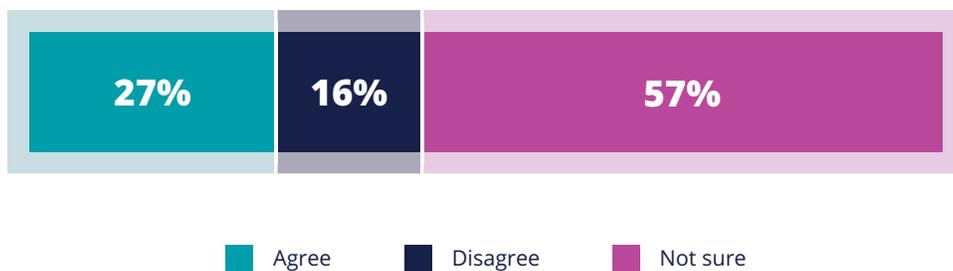
Have you completed a MOOC?



MOOCs are a great way for me to obtain the skills I need to progress in my career.



My employer feels MOOCs are a great way for employees to obtain a new skill.





MOOC Interest

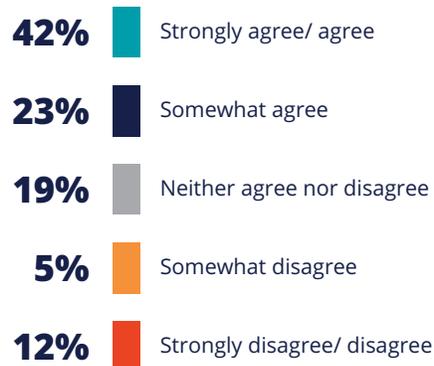
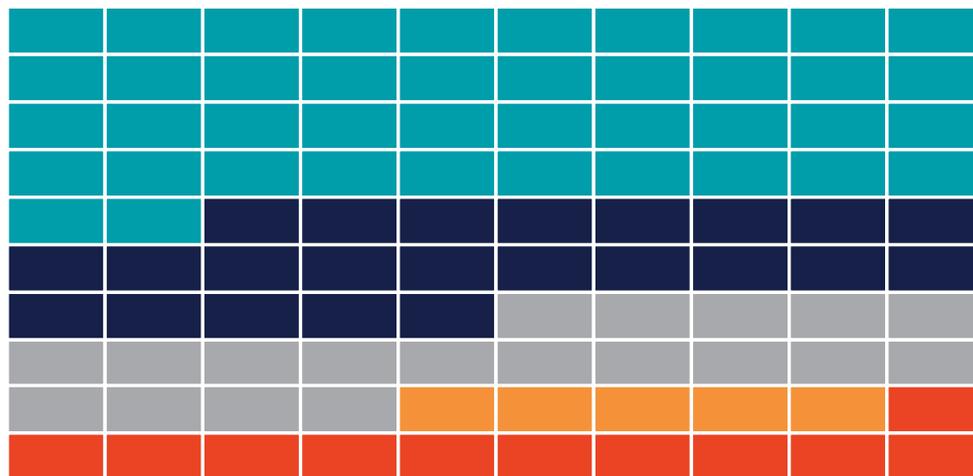
Looking closer at those who have enrolled in a MOOC, we found that most are employed full-time. These learners are price sensitive but value gaining skills to help them in the workplace. For example, MOOC users are more likely to use their employer's tuition reimbursement program and be swayed by scholarships during program selection than non-MOOC users. Those who enroll in MOOCs understand the value proposition of the open course method.



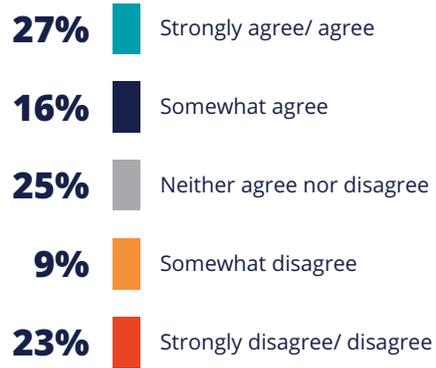
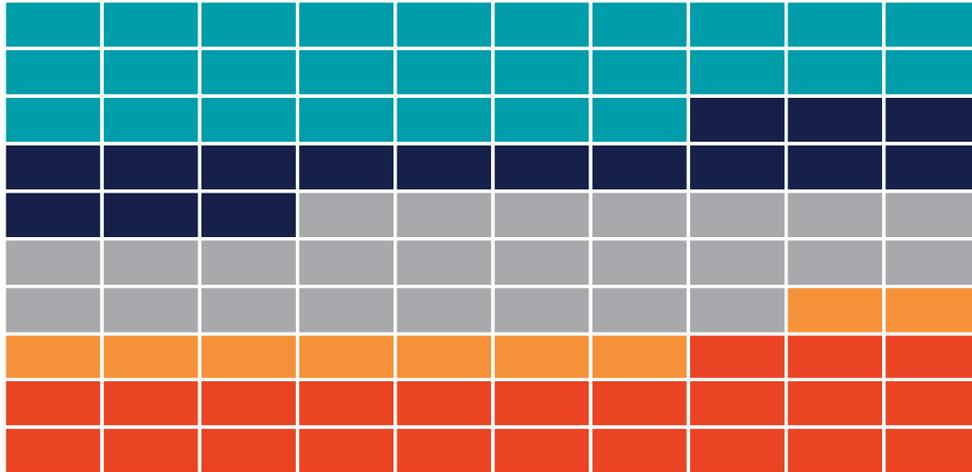
The Role of Residencies in Online Education

Nearly two-thirds of online college students are open to traveling to campus for one class session per course for the duration of their program. Thirty-two percent would not consider a program if it included a residency, such as required time on campus or an off-campus site. However, 41% of online college students would seek a program with a residency component, such as time on campus or an off-campus site.

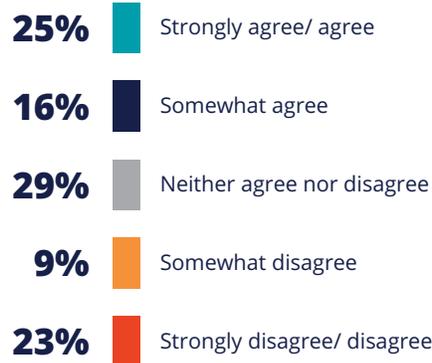
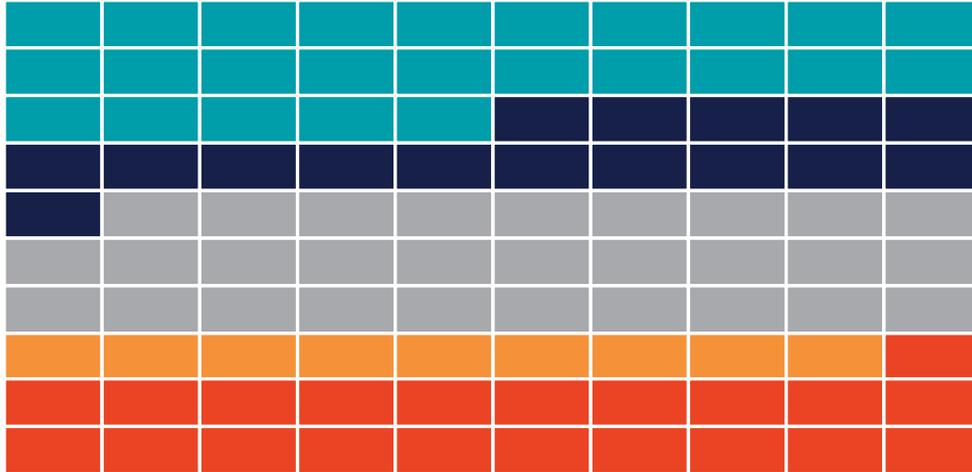
I would be willing to come to campus for one class session per course for the duration of my program.



If a program I am interested in requires a residency, I would still consider enrolling in it.



I would seek out a program that includes a residency consisting of one or more full-day visits to campus.



Distance to Campus and Visiting Behaviors

Online college students continue to seek local institutions for their studies. In 2012, 44% of survey respondents said their campus was within 50 miles of their home. This group increased to 67% in 2019. In 2020, 75% said their campus is within 50 miles of their home. In fact, 50% of students reported being within 15 miles of their campus.

This trend of selecting a school close to home results in more campus visits. Seventy-one percent of survey respondents said they visited campus within the past 12 months. Of those who visited, 27% did so to see an

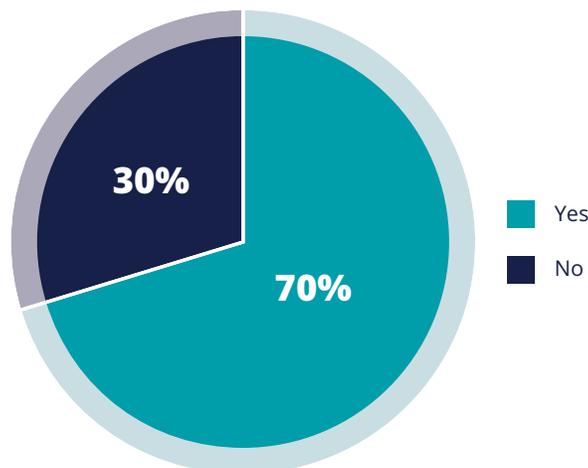
instructor in person, 27% attended a face-to-face session of their online course, and 24% visited to resolve an administrative issue. These visits differ from residencies in that they are not required by the program.

Not all reasons for visiting were related to their programs. Twelve percent reported attending a sporting event on campus. Nine percent took part in a student activity, played a sport, or took advantage of the campus gym facilities.

How far do you live from the closest campus/service center of the school you attend?



Have you visited the campus/service center of the school you are attending within the last 12 months?



Why did you visit the campus/service center? [Select all that apply]

To see an instructor	27%
To attend a classroom session (for an online course)	27%
To make a payment or address another administrative issue	24%
To attend an orientation/information session	22%
To meet a study group	20%
To attend a sporting event	12%
To participate in a student activity/sport/use the gym	9%
Something else	3%

Recommendation

Online students, though seeking the convenience of learning off-campus, still want to be a part of a campus community. Institutions should reach out to this student group and create ways to include them in on-campus activities. These events should not be mandatory, but learners value the connection. Events could include meeting up with classmates at a sporting event, invitations to lecture series, or student and faculty meet-ups.

SECTION 5

PROVIDING SUPPORT AND BUILDING ONLINE CONNECTIONS



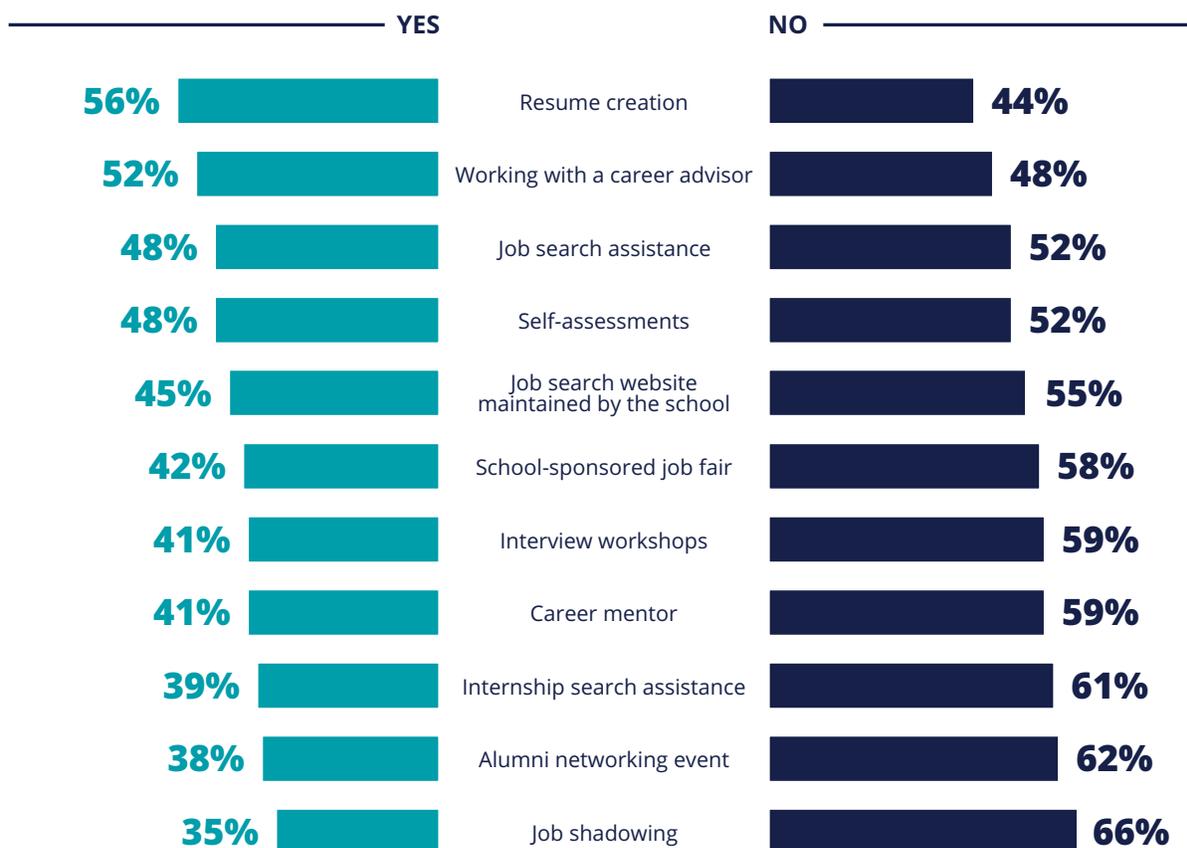
The Need for Career Services

Universities offer an array of career services and guidance to online learners. Eighty-four percent of respondents note that their school offered at least some of the career services we asked about in the survey.

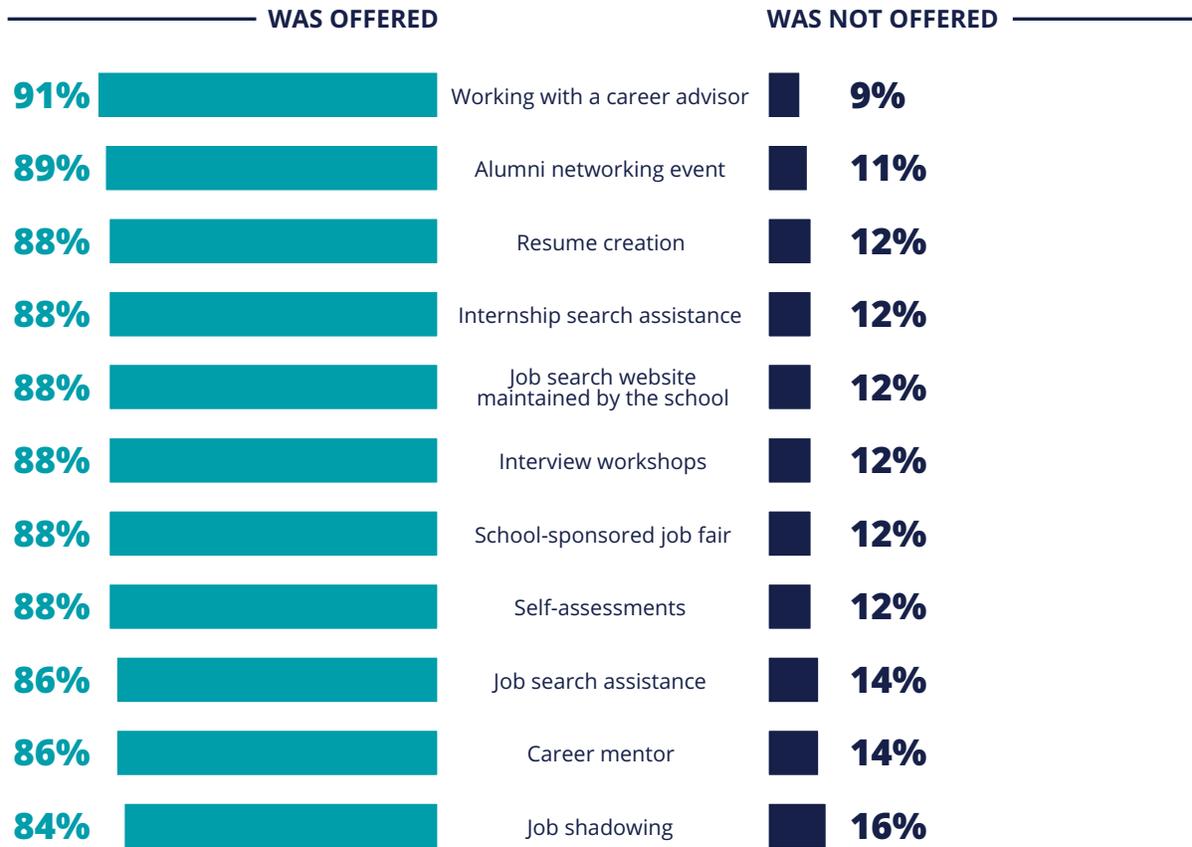
Resume creation, working with a career advisor, and self-assessments are the most used career services, with nearly half of online college students accessing them. Of the services used during their studies, working with a career advisor was the most important to students' success, followed by job search sites maintained by the school.

Job shadowing, alumni networking, and internship search assistance are among the least used career services, with 54% to 55% of online students saying they did not use them.

During your online program, did you use any of the following career services?



During your online program, were any of the the following career services offered? [Select all that apply]



Of the services you used in your online program, which were the most important to your personal success? [Select up to three]

Working with a career advisor	54%
Job search website maintained by the school	37%
Job search assistance	37%
Resume creation	31%
Internship search assistance	28%
Self-assessments	26%
Interview workshops	26%
School-sponsored job fair	20%
Alumni networking event	16%
Career mentor	15%
Job shadowing	11%

Recommendation

Career services may not sway students to enroll in one online program over another, but learners expect them as a fundamental part of the online higher education process. Though some students may elect to use these services in person, as many of these services as possible should be offered online.

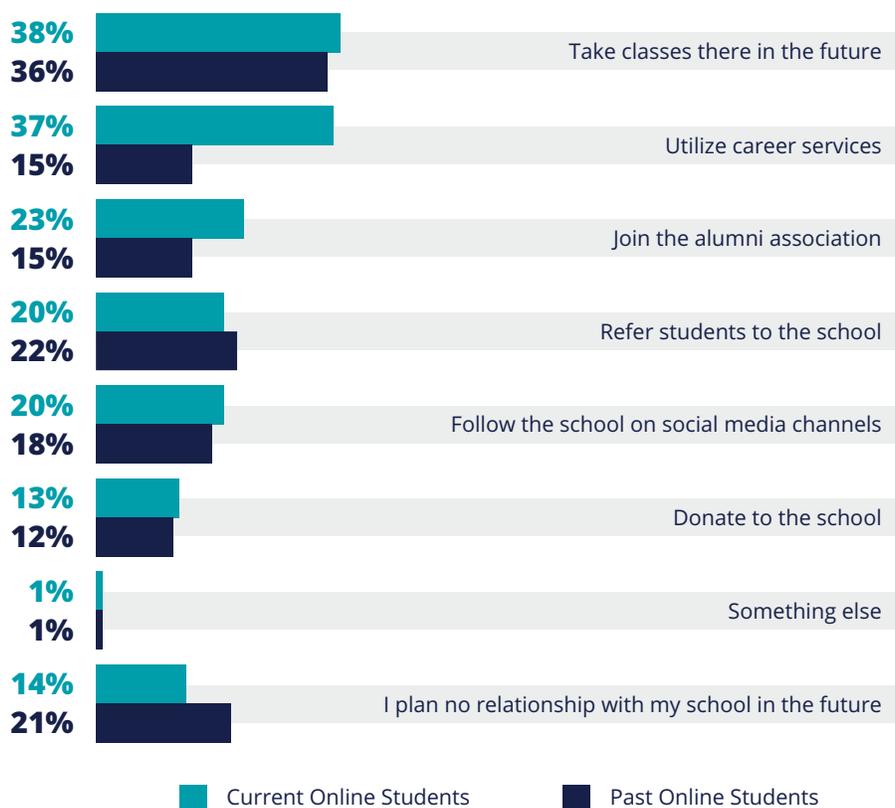
Online Alumni Engagement

Eighty-six percent of current online students plan to have relationships with their schools after completing their online programs. Seventy-nine percent of past online learners reported having some level of a relationship with their former college or university.

Thirty-eight percent of current students plan to take future online classes at their schools, and 37% plan to take advantage of career services offered to alumni. Thirteen percent of respondents plan to donate to their institutions.

These relationships can prove lucrative to colleges and universities long term. Thirty-six percent of past online students plan to take more classes at their alma mater. Twenty-two percent have referred others to their schools, and 12% of online learners surveyed have donated to their schools.

After graduation from your current online school/program, which of the following actions do you expect to take or have taken? [Select all that apply] (Current and Past Online Students)



Recommendation

Alumni are valuable marketing sources for online offerings. With 22% of alumni recommending institutions to others, coupled with the importance of friend or family recommendations during the college search process, schools should encourage former students to post reviews about programs on third-party recommendation websites and to submit feedback to the school directly.



METHODOLOGY

In the winter of 2020, Wiley Education Services and Aslanian Market Research conducted surveys with more than 1,500 individuals nationwide. Respondents were at least 18 years of age, had a minimum of a high school degree or equivalent, and were recently enrolled, currently enrolled, or planned to enroll in the next twelve months in a fully online undergraduate or graduate degree, certificate, or licensure program.

Graduate students represent 15.2% of the total college population but 28.6% of the online population.³ The sample for this survey was weighted to be made up of approximately 40% graduate students to ensure a large enough sample for meaningful conclusions. We combined undergraduate and graduate data unless there were noteworthy differences.

The sample consisted of 1,618 respondents and was drawn from an actively managed, 100% market-research-only panel that represents the U.S. Census Bureau, which enables the selection of groups that prove difficult to source. Up to 250 behavioral and demographic data points on each consumer panelist allow the targeting of respondents for specific research objectives.

To recruit for this study, a panel of consumers from across the nation were asked to participate in an online survey through custom email invitations. Invitations were sent randomly across the U.S. to reflect the basic population distribution targeting persons 18 years of age or older. Panelists were then allowed to participate in the study if they had participated in or were planning to enroll in a fully online degree, certificate, or licensing program.

Respondents hailed from all 50 states. The states that represent 51% of the nation's population (according to the 2012 U.S. Census) represented 51% of the study's respondents. These states included California, New York, Florida, Colorado, Illinois, Texas, Georgia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.

In 2018, 3.3 million higher education students were enrolled in courses that were exclusively delivered via distance education.³ Based on these findings, a sample of 1,500 represents an approximate sampling error of +/-2.5% at a 95% confidence level.

A similar 3% margin of error was achieved in the 2012 through 2019 surveys. Therefore, differences between these survey results and past survey results of more than six percentage points may be significant. We only address differences between the surveys that are at least ten percentage points to err on the side of caution. The margin of sampling error is greater for subgroups.

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

How old are you?

	Undergraduate	Graduate	All
18 to 24	20%	18%	19%
25 to 29	11%	11%	11%
30 to 34	14%	14%	14%
35 to 39	11%	13%	12%
40 to 44	8%	8%	8%
45 to 49	6%	9%	7%
50 to 54	7%	5%	6%
55 or older	23%	22%	22%

What is your gender?

	Undergraduate	Graduate	All
Male	49%	48%	48%
Female	50%	52%	51%
Prefer not to say	1%	0%	1%

What is your marital status?

	Undergraduate	Graduate	All
Married/Partnered	57%	53%	55%
Single	43%	45%	44%
Prefer not to say	1%	1%	1%

How many children did you have under the age of 18 when you enrolled in your most recent fully online college-level program?

	Undergraduate	Graduate	All
None	67%	59%	64%
1	17%	19%	18%
2	10%	17%	13%
3 or more	5%	5%	5%
Prefer not to say	1%	1%	1%

What was your total household income when you enrolled in your most recent fully online college-level program?

	Undergraduate	Graduate	All
Under \$25,000	13%	16%	14%
\$25,000-39,999	16%	12%	14%
\$40,000-54,999	13%	12%	12%
\$55,000-69,999	13%	11%	13%
\$70,000-84,999	12%	12%	12%
\$85,000-99,999	9%	8%	8%
\$100,000-114,999	6%	8%	7%
\$115,000-129,999	3%	3%	3%
\$130,000-149,999	3%	5%	4%
\$150,000 or more	7%	9%	8%
Prefer not to say	4%	3%	4%

What was your employment status when you enrolled in your most recent fully online college-level program?

	Undergraduate	Graduate	All
Employed full time	53%	69%	60%
Employed part time	20%	11%	16%
Not employed	9%	9%	9%
Retired	14%	7%	11%
Prefer not to say	4%	5%	4%

What is your race or ethnicity?

	Undergraduate	Graduate	All
African American	7%	6%	6%
Asian or Pacific Islander	7%	7%	7%
Hispanic	4%	4%	4%
Native American	0%	0%	0%
White	79%	80%	79%
From another background	1%	2%	2%
Prefer not to say	1%	1%	1%

Are you the first in your family to attend college?

	Undergraduate	Graduate	All
Yes	31%	32%	32%
No	67%	68%	68%
Prefer not to say	1%	0%	1%



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2. Encoura and Quality Matters. (2019). *CHLOE 3: Behind the Numbers*.
3. National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). *IPEDS [Data sets]*. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/IPEDS/>

Technical Notes

All percentages in this report have been rounded; therefore, the total percent figure in a table may not add up to exactly 100. Further, if the total percentage is substantially more than 100, it is because the question allowed respondents to choose more than one option.



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