

Online College Students Report 2022



11th Annual Report on the
demands and preferences of
online college students

Education*Dynamics*®



Online College Students 2022

11th Annual Report on the demands and preferences of online college students today

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Suggested Citation: Aslanian, C.B., Fischer, Steven; Rick Kitchell, Creative Manager, Hoboken, NJ: *EducationDynamics*

The authors would like to thank the following colleagues at *EducationDynamics* for their assistance in the execution of this project: Bruce Douglas, CEO; Greg Clayton, President, Enrollment Management Services; Eric McGee, Sr. Director of Marketing & Corporate Communications; Thee Sao, Marketing Manager; Nicole Hagel, Marketing Coordinator; Tracy Kreikemeier, Chief Relationship Officer; Katie Tomlinson, Sr. Director of Analytics & Business Intelligence; and McKenna Serpa, Market Research Associate.



Preface

We have spent the past 11 years speaking with and listening to current and prospective online learners. Over that period, we have gained a better understanding of those students who choose to pursue a degree through online programs. While many of their motivations and preferences remain relatively unchanged during that period, we have witnessed major changes both among the online learners themselves in the ways in which they are perceived by the schools seeking to serve them. The past few years have ushered in many changes in higher education and our society as a whole. We have long believed that online programs, and the students they serve, will play an increasingly important role in higher education and our economy. Our research indicates that students place increasing value on the benefits of online education and are doing so in larger numbers than ever before.

At *EducationDynamics*, our mission is to expand opportunity through education by helping schools understand, find and serve those students who choose a non-traditional path to higher education. We believe the colleges and universities that best understand learner needs and preferences will be best positioned to deliver the programs and experiences to serve this important and growing segment of the college student population.

Our dedicated market research team is pleased to release the latest data from our most recent survey of online college students.

We hope you find our report incredibly valuable to your institution as you seek out new ways to serve and support students who elect to further their education through online programs.

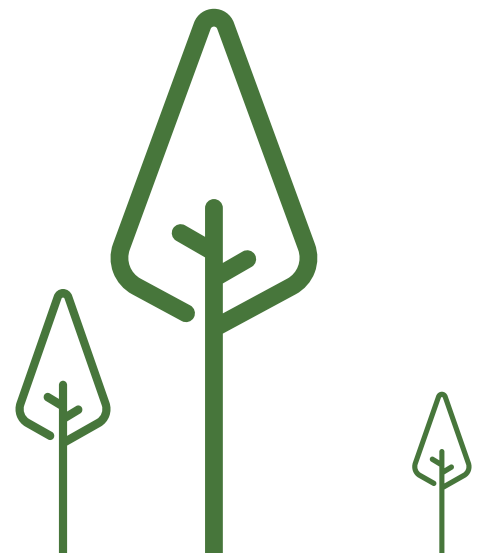
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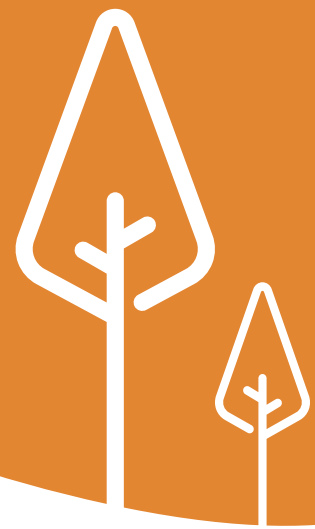
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Introduction

When *EducationDynamics* first began surveying and reporting on the demands and preferences of online college students in 2012, little was understood about this relative niche pocket of students. In fact, even within what was termed “adult and continuing education”, online programs and the students they serve were considered a subset of a much larger group of students. We began the study of online college students because we recognized even then that online students had unique needs and demands, and a better understanding was required if schools were to better serve these students.

Now in its 11th edition, the Online College Students (OCS) Report continues to help schools and higher education leaders understand the students who pursue higher education through online programs. No longer a niche audience, online college students are a growing - and increasingly critical - segment of the overall student population. As overall college enrollments have declined over the past 11 years, we have seen the growth of enrollment in online programs. The increased exposure to online learning during two plus years of the pandemic has also led to wider acceptance of the modality and viability of online programs. Further, demographic patterns and shifts in the economy mean more individuals can begin careers before earning a full degree. More people are electing to pursue higher education while concurrently working and balancing other elements of life. All of these factors have combined with overall improvement in the online learning experience to drive wider acceptance, interest, and enrollment for online programs across the country.

The 2022 Online College Students Report confirms many of our prior findings and codifies long-developing trends. Additionally, it shows how quickly things are changing and uncovers unexpected findings that are likely to define the trends over the next five years. Looking back at data from our 2017 report as a comparison benchmark, we identified the following changes that are having a major impact on online education today.

1) Online Education is growing in acceptance among students.

In 2017, only 71 percent of online students agreed or strongly agreed that online education was worth the cost. In OCS 2022, this number jumped to 87 percent who agreed or strongly agreed that it is worth the cost.

2) Online Education enrollment is growing.

According to NCES fall enrollment data, in 2017, 33 percent of college students (undergraduate and graduate) enrolled in online or partially online study. In 2019, this proportion jumped to 36 percent. In 2020, most likely due to COVID-19, 73 percent of students were considered online or partially online (fall enrollment). While we don't yet know the lasting impact on enrollment growth, it is clear that more students are turning to online programs.

3) Certificate and Microcredential programs are growing.

In OCS 2017, 20 percent of online students were enrolled in a non-degree credential. This has jumped to nearly 25 percent in 2022. Growth is especially pronounced at the graduate level, in which nearly 30 percent of graduate online students in 2022 have enrolled in a non-degree credential, compared to just 21 percent in 2017.

4) Online students are turning to health programs.

Enrollments in health professions have risen amongst the ranks of subject field areas at the graduate level. While the percentage of graduate students remained the same between 2017 and 2022, graduate health degree programs have risen from the fourth ranked subject area to the third.



5) Age is not a determining factor in who studies online.

The median age of online students is older than 30. However, there is also a large, and growing, segment of the online student population under the age of 24 years old.

6) More online students are also employed full time.

In 2017, 53 percent of online students were employed full time. In 2022, 66 percent of online students are employed full time.

7) Online students now devote more time to their studies than in years past.

In 2017, 40 percent of online students indicated that they devote only 5–10 hours per week to their studies. In 2022, only 17 percent of online students cited 10 hours (or less) per week as their study allotment. In fact, 40 percent now devote 11–19 hours per week to their studies.

8) Online students recognize and value schools focused on delivering online study.

In 2022, 33 percent of online students indicate that “schools focused on online study only” was an important consideration in their search. That is up from 24 percent in 2017.

9) The financial aid process continues to be the most difficult part of the enrollment process.

In 2017, the most difficult component of the enrollment process was financial factors such as completing financial aid forms or other financing factors. This has not changed in 2022. There is an opportunity for schools to provide better support and resources in regard to financial aid. Not surprisingly, students cite financial aid advisors as a staff member who is most vital to their persistence and academic success. By a margin of 10 percent, financial aid staff assistance was the most helpful aspect of enrollment. Once enrolled, financial aid advisor was the most important faculty or staff member to a student’s continued enrollment. Forty-three percent of online college students, five percentage points higher than for academic advisors, identify financial aid staff as the most influential contact.





Even as the overall outlook for online education has significantly improved over the past decade, many schools are finding it increasingly difficult to take advantage of the growth opportunity. This is particularly true because more colleges and universities are investing heavily in building out online program offerings, leading to many more options for students. Understanding the unique challenges and characteristics of online learners is key to surviving and thriving in this increasingly competitive environment. With online education now taking its place in the forefront of the minds of students and educators alike, it will be more important than ever for the leaders of higher education to fully understand the online students of today and the future.

SECTION 1:

WHY & WHAT
ONLINE COLLEGE
STUDENTS STUDY



CIRCUMSTANCES OF RESPONDENTS

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION PLANS

For 78 percent of online college students, COVID-19 impacted to some extent their enrollment in a fully online program. Only 22 percent were not influenced at all and had an existing preference to be enrolled in an online program. When comparing undergraduate and graduate respondents, a higher percentage of graduate students indicate a connection between COVID-19 and their decision to enroll online.

COVID-19 Influence on Enrollment Decision	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Not at all – online programs were my first preference	22%	26%	18%
Somewhat	26%	25%	27%
A good deal	35%	32%	37%
Totally – I would have not enrolled in an online program otherwise	18%	17%	18%



TYPE OF PROGRAM

LEVEL OF STUDY

While an impressive 25 percent or so of online college students enroll in a certificate or licensure program, a majority, about 75 percent, enroll in degree programs – most often in a master’s degree followed by a bachelor’s degree. The remaining – close to one-fourth – of online college students – enroll in a non-degree program – typically a certificate or licensing program. While the proportion of undergraduate online students enrolled in a non-degree program is only slightly higher in comparison to the proportion in data collected in recent Online College Students reports. At the graduate level, the proportion of students enrolled in a non-degree program rose from 23 percent in 2021 to 29 percent in 2022.

Credential	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Associate degree program	18%	36%	0%
Bachelor’s degree program	22%	45%	0%
Master’s degree program	29%	0%	58%
Doctoral degree program	6%	0%	13%
Certificate program	20%	15%	25%
Licensure program	4%	4%	4%



SUBJECT FIELD OF STUDY

Online college students most often study business, followed closely by computers & IT. These two fields account for 50 percent of online college students enrolled in degree and certificate programs. The next most common field is health, nursing & medicine, followed by arts & humanities, education & teaching, science, technology, engineering, or mathematics respectively. Social sciences, criminal justice and law along with counseling, human service account for the smallest portion of online college students. It is of note that, at the graduate level, computers & IT is the field most often studied among online college students, followed closely by business. Compared to 2021 data, there is an 8 percent increase in business and a 10 percent increase in computers & IT at the graduate level.

Subject Field	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Business	26%	25%	27%
Computers & IT	24%	18%	30%
Health, Nursing & Medicine	15%	17%	12%
Arts & Humanities	9%	12%	6%
Education & Teaching	7%	6%	7%
Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics	7%	7%	8%
Social Sciences, Criminal Justice, Law	7%	9%	5%
Counseling, Human Services	5%	5%	4%



PURSUIT OF ADDITIONAL CERTIFICATES IN SAME FIELD

The large majority of online certificate and licensure students — 85 percent — intend to pursue additional credentials in their field of study.

Pursue Additional Certificates in Same Field	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Yes	85%	87%	84%
No	15%	14%	16%

PRIOR COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

FULL OR PART-TIME PROGRAM

Sixty-six percent of online college students are enrolled in a full-time program. A noticeably higher portion of graduate students than undergraduate students are enrolled full time. This is a change from previous years when undergraduate students enrolled in full-time programs at a higher proportion than graduate students.

Enrollment Status	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Full time	66%	61%	72%
Part time	28%	30%	25%
Not sure	7%	10%	3%

TIME ELAPSED SINCE LAST ENROLLED IN POST-SECONDARY STUDY

About 50 percent of online college students were last enrolled in post-secondary study within the last two years. This is a sharp decline from 2021 where nearly 70 percent of online college students had been enrolled in post-secondary study within the last two years. Forty-seven percent have been out of post-secondary study for more than two years and 20 percent of online college students have not been enrolled for five or more years in post-secondary study. The proportion of online college students five or more years removed from post-secondary study has grown 10 percent from the 2021 report results. This could suggest that a higher proportion of older learners are returning to school.

Time Elapsed Since Last Enrolled	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Less than 1 year	15%	16%	13%
1 year	15%	16%	13%
2 years	19%	18%	20%
3 years	14%	12%	16%
4 years	13%	11%	14%
5 or more years	20%	20%	19%
I have not been previously enrolled in post-secondary study	6%	7%	5%

COMPLETED PROGRAM WHEN LAST ENROLLED

Among those students who had enrolled previously in post-secondary study, 81 percent of respondents, a majority, completed the program in which they were last enrolled. Fourteen percent more graduate online college students completed their program compared to undergraduate online college students.

Completed Program When Last Enrolled	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Yes	81%	74%	88%
No	19%	27%	12%

SECTION 2:

ONLINE STUDY PREFERENCES & OPINIONS



OPINIONS ABOUT ONLINE STUDY

ONLINE EDUCATION WORTH THE COST

A significant proportion of online college students agree that online education is worth the cost. Graduate online college students make up a larger proportion of students as compared to undergraduate online students who agree that online education is worth the cost. Overall, both undergraduate and graduate online college students surveyed in 2022 are in stronger agreement that online study is worth the cost compared to the 2021 data. Those who strongly agree with the statement grew from 32 percent in 2021 to 51 percent in 2022. This seems to indicate a positive shift in student perceptions of online learning.

Online Study Worth Cost	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Strongly agree	51%	44%	57%
Agree	36%	38%	34%
Neither agree nor disagree	9%	12%	6%
Disagree	3%	4%	2%
Completely disagree	1%	2%	1%
Average Rating	4.3	4.2	4.4



STATEMENTS ABOUT ONLINE STUDY

A majority of online college students agree with selected given statements about online study. Students are in strongest agreement, 86 percent, that online study allows a student to complete studies faster. The smallest proportion of respondents, 66 percent of undergraduate students and 77 percent of graduate students, agree with the statement that they had a connection with their classmates during their study. It is worth noting the two statements where graduate and undergraduate students differ in their response to the statements.

Eighty percent of graduate students feel they have a connection to their teachers during online study while only 75 percent of undergraduate students agree with this statement. The largest disparity in responses between graduate and undergraduate students came in response to their connections with classmates during online study. Seventy-seven percent of graduate students agree with this statement in comparison to only 66 percent of undergraduate students. Overall, both graduate and undergraduate online students agree with statements below regarding online study.



Online Study Statements	Total		Undergrad		Graduate	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Online study allows me to complete my studies faster	86%	14%	86%	14%	86%	14%
In order to complete my studies faster, I would be interested in studying online during the summer months	85%	15%	86%	14%	84%	16%
My personal productivity is improved by studying online	85%	15%	85%	15%	85%	15%
Online programs should include an introductory course about “how to study online” or workshops to prepare students for online study	85%	16%	84%	16%	85%	15%
I was able to easily navigate the technology and learning management system for my classes	84%	16%	84%	16%	85%	15%
Online study made me more motivated to complete my studies	84%	16%	84%	16%	84%	16%
My teachers were prepared to teach online	83%	17%	84%	16%	83%	17%
Online courses should provide opportunities to interact with other classmates socially	83%	17%	82%	18%	84%	16%
Online programs should include “cohorts” of students who have the same career goals in order to build relationships	82%	19%	82%	19%	81%	19%
Online courses should have content related to historic moments and current events which students can discuss together	81%	19%	82%	18%	81%	19%
I had a connection to my teachers during my online study	78%	22%	75%	25%	80%	20%
Online courses should include virtual field trips and/or simulations	76%	24%	75%	25%	77%	23%
A school with a national well-known reputation is preferable to a school based in my community	75%	25%	73%	27%	77%	23%
I would be interested in visiting campus for a multi-day residency (in addition to my online course)	74%	26%	73%	27%	75%	25%
I had a connection to my classmates during my online study	72%	28%	66%	34%	77%	23%

ONLINE PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES

Forty-one percent of online college students believe leadership building workshops should be included in online programs. This is followed closely by an interest in discussions of current events, financial literacy workshops, and an introductory course to prepare students for online study. The highest proportion of undergraduate students feel introductory courses to prepare students for online study should be included in their online program (41%) compared to graduate students value leadership building workshops (44%) with a larger proportion.

Online Program Opportunities	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Leadership building workshops	41%	38%	44%
Discussions of current events	40%	39%	41%
Financial literacy workshops	40%	38%	41%
Introductory course to prepare students for online study	39%	41%	36%
Small group learning communities based on desired goals	35%	35%	35%
Discussions of historical events	32%	32%	32%
Digital meet and greets with other students	26%	26%	26%
Cohorts of students organized by learning interests	25%	27%	24%
Digital meet and greets with practitioners in my field of study	22%	23%	21%
Virtual field trips	21%	19%	23%
Simulations or virtual reality experiences	21%	22%	19%
Some asynchronous learning options	12%	13%	10%
None of these	3%	3%	2%

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATING WITH OTHER STUDENTS IN PROGRAM

With an average rating of 3.8 on a scale of 1 – Not at all important to 5 – Very important, online college students believe it is important to communicate with other students in their program. Graduate students believe it was slightly more important with an average score of 3.9 compared to an undergraduate students average rating of 3.6. If we look at scores of 4 and 5, we note that nearly two-thirds of all online college students, 62 percent, prefer communication with other students to be important.

Importance of Communicating with Other Students	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
1 – Not at all important	6%	7%	5%
2	9%	10%	8%
3	23%	28%	17%
4	27%	27%	28%
5 – Very important	35%	29%	41%
Average Rating	3.8	3.6	3.9



SECTION 3:

ENROLLMENT & FORMAT OF STUDY PREFERENCES



PREFERRED CALENDAR SCHEDULE

The preferred course calendar among online college students is breaks of two weeks between semesters or terms with 32 percent of all respondents selecting this response. This is followed closely by a preference for breaks of one week between semesters or terms. The least preferred course calendar for online college students is breaks of four or more weeks between semesters or terms. Among undergraduate students, the largest portion (31%) prefer breaks of two weeks between semesters and terms. Among graduate students, 34 percent prefer breaks of only one week between semesters or terms. The highest portion across all groups prefer breaks of one or two weeks.

Preferred Course Calendar	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Back-to-back courses over the span of a year with no breaks	20%	21%	20%
Breaks of 1 week between semesters or terms	31%	28%	34%
Breaks of 2 weeks between semesters or terms	32%	31%	32%
Breaks of 3 weeks between semesters or terms	10%	12%	8%
Breaks of 4 or more weeks between semesters or terms	7%	9%	6%





DESIRED CLASS/COHORT SIZE

While undergraduate students most often prefer their class/cohort size to be 15-24, close to one half of both undergraduate and graduate online students most often prefer a class size of less than 25 students. Eighty-eight percent of online students prefer a class/cohort size less than 200 and 10 percent do not have a preference.

Desired Class/Cohort Size	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Small cohort of less 15 students	20%	21%	18%
15-24 students	27%	30%	25%
25-39 students	17%	16%	18%
40-59 student	11%	10%	13%
60-99 students	6%	6%	7%
100-199 students	6%	4%	8%
Large class of 200 students or more	2%	1%	3%
It does not matter to me	10%	12%	9%

PROGRAMS & STUDENT SERVICES

REASON FOR CHOOSING CERTIFICATE OVER DEGREE

Fifty-seven percent of online college students who enroll in a certificate or licensing program cite time as their reason for selecting a certificate program over a degree. This was followed closely by cost (53%) and convenience (50%). Undergraduate students value convenience at a higher proportion than graduate students while graduate students value time at a higher proportion than undergraduate students.

Reasoning for Choosing Certificate/License	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Time	57%	55%	57%
Cost	53%	52%	53%
Convenience	50%	52%	48%
Fulfilled work/career requirements	29%	31%	28%
I intend to complete additional related credentials	25%	25%	24%
Format	16%	19%	14%
Outcomes of program graduates	12%	14%	10%
Testimonials of program graduates	8%	8%	8%
Another reason	2%	2%	1%



ATTRACTIVENESS OF STACKABLE CERTIFICATES

Ninety-six percent of respondents agree that stacking certificates into a completed degree is an attractive outcome. Sixty-one percent feel it was 'very attractive.' Among graduate students, 66 percent find this possibility to be 'very attractive' compared to 56 percent of undergraduate students.

Attractiveness of Stackable Certificates	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Not at all attractive	4%	3%	4%
Somewhat attractive	36%	41%	30%
Very attractive	61%	56%	66%



ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

Respondents were asked to select the alternative pathways for which they would have qualified to earn credit for a degree, certificate, or other program. The highest proportion, 73 percent, indicate that they would have earned credit for work experience. Sixty-two percent indicate they would have received credit for competency-based education, professional license/certification, or examination. Twenty-one percent of online college students were not familiar with microcredentialing/badging.

Alternative Pathways - Total	Yes	No	Not sure what this is
Work experience	73%	22%	6%
Competency-based education (students' progress through program after they have demonstrated mastery of topic)	62%	27%	11%
Professional license/certification	62%	28%	10%
Examination	62%	28%	11%
Credit for life experience	61%	28%	11%
Prior Learning Assessment (learning gained outside an academic environment)	58%	30%	12%
Portfolio	56%	31%	14%
CLEP (a set of standardized tests in various subjects, qualifying scores on which can be used to earn college credits)	55%	31%	15%
Faculty review	50%	34%	16%
Microcredentials/badging	41%	38%	21%
Military Experience/ACE	30%	59%	10%

Among undergraduate students, 69 percent cite work experience as a pathway which would qualify them for credit towards a program. Twenty-four percent indicate they were unfamiliar with microcredentials/badging. Overall, the qualifications for pathway programs among undergraduate students for credit was lower than those of graduate students.

Alternative Pathways - Undergraduate	Yes	No	Not sure what this is
Work experience	69%	26%	5%
Competency-based-education (students progress through program after they have demonstrated mastery of topic)	58%	29%	13%
Examination	58%	30%	13%
Credit for life experience	58%	29%	14%
Professional license/certification	56%	33%	11%
Prior Learning Assessment (learning gained outside an academic environment)	55%	32%	13%
CLEP (a set of standardized tests in various subjects, qualifying scores on which can be used to earn college credits)	52%	32%	16%
Portfolio	50%	33%	17%
Faculty review	44%	40%	16%
Microcredentials/badging	31%	45%	24%
Military Experience/ACE	27%	62%	11%



More than 75 percent of graduate students indicate they would qualify for credit with work experience in a pathway program. Their familiarity with alternative pathways and overall qualifications tends to be higher than for undergraduate students. Professional license/certification is the second highest alternative pathway among graduate students with 68 percent who indicate they would have qualified for credit.

Alternative Pathways - Graduate	Yes	No	Not sure what this is
Work experience	76%	17%	6%
Professional license/certification	68%	23%	9%
Competency-based education (students progress through program after they have demonstrated mastery of topic)	65%	26%	9%
Examination	65%	26%	9%
Credit for life experience	65%	27%	9%
Prior Learning Assessment (learning gained outside an academic environment)	61%	27%	12%
Portfolio	61%	29%	10%
CLEP (a set of standardized tests in various subjects, qualifying scores on which can be used to earn college credits)	57%	30%	13%
Faculty review	56%	29%	15%
Microcredentials/badging	50%	32%	18%
Military Experience/ACE	33%	56%	10%

ATTRACTIVENESS- NONCREDIT PATHWAYS

Seventy-eight percent of respondents who did not or were not able to utilize alternative pathways agree that noncredit pathways would have been attractive to them, had they been offered. Undergraduate students are in stronger agreement regarding noncredit pathways attractiveness, with 80 percent responding “yes”, compared to 75 percent of graduate students.

Attractiveness- Noncredit Pathways	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Yes	78%	80%	75%
No	22%	20%	25%

HELPFULNESS – NONCREDIT PATHWAYS

Similar to attractiveness, 79 percent of respondents agree noncredit pathways would be helpful in completing their degree.

Helpfulness- Noncredit Pathways	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Yes	79%	81%	76%
No	21%	19%	24%

SECTION 4:

CAREER MOTIVATIONS



OBJECTIVES

The top three objectives among online college students currently earning their degree are to start a new career to earn more money (36%), to start a new career more aligned with their interests (21%), and to get a first professional/salaried job (15%). It is important to note that among graduate students, as compared to undergraduate students, a higher percentage indicate increased salary and employer requirements for current job as objectives for their current career.

Career Objectives	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
To start a new career to earn more money	36%	37%	34%
To start a new career more aligned with my interests	21%	20%	21%
To get my first professional/salaried job	15%	17%	14%
To get a promotion within my current profession	13%	13%	13%
To increase my salary within my current profession	7%	6%	9%
It is required by my employer/to keep my current job	5%	3%	6%
Something else	2%	2%	2%
I do not have a career objective for this degree	2%	2%	2%

CAREER SERVICES FOR ONLINE STUDENTS

CAREER SERVICES USED

A large portion of respondents utilize a school's career services during their online program. The top four services used were self-assessments (67%), working with a career advisor (66%), resume creation (65%), and job search assistance (65%). Overall, the availability of services and utilization of those services among online college students is high, reflecting the importance of such services to enrolled online students.

Use of Career Services – Total	Yes	No	Had Available
Self-assessments	67%	33%	91%
Working with a career advisor	66%	34%	93%
Resume creation	65%	35%	92%
Job search assistance	65%	35%	92%
Job search website maintained by the school	61%	39%	90%
Connections with area employers	60%	40%	89%
Internship search assistance	58%	42%	88%
School-sponsored job fair	57%	43%	90%
Career mentor	57%	43%	90%
Interview workshops	56%	44%	90%
Job shadowing	52%	48%	88%
Alumni networking event	50%	50%	87%



Undergraduate students utilize the services at a slightly lower proportion compared to graduate students; however, they have shown growth in their use compared to 2021 data. In 2021, 48 percent of students utilized the top service compared to 65 percent in 2022. The use by graduate students is only five percent higher, indicating a decreased gap between a given service utilized by undergraduate and graduate students in online programs. These data point to the importance of schools offering these career services for students enrolled in online programs as well as increase engagement among online students to seek these services.

Use of Career Services - Undergraduate	Yes	No	Had Available
Self-assessments	65%	35%	89%
Working with a career advisor	63%	37%	91%
Resume creation	62%	38%	91%
Job search assistance	61%	39%	90%
Job search website maintained by the school	57%	43%	88%
Connections with area employers	56%	44%	86%
Internship search assistance	53%	47%	87%
School-sponsored job fair	53%	47%	87%
Interview workshops	52%	48%	88%
Career mentor	52%	48%	87%
Job shadowing	50%	50%	86%
Alumni networking event	48%	52%	86%

Use of Career Services - Graduate	Yes	No	Had Available
Working with a career advisor	70%	30%	94%
Self-assessments	69%	31%	93%
Resume creation	68%	32%	93%
Job search assistance	68%	32%	94%
Job search website maintained by the school	64%	36%	93%
Internship search assistance	63%	37%	90%
Career mentor	63%	37%	92%
Connections with area employers	63%	37%	92%
Interview workshops	60%	40%	91%
School-sponsored job fair	60%	40%	93%
Job shadowing	54%	46%	89%
Alumni networking event	53%	47%	88%



EXPECTATION FOR USING CAREER SERVICES

Sixty percent of students expect to use career services immediately after completing their studies to assist in getting a job. Half of online college students expect to use career services during their enrollment to prepare for the job market. Only 35 percent expect to use career services throughout their career to help them along the way. It is noteworthy that both undergraduate and graduate students share similar expectations of career services for their online program.

Career Service Use Expectation	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
During my enrollment to help me prepare for the job market	50%	50%	50%
Immediately after completing my studies to help me get a job after completing my program	60%	61%	58%
Throughout my career to help me along the way	35%	33%	36%

TRAINING REQUIRED FOR CAREER

A majority of students indicate they were required to enroll in training for their career, 60 percent. A higher proportion of graduate students indicate they were required to enroll (66%) compared to undergraduate students (55%).

Required to Enroll in Additional Training for Career	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Yes	60%	55%	66%
No	31%	35%	27%
I don't know	9%	10%	7%

CAREER STATEMENTS

Using a 5-point scale of 1 – not at all agree to 5 – strongly agree, online college students gave the highest average rating, 4.2, to the career statement “I know what career field I want to work in after I complete my studies.” However, respondents are largely in agreement with all the given career statements.

Career Statements - Total	1 – Not at all agree	2	3	4	5- Strongly agree	Able to Rate	Average Rating
I know what career field I want to work in after I complete my studies	4%	6%	14%	25%	51%	96%	4.2
Online study provides me with the specific skills I need for my intended career	2%	5%	19%	34%	41%	97%	4.1
Online study provides me with the overall skills I need to enter any job (such as management skills)	2%	5%	18%	36%	39%	98%	4.0
Online study allows me to interact with professionals in my desired field of work	3%	6%	20%	31%	40%	97%	4.0

Graduate online college students are slightly more in agreement with the stated career statements than undergraduate online college students. Overall, compared to undergraduate students, graduate students more often than undergraduate students gave more scores of five in rating the career statements.

Career Statements - Undergraduate	1 – Not at all agree	2	3	4	5- Strongly agree	Able to Rate	Average Rating
I know what career field I want to work in after I complete my studies	4%	6%	16%	25%	49%	96%	4.1
Online study provides me with the specific skills I need for my intended career	2%	6%	21%	32%	39%	98%	4.0
Online study provides me with the overall skills I need to enter any job (such as management skills)	2%	6%	19%	39%	34%	98%	4.0
Online study allows me to interact with professionals in my desired field of work	4%	6%	24%	30%	36%	98%	3.9

Career Statements - Graduate	1 – Not at all agree	2	3	4	5- Strongly agree	Able to Rate	Average Rating
I know what career field I want to work in after I complete my studies	4%	5%	12%	26%	53%	97%	4.2
Online study provides me with the specific skills I need for my intended career	1%	3%	16%	36%	43%	97%	4.2
Online study provides me with the overall skills I need to enter any job (such as management skills)	2%	5%	17%	33%	44%	98%	4.1
Online study allows me to interact with professionals in my desired field of work	1%	6%	17%	33%	44%	97%	4.1



SECTION 5:

THE ONLINE COLLEGE STUDENT'S DECISION-MAKING PROCESS



TIME TO DEVOTE TO STUDY

Among all online college students, on a weekly basis, the highest proportion of students have either 11-14 hours (19%), 15-19 hours (19%), or 20-24 hours to devote to studying for their program (19%). Undergraduate students typically have 11-14 hours to study and graduate students typically have 20-24 hours to devote to their studies.

Time to Devote to Study	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
10 hours or less per week	17%	17%	17%
11-14 hours	19%	22%	15%
15-19 hours	19%	20%	18%
20-24 hours	19%	17%	21%
25-29 hours	8%	6%	9%
30-34 hours	9%	7%	10%
35 hours or more per week	10%	10%	10%

ENROLLMENT IN FUTURE ONLINE PROGRAM

Online students who are required to enroll in additional career training agree they will enroll in future online programs. With an average rating of 4.0 on a scale of 1 - Not at all likely to 5 - Definitely, over 70 percent respond positively regarding their likelihood for enrollment in future online programs. These opinions are shared among both undergraduate and graduate students.

Will Enroll in Future Online Program	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
1 - Not at all likely	3%	5%	2%
2	7%	7%	6%
3	18%	21%	16%
4	27%	27%	28%
5 - Definitely	44%	40%	48%
Average Rating	4.0	3.9	4.1



SCHOOL EXPLORATION

When asked among a set of features for which they search when exploring schools and programs, online college students cite schools focused on online study only as a top factor in their search closely followed by schools with a well-known name. Thirty-four percent of undergraduate students, the largest proportion, value a school's focus on online study. Graduate students, however, most often value schools with a well-known name (33%) and people who appear to be the same age (33%) as top factors when exploring potential programs and schools. The factor both undergraduate and graduate students agree to be least relevant when exploring is an articulation with previous schools they have attended.

School Exploration Factors	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Schools that are focused on online study only	33%	34%	31%
Schools with a well-known name	32%	32%	33%
Schools that are focused on individualized attention	29%	27%	31%
People who look to be the same age as me	28%	24%	33%
Schools with career service assistance	27%	30%	24%
Schools that offer credit transfer opportunities	22%	26%	18%
People who look to be the same race/ethnicity as me	21%	20%	21%
Schools with an articulation with another school I attended	6%	6%	6%
None of these	2%	1%	2%

MOST DIFFICULT PART OF ENROLLMENT PROCESS

Twenty-four percent of online college students believe the most difficult part of the enrollment process was completing financial aid forms. This shows a sharp increase in difficulty from data EducationDynamics collected previously where only 10 percent of respondents cited this as the most difficult part of enrollment. Paying for school (21%) and deciding if they were able to return to school with family and work obligations (14%) are also top challenges for school enrollment.

Most Difficult Aspect of Enrollment	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Completing financial aid forms	24%	25%	23%
Determining how to pay for school	21%	24%	18%
Deciding if I was able to go to school with other family and work obligations	14%	13%	15%
Getting previous credits transferred	9%	9%	9%
Completing the application	8%	7%	9%
Gathering transcripts	6%	6%	6%
Writing essays	6%	6%	6%
Gathering recommendations	3%	3%	4%
Understanding the enrollment process	3%	3%	4%
Scheduling courses	3%	3%	4%
Registering for courses	2%	2%	2%
Something else	1%	0%	1%

ENROLLMENT ASPECT IMPORTANT TO ENROLLMENT DECISION

Online college students cite that the most important aspect to their enrollment decision was their awareness of the school prior to researching schools in general (29%). This was followed closely by the awareness of a school among friends and family (21%) and the awareness of a school among employers (21%). For both graduate and undergraduate students, name recognition plays a role in their decision to enroll at a particular school.

Enrollment Aspects	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Awareness of school prior to researching schools	29%	28%	30%
Awareness of school among friends and family	21%	20%	21%
Awareness of school among employers	21%	19%	22%
School is known within my region	13%	13%	13%
School is known across the nation	9%	8%	10%
None of these	8%	11%	4%



MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS IN ENROLLMENT DECISIONS

Many factors are considered by online college students prior to their enrollment in a program. When asked to rank their top five most important factors, 31 percent of online college students select the cost of tuition and fees followed by 30 percent citing the availability of online programs and 29 percent citing schools which offer programs that match my career goals. Also important to these students is the professional accreditation of the program (27%) and the length of time to complete the program (27%).

Enrollment Decision Factors - Total	1 – Most Important	2	3	4	5	Total
Cost of tuition and fees	8%	7%	6%	6%	4%	31%
Availability of online programs	7%	7%	6%	5%	5%	30%
School offers programs that match my career goals	8%	5%	7%	5%	6%	29%
Professional accreditation of my program	7%	6%	4%	6%	5%	27%
Length of time to complete my studies	4%	6%	5%	6%	5%	27%
Availability of flexible formats (online, hybrid, low-residence...)	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	26%
Feeling that school/program/staff cared about my success	5%	5%	6%	5%	5%	25%
Availability of scholarships, fellowships, and assistantships	5%	4%	6%	5%	5%	25%
Location where my courses are offered/available	5%	6%	5%	5%	5%	25%
Reputation of the college or program	5%	4%	5%	6%	4%	24%
Available student support services	4%	4%	6%	4%	5%	23%
Availability of accelerated courses	3%	4%	5%	5%	5%	23%
Received credit for Prior Life Experience or other non-traditional pathways to credit	3%	4%	5%	6%	5%	23%
Attractiveness of specific school marketing messages and advertisements	4%	4%	4%	6%	5%	22%
Recommendations of friends, family, associates	3%	5%	5%	5%	5%	22%
Feeling of inclusiveness on campus/in program for students like me	5%	4%	4%	4%	5%	22%
Availability of child care	4%	5%	3%	4%	6%	21%
Acceptance of previously earned credits	5%	6%	4%	3%	3%	21%
Recommended by my employer	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%	21%
Located near public transportation	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%	20%
School has a population of students like me	3%	3%	3%	4%	4%	18%

For undergraduate students, cost of tuition and fees remains the most important factor to impact their enrollment decision, 33 percent. The reputation of the college or program among undergraduate students plays a larger role in enrollment decisions than for their graduate counterparts with 27 percent of undergraduate respondents placing this factor in their top five for enrollment decisions.

Enrollment Decision Factors - Undergraduate	1 – Most Important	2	3	4	5	Total
Cost of tuition and fees	10%	8%	7%	6%	3%	33%
Availability of online programs	7%	7%	6%	5%	6%	30%
School offers programs that match my career goals	8%	4%	7%	4%	5%	29%
Reputation of the college or program	6%	4%	6%	6%	4%	27%
Professional accreditation of my program	7%	6%	4%	6%	4%	26%
Availability of flexible formats (online, hybrid, low-residence...)	4%	6%	5%	5%	6%	26%
Length of time to complete my studies	4%	5%	4%	6%	6%	25%
Availability of scholarships, fellowships, and assistantships	5%	3%	6%	6%	6%	25%
Location where my courses are offered/available	6%	4%	4%	4%	7%	24%
Feeling that school/program/staff cared about my success	4%	4%	6%	5%	5%	24%
Available student support services	4%	3%	5%	5%	5%	23%
Attractiveness of specific school marketing messages and advertisements	4%	3%	4%	7%	5%	23%
Recommendations of friends, family, associates	3%	4%	6%	4%	5%	22%
Received credit for Prior Life Experience or other non-traditional pathways to credit	3%	5%	4%	6%	4%	22%
Located near public transportation	4%	5%	3%	3%	5%	21%
Availability of accelerated courses	3%	4%	6%	3%	4%	21%
Acceptance of previously earned credits	4%	7%	4%	3%	3%	21%
Feeling of inclusiveness on campus/in program for students like me	3%	6%	4%	4%	4%	20%
Availability of child care	4%	4%	3%	4%	5%	20%
Recommended by my employer	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	20%
School has a population of students like me	4%	4%	3%	4%	4%	18%

Graduate students agree that the cost of tuition and fees is the most important factor when making an enrollment decision (29%), along with the availability of online programs and programs that match their career goals, each with 25 percent.

Enrollment Decision Factors - Graduate	1 – Most Important	2	3	4	5	Total
Cost of tuition and fees	6%	6%	6%	7%	5%	29%
Availability of online programs	7%	6%	6%	6%	4%	29%
School offers programs that match my career goals	7%	5%	6%	5%	6%	29%
Length of time to complete my studies	5%	8%	5%	6%	4%	27%
Professional accreditation of my program	7%	6%	3%	5%	6%	27%
Feeling that school/program/staff cared about my success	5%	5%	7%	5%	5%	26%
Availability of accelerated courses	4%	5%	4%	6%	6%	25%
Availability of flexible formats (online, hybrid, low-residence...)	5%	3%	6%	5%	5%	25%
Location where my courses are offered/available	4%	7%	6%	5%	3%	25%
Availability of scholarships, fellowships, and assistantships	5%	5%	5%	4%	5%	24%
Received credit for Prior Life Experience or other non-traditional pathways to credit	4%	4%	5%	5%	5%	23%
Available student support services	3%	5%	8%	4%	4%	23%
Acceptance of previously earned credits	6%	5%	4%	3%	3%	22%
Availability of child care	4%	5%	4%	3%	7%	22%
Recommended by my employer	5%	4%	4%	5%	5%	22%
Recommendations of friends, family, associates	3%	6%	4%	5%	5%	22%
Feeling of inclusiveness on campus/in program for students like me	6%	3%	3%	5%	6%	22%
Reputation/reputation of the college or program	5%	4%	4%	5%	4%	21%
Attractiveness of specific school marketing messages and advertisements	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%	21%
Located near public transportation	4%	3%	4%	4%	4%	19%
School has a population of students like me	2%	2%	4%	5%	4%	17%

MOST HELPFUL IN ENROLLMENT PROCESS

When online college students were asked to indicate the most helpful aspect of the enrollment process, 25 percent pointed to the financial aid staff. This was followed by 15 percent who cite credit transfer assistance and 14 percent who value frequent contact from enrollment staff. Graduate students find the credit transfer assistance slightly more helpful than do undergraduate students while undergraduate students indicate financial aid staff to be slightly more helpful than did their graduate peers. Overall, online college students have similar opinions regarding the most helpful aspects of their enrollment.

Most Helpful Aspect of Enrollment	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Financial aid staff	25%	27%	23%
Credit transfer assistance	15%	13%	17%
Frequent contact from enrollment staff	14%	14%	14%
Frequent contact from faculty	10%	10%	10%
Application assistance	10%	10%	11%
No standardized test score requirements	6%	7%	5%
Articulation agreement between my schools	5%	7%	4%
Course registration assistance	4%	4%	5%
Ability to apply to program from web page link on program web page	4%	4%	4%
Ability to request more program information on program web page	3%	3%	3%
Ability to engage with school through online chat on web page	3%	2%	4%
Something else	1%	1%	1%

MOST IMPORTANT IN CONTINUED ENROLLMENT

Financial aid advisors are selected by online college students as most important to their continued enrollment in a program with 43 percent of respondents in agreement. This is closely followed by academic advisors (38%) and career services advisors (32%).

Important in Continued Enrollment	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Financial aid advisor	43%	41%	45%
Academic advisors	38%	39%	37%
Career services advisor	32%	32%	32%
Admissions counselor	30%	34%	27%
Professors and instructors	25%	26%	24%
College leadership (deans, department chair, provost, etc.)	20%	18%	22%
Student success coaches	18%	17%	20%
Other students in my program	13%	15%	11%
Someone else	2%	2%	2%



MOST ATTRACTIVE WAY TO INFLUENCE PROMOTION FROM SCHOOL

Lower tuition is cited as the most attractive way for schools to influence enrollment decisions by 18 percent of online college students. Free courses, free technology equipment, and a faster program completion time were also selected as attractive ways to encourage enrollment at a particular school. For graduate students, however, accelerated options for programs is the most attractive way to influence their enrollment with 15 percent of respondents in agreement. Graduate students were also attracted to programs that match their career objectives and the offering of free technology equipment according to 14 percent of respondents. Financial assistance, either through lower tuition or free equipment, has a strong influence on the selection of a school for online college students.

Influential Promotion from School	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Lower tuition	18%	23%	13%
Free course	14%	15%	13%
Free technology equipment (computer, iPad, tablet, etc.)	14%	13%	14%
Faster time to complete my program	14%	15%	13%
Tuition payment plan	13%	13%	13%
Programs match my career objectives	13%	11%	14%
Higher scholarships and grants	12%	13%	11%
Accelerated program options to finish faster	12%	10%	15%
Free textbooks	11%	13%	10%
Feeling like I belonged	10%	9%	11%
More course/class options	9%	9%	10%
Lifetime career services	8%	8%	8%
Fee waivers (such as application, registration, or deposit)	8%	8%	9%
Larger school	7%	6%	8%
Generous or friendly acceptance of transfer credits	7%	6%	9%
Better contact when I inquire or apply	7%	6%	8%
Linkages to area industry and employers in my study field	6%	6%	7%
Blended/Hybrid Courses	6%	6%	5%
Audit a class for free	5%	5%	5%
Alumni discount	4%	4%	4%
Military discount	3%	3%	2%

MOST INFLUENTIAL IN SELECTING A SCHOOL

Marketing vehicles are an important tool to bring prospective students into the consideration set. All the elements surveyed and the response distribution suggests a multi touch driven journey that ultimately leads a prospective student to ultimately inquire particularly in regard to marketing channels. Establishing a comprehensive overall marketing strategy is critical to reach today’s learner in a complex media environment.

Influential Marketing Vehicles	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Digital Media	66%	62%	70%
Traditional Media	34%	38%	30%

Note that digital media includes: college search/ranking websites (elearners.com, classesusa.com, U.S. News & World Report, etc.), online reviews of the school, emails from the school, videos on YouTube, online advertisements on social media (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, etc.), ads on websites I visit, listings or advertisements on search engines (Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc.), people/groups i follow online, posts on Facebook or other social media sites, social media personalities, ads on streaming services such as Hulu, Peacock, Paramount+, podcasts, ads on apps, ads on Pandora or Spotify, radio commercials about the school, and TV commercials about the school. Traditional media includes: opinions of friends, family, and coworkers, college fairs or events, information from community colleges attended, direct mail from the school, employers, and billboards.



INFLUENTIAL PROMOTION TO ENROLL FURTHER FROM HOME

As noted in earlier Online College Students studies, online students most often enroll in a school within 100 miles of their residence. In order to assess what would motivate online students to select a school further from home, the following data were collected.

Both lower tuition (19%) and free courses (16%) were selected as the top influences to encourage students to enroll in an institution further than 100 miles from their place of residence.

Additionally, online college students feel programs that match their career objectives (13%) and faster completion time for the program (13%) could also contribute to enrolling in a school further from home. For graduate students, lower tuition is less influential than free courses and programs which match their career objectives. Although only 3 percent of undergraduate students indicate auditing a class for free would influence their enrollment in a school further away, 8 percent of graduate students feel this could have an effect on their program selection.

Influential Promotion to Have Student Enroll Further than 100 Miles from Home

	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Lower tuition	19%	24%	13%
Free course	16%	17%	15%
Programs match my career objectives	13%	10%	15%
Faster time to complete my program	13%	14%	12%
Higher scholarships and grants	12%	12%	12%
Free textbooks	12%	14%	11%
Free technology equipment (computer, iPad, tablet, etc.)	12%	13%	12%
Tuition payment plan	10%	10%	10%
Accelerated program options to finish faster	10%	10%	10%
More course/class options	10%	8%	11%
Fee waivers (such as application, registration, or deposit)	9%	10%	9%
Lifetime career services	8%	7%	9%
Feeling like I belonged	8%	9%	7%
Linkages to area industry and employers in my study field	7%	7%	8%
Blended/Hybrid Courses	7%	6%	7%
Generous or friendly acceptance of transfer credits	7%	7%	7%
Better contact when I inquire or apply	7%	5%	8%
Alumni discount	5%	4%	7%
Audit a class for free	5%	3%	8%
Larger school	5%	4%	6%
Military discount	4%	5%	3%

SECTION 6:

STUDY CIRCUMSTANCES OF ONLINE COLLEGE STUDENTS



ACCESS TO TUITION REIMBURSEMENT

The largest proportion of online college students do not have access to employer tuition reimbursement — 49%. This is more often true for undergraduate than graduate online students.

Employer Offers Tuition Reimbursement	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Yes	41%	34%	49%
No	49%	55%	43%
Not sure	10%	11%	8%

USE OF EMPLOYER TUITION REIMBURSEMENT

Almost 60 percent of employed online students either do not have access to tuition reimbursement programs or did not use this benefit. Of those who had access to tuition reimbursement, 83 percent of online college students use this benefit to pay for some portion of their online studies; 78 percent of undergraduate students and 88 percent of graduate students.

Use of Offered Tuition Reimbursement Benefit	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Yes	83%	78%	88%
No	17%	22%	13%

EMPLOYER SUPPORT

The majority of employed online students, 78 percent, agree they feel supported by their employer to pursue their online studies. However, this leaves nearly one quarter of employed students who do not feel supported by their employer.

Employer Support	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Feel supported in your education by your employer	78%	75%	81%
Do not feel supported in your education by your employer	22%	25%	19%

TUITION DISCOUNTS AT ORGANIZATION

About 40 percent of employed undergraduate students and over 50 percent of graduate students enroll at an institution that offers tuition discounts at their place of employment. Among graduate students, only 15 percent are unsure about tuition discounts while 23 percent of undergraduate students are unsure about these offers.

Tuition Discounts at Organization	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Yes	46%	39%	52%
No	36%	38%	33%
Unsure	19%	23%	15%

STUDY ENVIRONMENT

STUDY ENVIRONMENT FACTORS

The vast majority, 98 percent, of online college student have access to the internet in their homes. Only 34 percent of respondents rely on public transportation, but a higher proportion of graduate students (36%) rely on public transportation compared to undergraduate students (31%). Other high proportions among online college students include 89 percent having a quiet space to complete coursework and study and 86 percent with a computer dedicated to schoolwork.

Study Environment Factors	Total		Undergrad		Graduate	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
I have internet access in my home	98%	2%	98%	2%	98%	2%
I have a quiet space available to me where I can do my coursework or study	89%	11%	89%	11%	90%	11%
I have a computer dedicated to my schoolwork	86%	14%	85%	16%	87%	13%
I feel supported by my family to enroll in higher education	83%	17%	82%	18%	83%	17%
I own or lease a car	83%	17%	79%	21%	87%	13%
I am currently the only person in my household enrolled in college/higher education	75%	25%	75%	25%	75%	25%
I live in a home with my parents or grandparents	44%	56%	44%	56%	43%	57%
I rely on public transportation	34%	67%	31%	69%	36%	64%



SECTION 7:

DEMOGRAPHICS



The typical undergraduate online college student is a white female between the ages of 18 and 24 who is single with no children living with them at home. They are employed full time with more than 10 years of work experience and a median household income of about \$50,000. They are not the first in their family to attend college. They live in suburban communities all over the nation.

The typical graduate online college student is a white male between the ages of 35 to 39 who is married/partnered with no children at home. They are employed full time with more than 10 years of work experience and a household income of about \$80,000. They are not the first in their family to attend college and live in urban areas all over the nation.

GENDER

Males and females each share about half of the online college student market, with 1 percent identifying as non-binary/non-conforming. There is a slightly higher percentage of male graduate students (56%) compared to male undergraduate students (45%). Females occupy a larger portion of undergraduate students (53%) compared to graduate students (43%).

Gender Identity	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Male	51%	45%	56%
Female	48%	53%	43%
Non-binary/ non-conforming	1%	1%	1%

AGE

The largest portion of online college students fall between 18-24 or 30-34 years of age. The largest proportion of undergraduate students is between the ages of 18 and 24. Among graduate students, the largest proportion of students falls between 35-39 years old.

Age	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
18-24	20%	21%	17%
25-29	16%	16%	16%
30-34	20%	20%	20%
35-39	19%	19%	21%
40-44	17%	15%	18%
45-49	8%	7%	8%
50-54	0%	0%	0%
55 and older	2%	2%	2%

RACE/ETHNICITY

Over 70 percent of respondents are White, and 18 percent are Black or African American. Only 6 percent of online college students are Asian.

Racial Identity	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
White	72%	74%	72%
Black or African American	18%	18%	18%
Asian	6%	6%	5%
American Indian or Alaska Native	3%	3%	3%
Native Hawaiian Other Pacific Islander	1%	2%	1%
Another race	4%	4%	3%

HISPANIC IDENTIFICATION

Eighty percent of online college students are not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicano students made up 12 percent of respondents.

Hispanic Identity

Total Undergrad Graduate

No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	80%	80%	80%
Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano	12%	11%	12%
Yes, Puerto Rican	3%	3%	3%
Yes, Cuban	2%	2%	1%
Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin – for example, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, Guatemalan, Spaniard, Ecuadorian, etc.	4%	3%	4%



MARITAL STATUS

There is an equal distribution of online college students who are married/partnered and single. About half of undergraduate students are married/partnered and half are single. Among graduate students, a slightly higher proportion (63%) are married/partnered compared to the 37 percent who are single.

Marital Status	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Married/partnered	55%	48%	63%
Single	45%	52%	37%

CHILDREN UNDER 18 IN HOUSEHOLD

The largest proportion of online college students do not have children under 18 in their households, 39 percent. Forty-two percent of undergraduate students have 1 or 2 children at home while about 60 percent of graduate students have 1 or 2 children at home.

Children Under 18	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
1	27%	23%	30%
2	24%	19%	29%
3 or more	11%	14%	9%
None	39%	45%	32%

TOTAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME

The median household income for online college students falls between \$55,000 and \$69,999.

Graduate students also have a median within the same range.

For undergraduate students, the median household income is between \$40,000-\$54,999.

Household Income	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Under \$25,000	15%	19%	11%
\$25,000-\$39,999	17%	22%	12%
\$40,000-\$54,999	12%	14%	10%
\$55,000-\$69,999	10%	12%	9%
\$70,000-\$84,999	10%	9%	11%
\$85,000-\$99,999	7%	7%	7%
\$100,000-\$114,999	6%	5%	7%
\$115,000-\$129,999	4%	3%	4%
\$130,000-\$149,999	8%	5%	10%
\$150,000 or more	11%	4%	18%

WORK EXPERIENCE

Nearly 25 percent of online college students have more than 10 years of work experience, the largest proportion of respondents.

Work Experience	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
No work experience	3%	4%	2%
Less than one year	5%	7%	4%
1-2 years	14%	16%	12%
3-4 years	16%	14%	17%
5-6 years	16%	15%	17%
7-8 years	10%	8%	11%
9-10 years	12%	10%	15%
More than 10 years	24%	27%	21%



EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Most respondents indicate they are employed full time in their current position (64%). When comparing undergraduate and graduate students, it is noted that a higher proportion of graduate students are employed full time (74%) than are undergraduate students (53%). Compared to the 2021 report, a lower percentage of online college students are full time students, only 5 percent in 2022 compared to nearly 20 percent in 2021.

Employment Status	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Employed full time	64%	53%	74%
Employed part time	17%	20%	13%
Not employed, but seeking employment	8%	11%	6%
Not employed and not seeking employment	5%	7%	3%
Retired	2%	2%	1%
Full-time student	5%	7%	3%

FIRST IN FAMILY TO ATTEND COLLEGE

Forty-two percent of online college students are first in their family to attend college. A similar breakdown is found among undergraduate and graduate students, with a majority of online college students not the first in their family to attend college.

First in Family to Attend College	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Yes	42%	43%	41%
No	58%	57%	59%

COMMUNITY TYPE

Online college students reside in suburban and urban areas at similar rates. Only about 20 percent live in rural areas. A slightly higher percentage of graduate students live in an urban area (44%) compared to undergraduate students (34%). Undergraduate students more frequently live in a suburban area (43%).

Residence Type	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Suburban area	40%	43%	36%
Rural area	21%	23%	20%
Urban area	39%	34%	44%

STATE OF RESIDENCE VS STATE ENROLLED

Most respondents enroll in a school in the state of their residence, 80 percent.

Enrolled in Same State as Residence	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Yes	80%	77%	83%
No	20%	23%	17%



STATE OF RESIDENCE VS STATE ENROLLED

While online college students reside in many states across the country, they most often live in California and Texas followed closely by New York.

State of Residence	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
California	12%	12%	11%
Texas	11%	11%	12%
New York	9%	7%	10%
Florida	8%	9%	7%
Illinois	5%	5%	5%
Georgia	4%	4%	4%
Ohio	4%	5%	2%
Michigan	3%	3%	3%
North Carolina	3%	3%	3%
Pennsylvania	3%	3%	2%
Virginia	3%	2%	3%
Alabama	2%	1%	2%
Arizona	2%	2%	1%
Arkansas	2%	2%	2%
Kansas	2%	1%	2%
Kentucky	2%	2%	2%
Massachusetts	2%	2%	2%
Minnesota	2%	2%	2%
Missouri	2%	2%	2%
New Jersey	2%	1%	2%
Tennessee	2%	1%	3%
Washington	2%	2%	1%
Colorado	1%	1%	1%
Connecticut	1%	2%	1%
Indiana	1%	1%	1%
Iowa	1%	1%	1%
Louisiana	1%	1%	2%
Maine	1%	0%	1%
Maryland	1%	1%	1%
Mississippi	1%	1%	1%
Nevada	1%	1%	1%
New Mexico	1%	1%	0%
Oklahoma	1%	1%	1%
Oregon	1%	1%	0%
South Carolina	1%	1%	1%
Utah	1%	1%	1%
Wisconsin	1%	1%	1%
Nebraska	0%	0%	1%
Rhode Island	0%	0%	1%

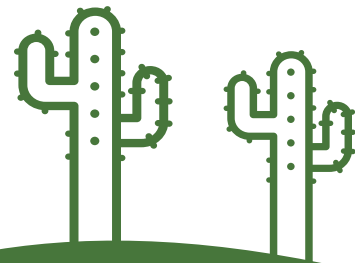
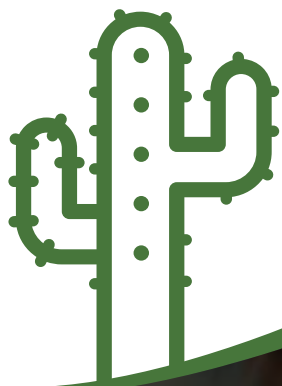
STATE OF ENROLLMENT

While 80 percent of students, overall, enroll in their state of residence, among online college students we see enrollment focused in California, Arizona, Florida, and Texas. This would suggest that Arizona and Florida see additional enrollments from students not residing in the state as these states do not occupy the top states of residence.

State of Enrollment	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
California	9%	9%	9%
Arizona	8%	8%	9%
Florida	8%	10%	5%
Texas	8%	7%	9%
New York	6%	7%	6%
Georgia	4%	3%	5%
Illinois	4%	3%	4%
Alabama	3%	2%	3%
New Jersey	3%	1%	5%
North Carolina	3%	2%	3%
Ohio	3%	4%	2%
Pennsylvania	3%	4%	2%
Virginia	3%	3%	2%
Colorado	2%	3%	2%
Massachusetts	2%	3%	1%
Michigan	2%	3%	2%
Minnesota	2%	1%	3%
New Mexico	2%	2%	2%
Oklahoma	2%	3%	1%
Alaska	1%	1%	2%
Arkansas	1%	1%	1%
Connecticut	1%	0%	2%
Delaware	1%	2%	0%
Idaho	1%	1%	2%
Indiana	1%	2%	1%
Iowa	1%	1%	2%
Kansas	1%	3%	0%
Kentucky	1%	1%	2%
Louisiana	1%	1%	2%
Missouri	1%	2%	1%
Montana	1%	1%	1%
New Hampshire	1%	3%	0%
South Carolina	1%	0%	2%
Tennessee	1%	1%	2%
Utah	1%	1%	2%
Washington	1%	1%	2%
Washington, D.C.	1%	1%	2%
Wisconsin	1%	1%	2%
Nebraska	0%	0%	1%

SECTION 8:

KEY FINDINGS



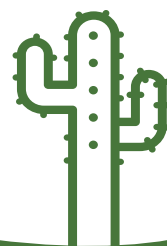
The 2022 Online College Students report, focusing on college students who study fully online for a degree or a for-credit certificate or license, is EducationDynamics' 11th edition. For more than a decade, we have documented and reported on the choices and viewpoints of online students –to inform colleges and universities nationwide. It is imperative that schools understand the demands and preferences of online students. In just two years (2017–2019), NCES reports a two percent rise in the number of online college students enrolled in fully online study – 15 percent to 17 percent. This number has risen in the past several years, likely over 20 percent of all college students. Moreover, as we saw in our 2021 Online College Students report, many online students who were forced into online study due to COVID-19 were highly satisfied with their experiences. As such, many of those students will continue to study online and thus will only intensify the rate of growth in online study in the years to come.

Below, we cite the key findings from our most recent study. We hope this report serves as a guide to colleges nationwide on the programs and practices in greatest demand among this key population.

LEVEL OF STUDY

While the majority –75 percent– of online students enroll in degree programs (slightly more in undergraduate vs. graduate programs), a growing number of students – close to 25 percent – enroll in shorter-term certificate and licensure programs and stackable certificates. Certificate programs are more often pursued at the graduate than undergraduate level. Colleges that offer short-term programs can increase their share of online students as students continue to shift from degree to short-term programs.

Further, those who study for a degree, in large proportions, find the concept of stackable certificates to be attractive (more so among graduate vs. undergraduate students). Close to 90 percent of students currently enrolled in a certificate program indicate that certificates could be stackable. Eighty-five percent enroll in additional certificate programs that are in fields similar to prior study. Factors related to time, cost, and convenience as well as fulfilling career requirements are the main driving factors in pursuing certificate study.



SUBJECT FIELD OF STUDY

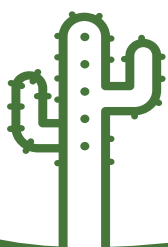
Computer & IT and STEM topics combined outnumber online students who are enrolled in business study. This is true at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. However, at the graduate level, those enrolled in Computer & IT programs have noticeably begun to outpace business. This trend represents a growing opportunity for colleges to develop further their Computer & IT offerings so as to serve larger numbers of students focusing more and more in this area.

FULL OR PART-TIME STUDY

Two-thirds of online college students are enrolled in a full-time program – slightly more often at the graduate vs. undergraduate level. These students want to complete their programs of study as quickly as possible for salary, position, and other job-related goals. Colleges nationwide have begun to compress programs and learning options so that students can complete their studies faster. Time to completion is critical to online college students.

PREVIOUS ONLINE STUDY

Nearly one half of online college students have had experiences in online learning – either full programs or individual courses. This proportion will obviously increase following the forced COVID-19-related online study of the past few years; moving the number of potential students with prior online experience higher.



PREFERENCES AND OPINIONS

Online college students have a number of opinions that colleges should bear in mind when developing strategies to attract and recruit these students. These include:

- Online education is worth the cost
- Online study allows me to complete my studies faster
- My personal productivity is improved by studying online
- To complete studies on a timely basis, summer offerings are attractive
- Online study made me more motivated to complete my studies

Moreover, across undergraduate and graduate online students, more than 70 percent indicate that they had a connection with other students. Thus, they believe online programs should provide opportunities to interact with other students. This is important given that a majority of both undergraduate and graduate students indicate that it is important to them that they are able to communicate with other students.

PREFERRED CALENDAR SCHEDULE

The preferred course calendar among online college students include:

- Breaks of 1-2 weeks between semesters or terms
- Class/cohort of 40 or fewer students (67 percent of undergraduate vs. 61 percent of graduate students)

CAREER MOTIVATION

Ninety-eight percent of online college students indicate that they enroll in college for a career-related reason. The most important motivations for enrolling in further study among online students are “to start a new career to earn more money” and “to start a new career more aligned with my interests.” Schools can address these needs in part by offering career-related or employer-aligned programs. Additionally, about 40 percent of online college students indicate that online programs should include leadership building opportunities. More than 80 percent of students believe that online courses should group students into cohorts with similar career goals in mind.



CAREER SERVICES

Career services are very important to online college students. The top career-related services they use are: self-assessments, working with a career advisor, resume creation, and job search assistance. Additionally, online college students indicate that success-coaching oriented advisors were an important factor in their persistence through online programs. Students use available career services during enrollment and immediately following the completion of their studies to help them enter the employment market. One-third of online college students will use career services throughout their career. These career-focused services contribute significantly to student belief that online study was worth the investment, as 87 percent do.

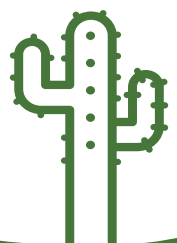
While the majority of online college students indicate that they know their intended career field, only about 40 percent indicate that online study provides them with the skills for that career, and only 39 percent indicate that it provides them with common skills such as management.

TIME TO DEVOTE TO STUDY

Undergraduate students typically have 11-14 hours to devote to their studies and graduate students typically have 20-24 hours. We expect this pattern to continue as more and more people permanently move to remote work.

SCHOOL EXPLORATION

Online college students cite a school's focus on online study as a top factor in their search, closely followed by a school with a well-known name, schools that are focused on individualized attention, people who look to be the same age as the student, and schools with career service assistance.



MOST DIFFICULT PART OF ENROLLMENT PROCESS

The two most popular difficulties reported are completing financial aid forms and determining how to pay for school.

MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS IN ENROLLMENT PROCESS

The three most important factors are cost of tuition and fees, availability of online programs, and schools offering programs that match one's career goals. Moreover, undergraduate students believe that career and reputational factors matter most in their enrollment decision while graduate students indicate that factors that allow them to complete their studies faster were more of a determinant. Additionally, lower tuition and fees is the leading factor that would drive a student's decision to enroll at one school over another as well as enroll at an institution further than 100 miles from their home.

Financial aid assistance is critical in helping students enroll and persist through their programs. One-quarter of both undergraduate and graduate students believe that the most helpful aspect during their enrollment was the assistance of financial aid staff. Moreover, 40 percent of undergraduate students and 45 percent of graduate students believe that their financial aid advisor was of importance to their continued enrollment. Conversely, the largest proportions of students, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (one-quarter of each), believe that completing financial aid forms was the hardest aspect of enrolling. This is followed by those who feel that determining how to pay for school was the most difficult aspect of the enrollment process.

The majority of online college students believe they would have qualified for some form of alternative credit pathways, including close to 75 percent who believe their work experience should be counted towards their program.

Finally, among those who do not earn credit through alternative pathways, 78 percent would have found such pathways to be attractive and 79 percent found them to be helpful in their academic pursuits. This pattern is more prevalent among undergraduate students than graduate students.



MOST INFLUENTIAL IN SELECTING A SCHOOL

The information sources most influential in selecting a school are college search/ranking websites, online reviews of the school and opinions of friends, family, and co-workers.

Schools must ensure that their programs remain top of mind among potential students. Awareness of a school prior to initial research was also identified as an important factor in a student's enrollment decision.

In earlier reports, we note that most online college students select an institution within 100 miles of their residence. In this current study, the data show that 23 percent of undergraduate students enroll in an institution outside of their home state while 17 percent of graduate students did likewise. When asked what it would take to select an institution further away, lower tuition was cited by the largest proportion of respondents, followed by free course.

STUDY ENVIRONMENT

The very large proportion of online students have internet access in their homes, have a quiet space to do their coursework or study, and have a computer dedicated to their schoolwork.

STUDY CIRCUMSTANCES

Not all online college students feel supported in their higher education pursuits by their families. Across undergraduate and graduate populations, 20 percent do not feel supported. Moreover, 25 percent of undergraduate students and 20 percent of graduate students do not feel supported by their employers.

Most employers do not financially support employees' education, but support is much more likely to be available for students studying at the graduate level. Only roughly one-third of undergraduate students indicate that their organization offers tuition reimbursement. Only one half of graduate students indicate likewise. While only 39 percent of undergraduate students enroll at an institution that offers a tuition discount to employers, a majority, 52 percent, of graduate students reported receiving a tuition discount through their employment.



DEMOGRAPHICS

Based on our survey, males and females equally participate in online education. The median age is between 30-34 (20 percent are 18-24 years of age) and the large majority (72 percent) are White. Slightly more than one half are married/partnered, and the majority have children under 18 living at home. Their median family income is between \$55,000 and \$69,999 and two-thirds are employed. Our survey respondents primarily reside in suburban and urban areas.





LOOKING FORWARD

Looking forward to the next five-year horizon for online education, we expect several trends to emerge and solidify. As online education, and the adult students largely served by online programs, play an increasingly important role in higher education, schools will dedicate more resources to attracting and serving these students in ways that will only reinforce these trends.

- 1.** Online college students will grow in numbers steadily in the next five years. We predict online students will make up 25 percent of all college students within five years. As more and more college students become experienced in online learning, more will see it as a means to acquiring the credentials they need to move on in their careers in a timely and cost-effective way.
- 2.** The average age of online college students will continue to decrease as more and more younger students (those 18-24) see online programs as a viable alternative to a traditional campus-based education. Further, these individuals will be attracted to the labor market with relatively well-paying entry-level positions that do not require a full bachelor's degree, allowing these students to begin working immediately while also pursuing a credential.
- 3.** The number of online college students enrolling in colleges outside their state of residence will increase. This will be largely driven by national-brand institutions which will compete with lower tuition and increased promotion and outreach.

4. More students will enroll in online certificate and licensure programs. This will occur at both the undergraduate and graduate level. The undergraduate certificate growth will be driven by the labor market offering entry-level positions that do not require degrees. As Americans become well-credentialled through degrees, graduate level certificate demand will grow as students seek short-term instruction to advance their skills over a lifetime.
5. Colleges will connect with employers to maximize tuition reimbursement policies; meeting a major demand among students for ties and linkages with employers for employment purposes.
6. Increasingly, employers will link up with online colleges to deliver on a contract basis the education and training necessary for employee advancement.
7. The cost of online education will decrease over time, as more and more colleges compete for this market segment and students continue to seek value as a major motivating factor in their decision-making process.
8. To date, traditional and elite institutions as well as community colleges have not actively engaged in the online student market. In a forecasted declining higher education market, it is likely that more and more such institutions will adopt online education as a means to attract larger numbers of students.



Methodology

In the spring of 2022, EducationDynamics surveyed 504 undergraduate students and 506 graduate students. All students had to have been enrolled, currently enrolled, or plan to enroll in the next 12 months in a degree (associate, bachelor's, master's, or doctoral) or a for-credit certificate or licensure program. Students who were recently enrolled must have completed their online program. Respondents must have been aged 18 years or older. Respondents were fielded using a United States nationwide online panel. Respondents were invited, through a panel, to complete an online survey instrument. Survey fielding commenced on April 18, 2022 and concluded April 27, 2022.



AUTHORS



Carol B. Aslanian is Founder and President of Aslanian Market Research, a Division of EducationDynamics. She is a national authority on the characteristics and learning patterns of adult and online college undergraduate and graduate students. She has made hundreds of presentations to national audiences and has authored numerous articles and reports on the topic. For more than 20 years, she led the College Board's Office of Adult Learning Services. Ms. Aslanian has lead market research projects for more than 300 colleges, universities, and educational agencies. She is an alumna of Cornell University and Harvard University.



Steven Fischer is the Senior Market Research Manager at EducationDynamics. Steven is responsible for creating, programming, testing, and monitoring primary market research surveys, as well as drafting preliminary analysis. Additionally, Steven develops methodologies and executes secondary research using data from NCES, the U.S. Labor Department, and other sources. Prior to coming to EducationDynamics, Steven started his career as a research assistant at Rutgers University Heldrich Center for Workforce Development. He is a loyal alum of Muhlenberg College and Lehigh University.



Grow Your Online Program Enrollments

At Education*Dynamics*, we continuously monitor the demands and preferences of career-focused adult and online students. By speaking with current and prospective students, and continuously monitoring trends in marketing and enrollment management engagement, we gain unmatched insights into the student journey.

Our full suite of services and solutions touch the entire student lifecycle, from inquiry generation to enrollment management, marketing, branding, student success coaching, and more. We give our college and university clients the information they need to make measured decisions based on data and deliver the flexibility to talk to prospective students in ways that meet their needs. We move students smoothly through the engagement funnel from the first point of contact to graduation.

Ready to grow your enrollments? Connect with us to learn how we can help you evaluate your program offerings and align your marketing and enrollment processes to meet the needs of today's online students.

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