



Online College Students 2021

Meeting Online Student Demands and Preferences in a Reshaped World

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Preface

The world around us continues to evolve and adapt at a pace none of us could have predicted just a few years ago. The impact is changing the way career-focused and online students learn and persist. There is no doubt that the landscape of higher education has been permanently altered, and the past year has proven to be a challenging time for students and educators alike. While learners were given little to no say in the transition to remote learning, we have gained material further evidence that online learning is a largely successful platform that is only just beginning to reach its potential.

We believe the colleges and universities that listen and respond to learner needs will be best positioned to succeed in this reshaped world. We have spent the past several months speaking with and listening to current and prospective online learners. Our conversations have uncovered an increased comfort with remote and online education, as learners have gained further access to higher education opportunities online.

At *EducationDynamics* our mission is to help post-traditional students achieve their academic goals. Our dedicated market research team is pleased to release the latest data from the most current online students through the 2021 Online Students Report.

We hope you find our report incredibly valuable to your institution, as you seek out new ways to serve and support today's students, furthering their education through online programs.

Bruce Douglas
Chief Executive Officer
EducationDynamics

Introduction

Online Education in a Reshaped World

In the early months of 2020 college students enrolled in colleges throughout the United States had their choice of study format. Our student surveys taken prior to the COVID-19 pandemic indicated that a majority of students wanted some level of classroom-based study; either in a fully-classroom setting or hybrid format. Illustrative of this, in the **2020 & Beyond Report***, a survey of undergraduate and graduate post-traditional students, 30 percent of students enrolled or would enroll in a fully online program. This gravitation towards programs with at least some classroom instruction made sense as the largest number of these undergraduate students enrolled in a classroom-based course (90%). Familiarity breeds comfort, and classroom study is nothing if not familiar.

However, COVID-19 reached all corners of the globe and changed the way higher education was presented. Difficult decisions had to be made. No longer could comfort be the driving factor in program and course delivery. Most if not all programs, no matter the original delivery format, moved to a remote format. The landscape of higher education (and education as a whole) shifted. Schools, educators and students were forced to shift to exclusively remote delivery methods, with varying degrees of success.

Remote learning quickly became the norm. To facilitate the transition to a virtual or online format in reaction to COVID-19, remote delivery became the primary delivery method used by colleges and universities nationwide. Those colleges and universities with significant existing infrastructure and understanding supporting fully online programs were able to quickly pivot additional programs while more traditional schools and programs were forced to learn and adapt on the fly.

As schools, educators, and students adjust to the permanently reshaped world in which we now live, college campuses are opening for a more traditional classroom experience. As many students had remote study foisted upon them, they were able to come to appreciate the benefits of online study. Much of the remaining stigma around online has been removed. Moreover, now that more students are considering online study in the future, institutions can promote online formats (or partially online formats) that will allow students to enroll in a greater breadth of programs from further afar (with the knowledge that students still enroll closer to home unless there is a more enticing feature further away).

The data presented in this report illuminate the demands and preferences of the newest cohort of online students; those who engaged in online study in the past year during a time of rapid change in the education landscape. These are students who engaged in online study on their own volition (or believe they did) or were moved into an online program due to COVID-19 and indicated they would be likely to enroll in online study in the future. In learning about this cohort of students, colleges and universities can best understand how to reach and serve the future online students.

SECTION 1:

FACTORS DETERMINING ONLINE STUDENT MODALITY AND FIELDS OF STUDY



CIRCUMSTANCES OF RESPONDENTS

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION PLANS

For about 70 percent of online students, COVID-19 did not impact their higher education plans.

	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
NO	69%	67%	72%
YES	31%	33%	28%

Comments from respondents that cited how they were impacted:

"It has made me recalculate the career I want and the school I would like to attend."

"I want to further my education in a much closer area as I am concerned for my safety. I also want to find cheaper options as I am harmed financially."



IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION PLANS

The majority of online college student respondents indicated they chose to enroll in an online program that they have either completed or in which they are currently enrolled. Only 18 percent of undergraduate online students and seven percent of graduate online students did not choose to enroll in an online program but were enrolled in one because their institution turned to virtual or online education. It is important to note that many students were moved to online programs due to COVID-19, but indicate it was their choice to continue with the program as it turned online.

Online Study Enrollment

	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Yes, I chose to enroll in an online program and am enrolled now	44%	41%	53%
Yes, I chose to enroll in an online program and have finished that program	40%	41%	40%
No, I did not choose to enroll in an online program but am enrolled in a college-level program since my school went to virtual or online education	15%	18%	7%



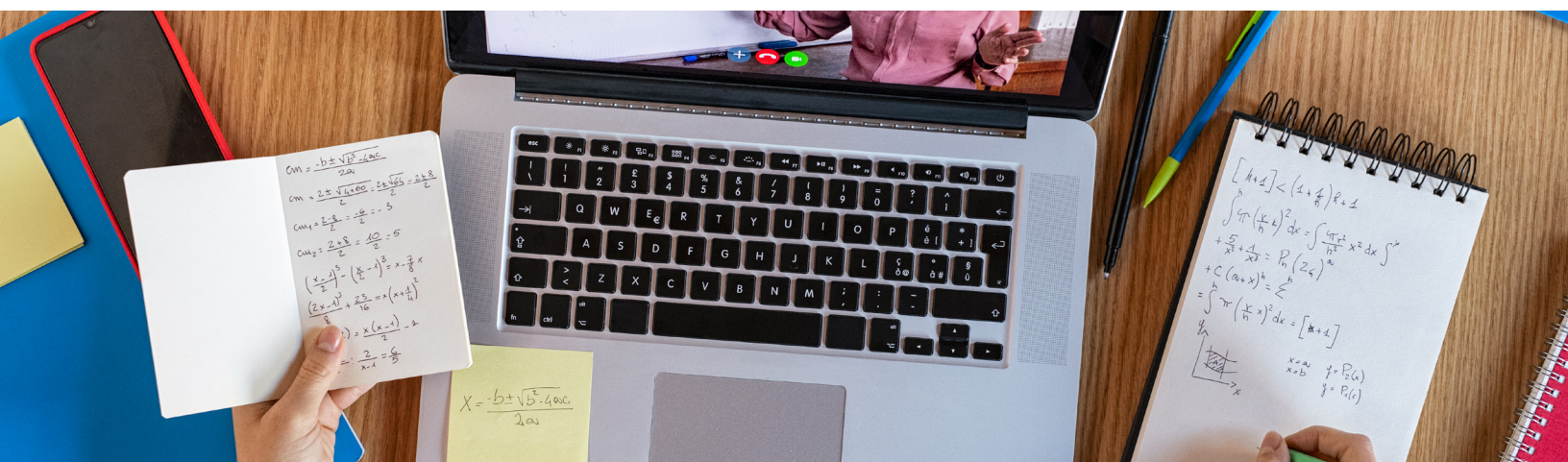


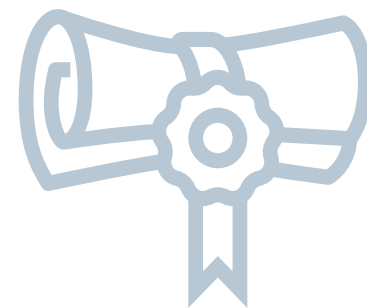
TYPE OF PROGRAM

LEVEL OF STUDY

The vast majority of online students, about 80 percent, enroll in degree programs—namely a bachelor's degree at the undergraduate level and a master's degree at the graduate level. The bulk of the remaining proportion enrolls in certificate programs or are undergraduates studying for their associate degree.

Level of Study	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Associate degree program	16%	22%	0%
Bachelor's degree program	43%	58%	0%
Master's degree program	16%	0%	62%
Doctoral degree program	4%	0%	15%
Certificate program	19%	18%	20%
Licensure program	2%	2%	3%





SUBJECT FIELD OF STUDY

Online college degree and certificate students most often study business, followed by computers & IT, and health & medicine, which account for about 55 percent of the market. Next most common subjects of study among online students are the social sciences, criminal justice, law, followed by science, technology, engineering, or mathematics, which together account for about 25 percent of the market. Note that an additional ten percent of undergraduate online students study arts & humanities, and an additional 13 percent of graduate online students study education & teaching.

Subject Field of Study	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Business	20%	21%	19%
Computers & IT	17%	16%	20%
Health & Medicine	16%	16%	17%
Social Sciences, Criminal Justice, Law	13%	14%	10%
Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics	11%	11%	11%
Arts & Humanities	8%	10%	5%
Education & Teaching	8%	7%	13%
Counseling, Human Services	5%	6%	5%

PRIOR COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

TYPE OF INSTITUTION

The largest proportions of online students most recently enrolled at (or plan to enroll at) a public college or university. Undergraduate online students studied at public institutions (71%) more often than graduate online students (51%). About twice as many graduate online students studied at private institutions and for-profit institutions as compared with undergraduate online students.

Type of Institution	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Public	66%	71%	51%
Private	21%	18%	32%
For-profit college/university	8%	6%	15%
Not sure	4%	5%	2%



FULL- OR PART-TIME PROGRAM

Seventy percent of online students are enrolled in a full-time program.

Full- or Part-Time Program	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Full-time	70%	71%	64%
Part-time	29%	27%	35%
Not sure	1%	2%	1%

PREVIOUS ONLINE STUDY

About half of online students had enrolled in fully online individual courses prior to their current or most recent online study. Interestingly, the next largest proportion, 22 percent, had never enrolled in fully online study before their current or most recent enrollment.

Previous Online Study	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Yes, I completed individual online courses	54%	56%	49%
Yes, I completed another fully online program	9%	7%	12%
Yes, both online courses and programs	15%	13%	19%
No, I had not participated in online courses	22%	23%	19%

COURSES/PROGRAM DELIVERED ONLINE PRIOR TO MARCH 2020

The majority of online students were enrolled in fully online courses or programs online study prior to March 2020, when COVID-19 began to impact college study in the United States. This was more often the case among graduate online students, 74 percent of whom were enrolled in fully online courses or programs prior to March 2020, compared to 58 percent of undergraduate online students. Again, demonstrating that while programs were moved to online due to COVID-19, respondents saw it as their choice to continue with their studies, even though the format changed.

Program Delivered Online
Prior to March 2020

Total

Undergrad

Graduate

YES
NO

62%	58%	74%
38%	42%	26%



REASON FOR ENGAGING IN ONLINE STUDY

We followed up with online students whose program was not delivered online prior to March 2020. We asked them why they engaged in online study. About two-thirds of this pool of undergraduate online students did so because their school decided to deliver their courses/program online/virtually. However, this pool of graduate online students were rather equally split; slightly greater than half (52%) enrolled in online study of their own volition.

Reason for Engaging in Online Study	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
My program became online/ virtual only (schools' choice)	61%	64%	48%
I wanted to enroll in online study (my choice)	39%	36%	52%



TIME ELAPSED SINCE LAST ENROLLED IN POST-SECONDARY STUDY

About 70 percent of online students were last enrolled in post-secondary study within the past two years.

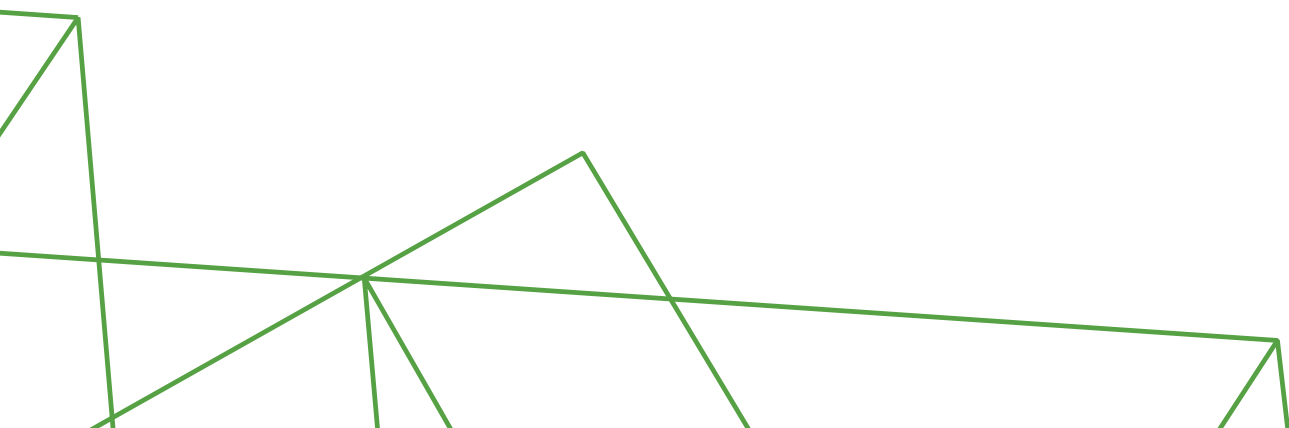
Time Elapsed Since Last Enrolled in Post-Secondary Study	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Less than 1 year	30%	33%	23%
1 year	20%	18%	27%
2 years	19%	18%	25%
3 years	6%	6%	6%
4 years	7%	6%	7%
5 or more years	10%	10%	10%
I have not been previously enrolled in study	8%	9%	2%



MOST IMPORTANT REASON FOR STUDY SELECTION

About half of online students enrolled in their most recent course or program because it was the subject they wanted to study. The remaining 27 percent enrolled because of the study format, while 20 did so because it was their preferred institution.

Most Important Reason for Study Selection	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
The subject you wanted to study (i.e., the subject area)	53%	54%	50%
The format of what you wanted to study (i.e., online or on-campus)	27%	26%	30%
The school where you wanted to study (i.e., the college of university)	20%	20%	19%





SECTION 2:

ONLINE STUDY PREFERENCES & OPINIONS



MOBILE DEVICE USAGE

USE OF MOBILE DEVICE IN ONLINE PROGRAM

The largest proportion of respondents, 36 percent, completed some of their course-related activities using their mobile device (a phone or tablet, but not a laptop), while about 30 percent completed most of their course-related activities using their mobile device. Note that about one-quarter of respondents would not want to use their mobile device for online study.

Use of Mobile Device in Online Program	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Yes, most of my course-related activities	30%	29%	32%
Yes, some of my course-related activities	36%	36%	37%
No, but I would have liked to	10%	10%	10%
No, and I would not want to	24%	25%	21%



REASON FOR MOBILE USAGE DURING ONLINE STUDY

Among the 66 percent who did use their mobile device to complete some or most of their course-related activities online, the majority (70%) did so to check grades, assignment due dates, or course schedules. Around half of this pool used their mobile device to communicate with professors or complete digital readings, videos, or other multimedia learning. Additionally, a substantial number used their mobile device in all of the given ways.

Reason for Mobile Usage During Online Study	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Checking grades, assignment due dates, or course schedules	70%	71%	66%
Communicating with professors	51%	51%	52%
Completing digital readings	47%	45%	51%
Completing videos or other multimedia learning	47%	48%	42%
Researching additional information	44%	45%	43%
Communicating with other students	43%	44%	39%
Completing practice activities	38%	38%	39%
Participating in a discussion forum	37%	37%	35%
Completing graded activities	34%	33%	37%
Something else	1%	1%	1%

OPINIONS ABOUT ONLINE STUDY

COMPARISON OF ONLINE TO CLASSROOM STUDY

About 45 percent of online students deem the instruction of their college-level online study about the same as their college-level classroom study. Graduate online students are slightly more satisfied with online instruction than undergraduate online students.

Comparison of Online to Classroom Study	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Better	29%	26%	38%
About the same	46%	46%	48%
Not as good	20%	23%	11%
I have not enrolled in any college-level classroom study other than my online program	4%	5%	2%



ONLINE EDUCATION WORTH THE COST

Seventy-four percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that online education is worth the cost.

Respondents largely agree that online education is worth the cost. Note that slightly larger proportions of graduate online students agree that online education is worth the cost, perhaps not surprising given the previous data.

Online Education Worth the Cost	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Strongly agree	32%	30%	37%
Agree	42%	40%	47%
Neither agree nor disagree	15%	16%	10%
Disagree	8%	9%	5%
Completely disagree	3%	4%	2%
Average Rating	3.9	3.8	4.1



STATEMENTS ABOUT ONLINE STUDY

The majority of online students agree with all of the given statements about online study. The largest proportions agree that online courses should provide opportunities to interact with other classmates socially and that to complete their studies faster, they would be interested in studying online during the summer months, each cited by 84 percent. Online study allows them to complete their studies faster and online programs should include cohorts of students who have the same career goals in order to build relationships, each cited by 83 percent. The smallest proportion of respondents, 53 percent of undergraduate online students and 70 percent of graduate online students, agreed with the statement that they had a connection to their classmates during their online study.

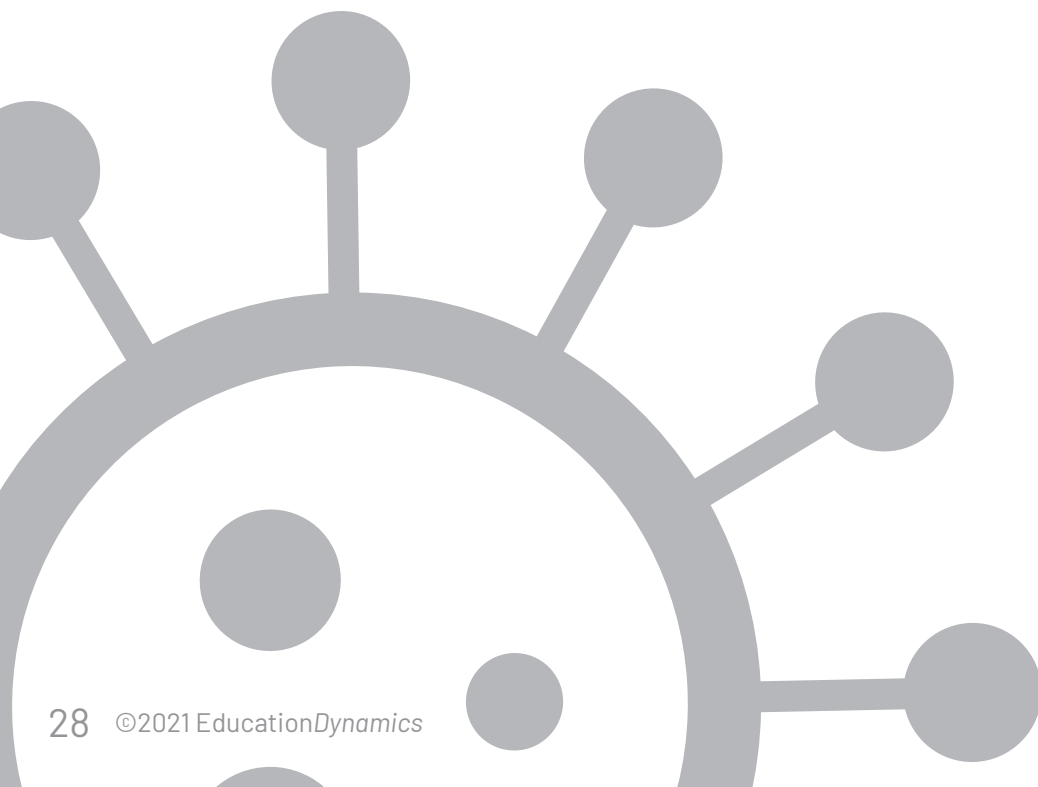
Statements About Online Study	Total		Undergrad		Graduate	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Online courses should provide opportunities to interact with other classmates socially	84%	16%	84%	16%	86%	14%
In order to complete my studies faster, I would be interested in studying online during the summer months	84%	16%	83%	17%	88%	12%
Online study allows me to complete my studies faster	83%	17%	82%	18%	87%	13%
Online programs should include cohorts of students who have the same career goals in order to build relationships	83%	17%	83%	17%	84%	16%
Online programs should include an introductory course about how to study online or workshops to prepare students for online study	81%	19%	80%	20%	84%	16%
My teachers were prepared to teach online	77%	23%	74%	26%	85%	15%
Online courses should have content related to historic moments and current events which students can discuss together	76%	24%	75%	25%	77%	23%
My personal productivity is improved by studying online	73%	27%	71%	29%	76%	24%
Online study made me more motivated to complete my studies	68%	32%	65%	35%	75%	25%
I had a connection to my teachers during my online study	67%	33%	64%	36%	77%	23%
Online courses should include virtual field trips	66%	34%	64%	36%	73%	27%
I had a connection to my classmates during my online study	57%	43%	53%	47%	70%	30%



INFLUENCE OF COVID-19 TO STUDY ONLINE

Interestingly, COVID-19 both did and didn't influence online students to study online. Slightly larger proportions, each of 28 percent, said the pandemic somewhat or a good deal influenced them to study online, but comparable proportions, each of 22 percent, were on the other ends of the spectrum. These data further indicate that respondents saw their continued education as programs moved to an online format as of their own volition, despite program changes.

Influence of COVID-19 to Study Online	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Not much	22%	22%	23%
Somewhat	28%	28%	27%
A good deal	28%	27%	29%
Totally	22%	23%	21%





SECTION 3:

ENROLLMENT & FORMAT OF STUDY PREFERENCES



PREFERRED FORMATS OF STUDY

PREFERRED STUDY FORMAT POST-COVID-19

Post pandemic, the largest proportion of online students, 57 percent, will prefer to enroll in hybrid study, conducted both in the classroom and online. About one-third will prefer to study fully online. While the survey focused on those students who indicated they engaged in online study voluntarily or would engage in online study voluntarily in the future, many respondents would prefer to have at least some classroom-based study as a part of their program. This may be due to many respondents beginning in a classroom-based format and still having a level of comfort with classroom-based instruction.

Preferred Study Format Post-COVID-19	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
100 percent online	34%	33%	35%
Hybrid study (a mix of online and classroom study)	57%	55%	62%
100 percent in the classroom	9%	11%	3%

THE FUTURE OF HYBRID STUDY

Among those who prefer hybrid study (55 percent among undergraduate online students and 62 percent among graduate online students), the largest proportions prefer that hybrid study be conducted mostly online, with some classroom visits. About 30 percent prefer hybrid study conducted mostly in the classroom, with some online content.

Preferred Hybrid Study Format	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Mostly online, with some classroom visits	41%	39%	45%
Mostly in the classroom, with some online content	30%	31%	28%
A 50/50 mix of online and classroom content	19%	20%	17%
Low residency (courses are delivered online with one or more multi-day visits to campus)	10%	10%	10%

PREFERENCE FOR FLEXIBLE LECTURE OPTIONS

The vast majority of respondents who prefer classroom or hybrid study would be interested in a study option that recorded classroom lectures for students to watch at their convenience if they missed a live classroom session.

Preference for Flexible Lecture Options	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
YES	91%	90%	92%
NO	9%	10%	8%

PROGRAMS & STUDENT SERVICES

ATTRACTIVENESS OF STACKABLE CERTIFICATES

After providing a definition of a stackable certificate to respondents, we asked how attractive it would be to them to be able to earn certificates in related fields that were able to be combined or “stacked” as a method to earning a bachelor’s degree. All but a few were at least somewhat attracted to the idea.

Attractiveness of Stackable Certificates	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Not at all attractive	7%	7%	6%
Somewhat attractive	47%	49%	42%
Very attractive	46%	44%	52%



MOST IMPORTANT STUDENT SERVICES

We asked respondents to rank the five most important student services they used or are most likely to use.

Online students most valued career planning/placement services, 38 percent, followed by financial aid advising, 35 percent, access to faculty for academic advising, 33 percent, online library, 32 percent, and 24/7 tech support, 30 percent.

Most Important Student Services: TOTAL	Most Important	2	3	4	5	Total
Career planning/placement services	11%	8%	7%	7%	6%	38%
Financial aid advising	10%	7%	6%	6%	6%	35%
Access to faculty for academic advising	7%	7%	7%	6%	5%	33%
Online library	8%	5%	6%	6%	6%	32%
24/7 tech support	6%	6%	6%	6%	6%	30%
Career fairs/events organized by college/university (online or on campus)	6%	8%	4%	5%	6%	29%
Research assistance	4%	5%	7%	7%	7%	28%
Tutoring	4%	8%	5%	5%	5%	28%
Mental health services/counseling	6%	4%	5%	7%	6%	27%
Student networking events	4%	4%	5%	5%	6%	24%
Fitness center and intramural activities	4%	3%	6%	5%	6%	24%
On-campus library	5%	5%	4%	5%	5%	23%
Peer study groups	4%	5%	5%	5%	4%	23%
On-campus computer center	4%	5%	4%	4%	4%	21%
Student organizations	4%	4%	4%	5%	4%	21%
Life coaching	3%	5%	4%	4%	5%	21%
Medical health services	3%	4%	5%	5%	4%	21%
Bookstore	4%	3%	5%	4%	4%	20%
New student orientation	4%	4%	4%	3%	5%	19%

Most important to undergraduate online students are career planning/placement services, 41 percent, followed by financial aid advising, 37 percent, access to faculty for academic advising, 33 percent, online library, 31 percent, and 24/7 tech support, 30 percent.

Most Important Student Services: UNDERGRADUATE	Most Important	2	3	4	5	Total
Career planning/placement services	11%	8%	7%	8%	7%	41%
Financial aid advising	11%	8%	6%	6%	7%	37%
Access to faculty for academic advising	7%	8%	7%	6%	5%	33%
Online library	8%	4%	6%	6%	7%	31%
24/7 tech support	6%	6%	7%	5%	6%	30%
Career fairs/events organized by college/ university (online or on campus)	6%	7%	4%	6%	5%	29%
Tutoring	3%	8%	6%	5%	6%	28%
Mental health services/counseling	6%	4%	6%	7%	5%	28%
Research assistance	3%	4%	6%	7%	6%	26%
Student networking events	4%	4%	5%	6%	6%	24%
On-campus library	5%	5%	4%	4%	5%	23%
Peer study groups	4%	6%	6%	4%	4%	23%
Fitness center and intramural activities	3%	2%	6%	5%	6%	23%
Medical health services	3%	5%	5%	4%	4%	22%
On-campus computer center	5%	5%	4%	4%	4%	21%
Bookstore	4%	3%	5%	4%	5%	21%
Life coaching	3%	5%	3%	4%	5%	21%
Student organizations	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	20%
New student orientation	4%	3%	4%	3%	5%	19%

Most important to graduate online students are an online library and research assistance, 34 percent each, followed by access to faculty for academic advising, 32 percent, as well as 24/7 tech support, career planning/ placement services, and career fairs/events organized by their college/university, 31 percent each.

Most Important Student Services: GRADUATE	Most Important	2	3	4	5	Total
Online library	11%	7%	6%	7%	3%	34%
Research assistance	6%	5%	7%	6%	9%	34%
Access to faculty for academic advising	7%	7%	7%	5%	6%	32%
24/7 tech support	5%	6%	4%	8%	8%	31%
Career planning/placement services	9%	5%	7%	5%	5%	31%
Career fairs/events organized by college/ university (online or on campus)	6%	10%	6%	3%	7%	31%
Financial aid advising	8%	3%	8%	5%	5%	29%
Tutoring	5%	9%	5%	5%	5%	28%
Mental health services/counseling	5%	5%	3%	4%	8%	26%
Student networking events	5%	3%	5%	5%	7%	25%
Student organizations	3%	6%	6%	7%	4%	25%
Fitness center and intramural activities	6%	3%	5%	6%	5%	25%
On-campus library	3%	8%	3%	6%	3%	24%
Peer study groups	5%	1%	5%	7%	6%	23%
Life coaching	4%	3%	5%	5%	5%	22%
On-campus computer center	3%	6%	3%	3%	5%	21%
New student orientation	4%	6%	3%	3%	4%	21%
Bookstore	3%	3%	6%	5%	2%	19%
Medical health services	2%	3%	5%	5%	4%	19%



SECTION 4:

CAREER MOTIVATIONS



OBJECTIVES

CAREER OBJECTIVE

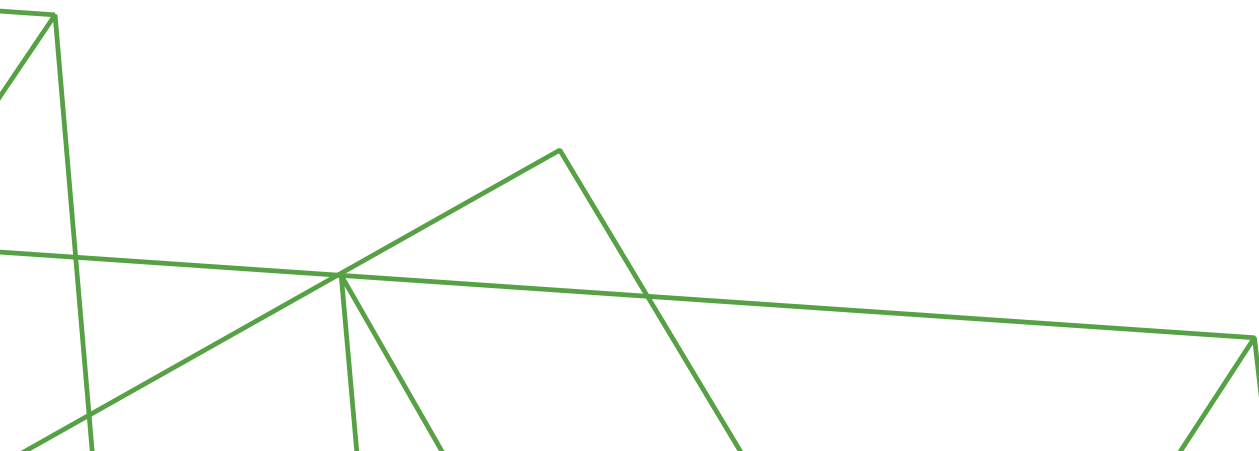
Online students primarily focused on three career outcomes: to start a new career to earn more money (29%), to start a new career to align better with their interests (24%), or to get their first professional/salaried job (20%).

Career Objective	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
To start a new career to earn more money	29%	30%	24%
To start a new career more aligned with my interests	24%	23%	27%
To get my first professional/salaried job	20%	23%	12%
To get a promotion within my current profession	11%	10%	15%
To increase my salary within my current profession	9%	7%	13%
It is required by my employer/to keep my current job	4%	3%	5%
Something else	2%	1%	3%
I do not have a career objective for this degree	3%	3%	2%

CAREER STATEMENTS OF AGREEMENT

Using a 5-point scale of 1 not at all agree to 5 strongly agree, online students gave the highest average rating, 4.1, to the career statement "I know what career field I want to work in after I complete my studies." However, respondents were largely in agreement with all of the given career statements.

Career Statements of Agreement: TOTAL	1-Not at-all Agree	2	3	4	5-Strongly Agree	Average Rating
I know what career field I want to work in after I complete my studies	4%	5%	17%	29%	45%	4.1
Online study provides me with the specific skills I need for my intended career	6%	8%	23%	31%	32%	3.8
Online study provides me with the overall skills I need to enter any job (such as management skills)	6%	10%	26%	29%	30%	3.7
Online study allows me to interact with professionals in my desired field of work	11%	13%	24%	26%	27%	3.5





Graduate online students are slightly more in agreement with the given career statements than undergraduate online students.

Career Statements of Agreement: UNDERGRADUATE	1-Not at-all Agree	2	3	4	5-Strongly Agree	Average Rating
I know what career field I want to work in after I complete my studies	5%	5%	18%	27%	45%	4.0
Online study provides me with the specific skills I need for my intended career	7%	10%	23%	30%	30%	3.7
Online study provides me with the overall skills I need to enter any job (such as management skills)	7%	11%	28%	27%	27%	3.6
Online study allows me to interact with professionals in my desired field of work	12%	15%	25%	22%	26%	3.3



Career Statements of Agreement: GRADUATE

	1-Not at-all Agree	2	3	4	5- Strongly Agree	Average Rating
I know what career field I want to work in after I complete my studies	2%	3%	14%	37%	43%	4.2
Online study provides me with the specific skills I need for my intended career	2%	2%	24%	33%	39%	4.1
Online study provides me with the overall skills I need to enter any job (such as management skills)	4%	6%	19%	33%	38%	4.0
Online study allows me to interact with professionals in my desired field of work	7%	7%	21%	36%	30%	3.8

CAREER SERVICES FOR ONLINE STUDENTS

CAREER SERVICES USED

Substantial proportions of respondents used many of the given career services during their online program. Half used self-assessments or worked with career advisors. Proportions of 45 percent used job search assistance or their institution's job search website, while comparable proportions used resume creation tools and internship search assistance.

Career Services Used: TOTAL	Yes	No	Was Not Offered
Self-assessments	51%	36%	13%
Working with a career advisor	50%	39%	11%
Job search assistance	45%	41%	14%
Job search website maintained by the school	45%	41%	14%
Resume creation	43%	43%	14%
Internship search assistance	42%	43%	16%
Interview workshops	37%	48%	14%
Career mentor	37%	46%	18%
Connections with area employers	37%	44%	19%
School-sponsored job fair	35%	50%	15%
Alumni networking event	34%	50%	16%
Job shadowing	27%	51%	23%



Overall, larger proportions of graduate online students used the career services offered at their institution than undergraduate online students.

Career Services Used: UNDERGRADUATE	Yes	No	Was Not Offered
Working with a career advisor	48%	40%	12%
Self-assessments	47%	39%	14%
Job search assistance	45%	40%	14%
Job search website maintained by the school	44%	41%	15%
Resume creation	41%	45%	14%
Internship search assistance	39%	44%	17%
Connections with area employers	35%	46%	20%
Interview workshops	33%	52%	16%
School-sponsored job fair	33%	51%	16%
Career mentor	32%	49%	18%
Alumni networking event	31%	52%	17%
Job shadowing	26%	52%	23%



Overall, larger proportions of graduate online students used the career services offered at their institution than undergraduate online students.

Career Services Used: GRADUATE	Yes	No	Was Not Offered
Self-assessments	62%	27%	10%
Working with a career advisor	57%	35%	9%
Resume creation	50%	37%	13%
Interview workshops	50%	39%	10%
Career mentor	50%	34%	16%
Internship search assistance	49%	38%	13%
Job search website maintained by the school	47%	42%	11%
Job search assistance	45%	42%	13%
Connections with area employers	43%	40%	17%
School-sponsored job fair	42%	46%	13%
Alumni networking event	40%	46%	14%
Job shadowing	30%	48%	22%



MOST IMPORTANT CAREER SERVICES USED

Of the career services respondents used during their online program, the three most important career services in terms of their personal success were resume creation tools (36%), working with a career advisor (33%), and self-assessments (30%). Undergraduate online students also cited internship assistance, their institution's job search website, and job search assistance.

Most Important Career Services Used	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Resume creation	36%	36%	37%
Working with a career advisor	33%	32%	33%
Self-assessments	30%	23%	37%
Job search website maintained by the school	29%	31%	27%
Job search assistance	28%	32%	23%
Internship search assistance	28%	34%	21%
Interview workshops	22%	21%	22%
Career mentor	16%	13%	20%
School-sponsored job fair	13%	13%	12%
Alumni networking event	11%	9%	13%
Job shadowing	9%	8%	10%
Connections with area employers	9%	10%	7%

EXPECTATION OF USING CAREER SERVICES

Greater than half of online students expect to use career services during their program to help prepare for the job market. Fifty-seven percent of respondents also intend to use career services immediately after program completion to help secure a new job. A substantial 40 percent expect to use these career services throughout their career to help them along the way.

Expectation of Using Career Services	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
During my enrollment to help me prepare for the job market	54%	55%	50%
Immediately after completing my studies to help me get a job after completing my program	57%	56%	63%
Throughout my career to help me along the way	40%	41%	39%



IMPORTANCE OF SKILLS ASSESSMENTS FOR CAREERS

Using a 5-point scale of 1 not at all important to 5 very important, online students gave a 3.9 average rating to describe how important it is for a college to assess their skills and abilities in regard to various occupations. The largest proportion, around 40 percent, said it was very important.

Importance of Skills Assessments for Careers	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
1 – Not at all important	3%	3%	5%
2	8%	9%	6%
3 – Important	20%	20%	18%
4	28%	28%	27%
5 – Very important	41%	40%	44%
Average Rating	3.9	3.9	4.0





SECTION 5:

THE ONLINE COLLEGE STUDENT'S DECISION-MAKING PROCESS



DISTANCE TO INSTITUTION

About two-thirds of online students live within 50 miles of their institution. The largest proportion of undergraduate online students, 32 percent, live within ten miles of their institution, while the largest proportion of graduate online students, 22 percent, live 15 to 50 miles from their institution.

Distance to Institution	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
10 miles or less	28%	32%	17%
11 to 14 miles	13%	12%	14%
15 to 50 miles	22%	22%	22%
51 to 75 miles	9%	7%	14%
76 to 100 miles	6%	5%	9%
101 to 250 miles	5%	4%	6%
251 to 500 miles	4%	4%	5%
More than 500 miles	9%	8%	11%
Not sure	5%	6%	2%



CONSIDER CHANGING INSTITUTIONS IF PROGRAM IS ONLINE FALL 2021

Two-thirds of respondents indicated they would not consider changing schools if their program is offered online in the Fall 2021 semester.

Consider Changing
Institutions if Program is
Online in Fall 2021

Total

Undergrad

Graduate

NO

66%

65%

67%

YES

34%

35%

33%





REASON FOR CHANGING INSTITUTIONS

The largest proportion among the approximately one-third who would consider changing schools if their program is online in Fall 2021 said they would want an institution closer to home. Other significant proportions would change institutions because they could enroll in another institution farther away that's more favorable (18%); because they would want a program that would be delivered in a classroom despite COVID-19 or because they would want to pay less if they continue to study online (17% each).

Reason for Changing Institutions	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Would want an institution closer to home	28%	27%	31%
Could enroll in another institution farther away that is more favorable	18%	17%	22%
Would want a program that would be delivered in classroom despite COVID-19	17%	20%	10%
Would want to pay less if continuing to study online	17%	16%	20%
Would want a different online program	13%	13%	12%
I do not need the same campus experience	6%	6%	5%
Other	1%	2%	0%

MOST DIFFICULT PART OF ENROLLMENT PROCESS

For online students, the most difficult part of the enrollment process was determining how to pay for school, 18 percent, followed by deciding if other family and work obligations would interfere with study, 14 percent, and completing financial aid forms, ten percent. Note that about twice as many graduate online students cited gathering recommendations and understanding the enrollment process as challenges.

Most Difficult Part of Enrollment Process	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Determining how to pay for school	18%	19%	13%
Deciding if I was able to go to school with other family and work obligations	14%	13%	17%
Completing financial aid forms	10%	10%	10%
Scheduling courses	9%	10%	6%
Gathering transcripts	8%	8%	7%
Gathering recommendations	8%	6%	13%
Writing essays	8%	9%	5%
Getting previous credits transferred	7%	7%	6%
Understanding the enrollment process	7%	6%	11%
Registering for courses	6%	6%	3%
Completing the application	5%	4%	6%
Something else	2%	2%	1%



Most Important Factors in Enrollment Decision: Total

Online students take many factors into consideration when it comes to deciding where to enroll. The most important factor is the cost of tuition and fees, 26 percent, followed by the institution offering programs that match their career goals, 23 percent, and the availability of online programs, 20 percent. Also important to this population is the length of time to complete their studies, 19 percent, followed by the availability of flexible formats and the reputation of the college or program, both with 18 percent.

Most Important Factors in Enrollment Decision: TOTAL	Most Important	Second	Third	Total
Cost of tuition and fees	9%	8%	9%	26%
School offers programs that match my career goals	11%	7%	5%	23%
Availability of online programs	7%	5%	7%	20%
Length of time to complete my studies	4%	8%	6%	19%
Availability of flexible formats (online, hybrid, low-residence...)	6%	6%	6%	18%
Reputation of the college or program	6%	7%	5%	18%
Professional accreditation of my program	7%	5%	4%	16%
Availability of scholarships, fellowships, and assistantships	5%	4%	5%	15%
Acceptance of previously earned credits	4%	5%	4%	14%
Location where my courses are offered/available	4%	4%	5%	13%
Feeling that school/program/staff cared about my success	3%	5%	5%	13%
Availability of accelerated courses	3%	5%	4%	12%
Available student support services	4%	4%	5%	12%
Recommended by my employer	4%	3%	3%	11%
Recommendations of friends, family, associates	3%	3%	5%	11%
Received credit for prior life experience or other non-traditional pathways to credit	3%	4%	4%	11%
School has a population of students like me	3%	4%	4%	11%
Availability of child care	3%	3%	3%	8%
Attractiveness of specific school marketing messages and advertisements	2%	3%	2%	8%
Feeling of inclusiveness on campus/in program for students like me	2%	3%	3%	8%
Located near public transportation	2%	3%	2%	7%
Something else	2%	2%	3%	8%

Most important to the largest proportions of undergraduate online students are cost of tuition and fees, 26 percent, the institution offering programs that match their career goals, 24 percent, and the availability of flexible formats and online programs, 18 percent each.

Most Important Factors in Enrollment Decision: UNDERGRAD	Most Important	Second	Third	Total
Cost of tuition and fees	10%	8%	7%	26%
School offers programs that match my career goals	11%	7%	5%	24%
Availability of flexible formats (online, hybrid, low-residence...)	6%	6%	6%	18%
Availability of online programs	7%	5%	6%	18%
Length of time to complete my studies	4%	8%	5%	17%
Reputation/reputation of the college or program	6%	7%	4%	16%
Professional accreditation of my program	7%	4%	5%	16%
Location where my courses are offered/available	4%	4%	7%	15%
Acceptance of previously earned credits	4%	6%	4%	14%
Availability of scholarships, fellowships, and assistantships	4%	4%	5%	14%
Available student support services	3%	4%	5%	13%
Availability of accelerated courses	4%	4%	5%	12%
Feeling that school/program/staff cared about my success	3%	4%	6%	12%
Recommendations of friends, family, associates	3%	3%	6%	11%
Received credit for prior life experience or other non-traditional pathways to credit	4%	4%	4%	11%
Availability of child care	4%	3%	3%	10%
Recommended by my employer	4%	3%	3%	10%
School has a population of students like me	3%	4%	4%	10%
Feeling of inclusiveness on campus/in program for students like me	3%	3%	4%	9%
Attractiveness of specific school marketing messages and advertisements	3%	4%	2%	8%
Located near public transportation	1%	3%	2%	6%
Something else	2%	3%	4%	8%

Most important to the largest proportions of graduate online students are cost of tuition and fees, 27 percent, the availability of online programs and length of time to complete studies, 24 percent each, the institution offering programs that match their career goals, 22 percent, and the reputation of the college or program, 21 percent.

Most Important Factors in Enrollment Decision: GRADUATE	Most Important	Second	Third	Total
Cost of tuition and fees	5%	9%	13%	27%
Availability of online programs	7%	7%	10%	24%
Length of time to complete my studies	6%	9%	9%	24%
School offers programs that match my career goals	10%	8%	5%	22%
Reputation of the college or program	8%	6%	7%	21%
Professional accreditation of my program	8%	6%	3%	18%
Availability of flexible formats (online, hybrid, low-residence...)	6%	5%	5%	17%
Availability of scholarships, fellowships, and assistantships	6%	5%	6%	17%
Feeling that school/program/staff cared about my success	6%	6%	5%	17%
Recommended by my employer	4%	3%	5%	13%
Acceptance of previously earned credits	3%	3%	5%	11%
Recommendations of friends, family, associates	5%	2%	5%	11%
Available student support services	5%	2%	5%	11%
School has a population of students like me	3%	3%	5%	11%
Availability of accelerated courses	2%	6%	2%	10%
Received credit for prior life experience or other non-traditional pathways to credit	3%	3%	3%	10%
Located near public transportation	5%	3%	1%	9%
Location where my courses are offered/available	2%	4%	2%	7%
Attractiveness of specific school marketing messages and advertisements	2%	3%	1%	5%
Availability of child care	0%	2%	2%	4%
Feeling of inclusiveness on campus/in program for students like me	1%	2%	1%	4%
Something else	3%	1%	3%	7%



STATEMENTS ABOUT ENROLLMENT DECISION

When we asked respondents which of the following statements about their enrollment is closest to how they did (or will) make their most recent enrollment decision, the data were rather equally split. The largest proportions, about 25 percent, said either that tuition for their preferred program is the lowest among the programs they evaluated or that tuition for their preferred program is higher than some others, but the program's convenience, format, schedule, and location are ideal for them.

Note that 23 percent of undergraduate online students said they did (or will) enroll at the school that will help them most with their career, compared to the smallest proportion of graduate online students, 14 percent.

Statements About Enrollment Decision	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Tuition for my preferred program is the lowest among the programs I evaluated	25%	24%	26%
Tuition for my preferred program is higher than some others but the program's convenience, format, schedule, and location are ideal for me	23%	22%	27%
The school that will help me most with my career	21%	23%	14%
Tuition for my preferred program is higher than some, but the content is what I want	16%	16%	16%
The school and the program I chose/will choose has the best reputation	16%	16%	17%

MOST ATTRACTIVE WAY TO INFLUENCE SCHOOL SELECTION

Given the following features of an institution, online students said the single most attractive way for a school to influence them to enroll there is to lower tuition, followed closely by offering programs that match their career objectives.

Most Attractive Way to Influence School Selection	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Lower tuition	15%	15%	16%
Programs match my career objectives	14%	14%	14%
Higher scholarships and grants	11%	12%	8%
Free course	9%	9%	9%
Faster time to complete my program	8%	7%	10%
Free technology equipment (computer, iPad, tablet, etc.)	7%	7%	7%
Tuition payment plan	6%	6%	6%
More course/class options	5%	5%	6%
Blended/hybrid courses	5%	5%	5%
Free textbooks	5%	5%	3%
Lifetime career services	4%	4%	4%
Audit a class for free	3%	3%	5%
Better linkages to area employers	3%	3%	2%
Larger school	2%	2%	4%
Alumni discount	2%	2%	1%
Better contact when I inquire or apply	2%	2%	0%

FEATURE TO ATTRACT ENROLLMENT OVER 100 MILES AWAY

Given the same features, but this time with the option of selecting as many that apply, the largest proportion of online students said the most influential feature an institution located over 100 miles away from them could have to persuade them to enroll is to lower tuition. However, substantial proportions cited several other ways to attract them. Note that the other largest proportion of graduate online students, also with 41 percent, cited a faster time to completion in addition to lowering tuition.

Feature to Attract Enrollment Over 100 Miles Away	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Lower tuition	50%	53%	41%
Free course	39%	40%	37%
Higher scholarships and grants	36%	37%	32%
Programs match my career objectives	35%	35%	37%
Free textbooks	34%	36%	25%
Faster time to complete my program	34%	32%	41%
Tuition payment plan	33%	32%	33%
Free technology equipment (computer, iPad, tablet, etc.)	33%	34%	30%
More course/class options	31%	32%	28%
Lifetime career services	27%	28%	24%
Better linkages to area employers	22%	20%	28%
Blended/hybrid courses	22%	21%	23%
Better contact when I inquire or apply	18%	16%	21%
Audit a class for free	17%	16%	19%
Alumni discount	12%	11%	15%
Larger school	9%	9%	9%

MOST INFLUENTIAL IN SELECTING INSTITUTION OF ENROLLMENT

According to online students, online reviews of the school and college search/ranking websites most influenced them in selecting their current institution. The opinions of friends, family, and coworkers also influenced a substantial proportion.

Undergraduate online students were also influenced by college fairs or events (20%), emails from the school (15%), and the community college they attended (15%). Graduate online students were also influenced by online advertisements on social media (19%), listings or advertisements on search engines (15%), and emails from the school. (17%)

Most Influential in Selecting Institution of Enrollment	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Online reviews of the school	31%	30%	34%
College search/ranking websites (eLearners.com, ClassesUSA.com, U.S. News & World Report, etc.)	30%	27%	36%
Opinions of friends, family, and coworkers	24%	26%	19%
College fair or event	18%	20%	13%
Emails from the school	16%	15%	17%
Online advertisements on social media (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, etc.)	14%	12%	19%
Direct mail from the school	14%	14%	13%
Community college I attended	14%	15%	10%
Listings or advertisements on search engines (Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc.)	12%	11%	15%
People/groups I follow online	9%	8%	13%
TV commercials about the school	9%	9%	9%
Posts on Facebook or other social media sites	9%	9%	7%
Videos on YouTube	9%	9%	7%
My employer	8%	8%	6%
Ads on websites I visit	7%	8%	5%
Ads on apps that I use	5%	5%	5%
Social influencers	4%	5%	3%
Ads on streaming services (such as Hulu)	3%	3%	5%
Radio commercials about the school	3%	2%	5%
Billboards	3%	3%	3%
Ads on Pandora or Spotify	2%	1%	5%
Podcasts	2%	2%	3%
Something else	7%	8%	5%

SECTION 6:

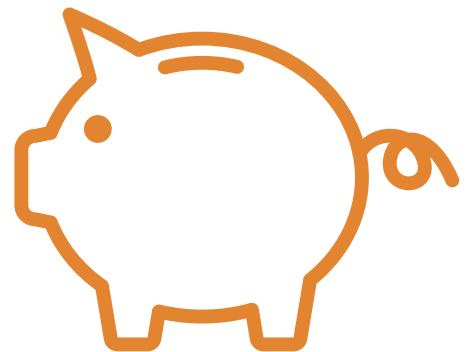
FINANCING EDUCATION FOR THE ONLINE COLLEGE STUDENT



COURSE PAYMENT METHODS

Online students pay for their online study mainly in three ways: with personal or family funds (54%), student loans (47%), or government grants (42%). Note that larger proportions of graduate online students use work-study, private loans, and employer tuition support benefits to pay for school than undergraduate online students do.

Course Payment Methods	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Personal/family funds	54%	54%	55%
Student loans (government, subsidized, unsubsidized, etc.)	47%	49%	41%
Government grants (Pell, federal, state, local, etc.)	42%	45%	31%
Private third-party scholarships	20%	20%	19%
Work-study	20%	18%	25%
Private loans (from a bank)	18%	17%	23%
Employer tuition support benefits	17%	14%	23%
Other	2%	2%	2%





IMPACT OF STUDENT LOAN DEBT

The largest proportion of online students did not have existing school loan debt during their most recent enrollment. But among those who did, 27 percent said as a result of having student loan debt, they looked for programs that had assistantships to help cover the costs. Another 23 percent specifically looked for programs that didn't require them borrowing any money.

Impact of Student Loan Debt	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
I didn't have any loan debt	45%	46%	39%
I looked for programs that had assistantship to help cover costs	27%	25%	30%
I specifically looked for programs for which I wouldn't have to borrow any money	23%	21%	27%
I didn't consider some of the programs I liked due to cost	17%	16%	19%
I decided to enroll part time in order to control costs each semester	15%	12%	22%
I delayed enrolling in order to save up or pay off existing loans	8%	7%	10%
Other	2%	3%	1%

USE OF EMPLOYER TUITION REIMBURSEMENT

The largest proportion of online students used employer tuition reimbursement to pay for their online studies: 36 percent of undergraduate online students and 47 percent of graduate online students. Similar proportions of 25 to 35 percent either did not use employer tuition reimbursement or did not have employer tuition reimbursement benefits.

Use of Employer Tuition Reimbursement	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
YES	40%	36%	47%
NO	28%	29%	25%
Benefit not offered to me	33%	35%	28%



EMPLOYER SUPPORTIVE OF STUDY

The majority of respondents feel supported in their education by their employer. Note that a larger proportion of graduate online students feel supported than undergraduate online students.

Employer Supportive of Study	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Feel supported in your education by your employer	71%	67%	80%
Do not feel supported in your education by your employer	29%	33%	20%

EMPLOYER-SPECIFIC TUITION DISCOUNTS

About 60 percent of undergraduate online students and 50 percent of graduate online students enrolled at institutions that did not offer tuition discounts for employees at their company. Note that about 14 percent were uncertain; implying they never looked into such a benefit.

Employer-Specific Tuition Discounts	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
NO	55%	59%	48%
YES	31%	27%	38%
Unsure	14%	14%	14%



SECTION 7:

STUDY CIRCUMSTANCES OF ONLINE STUDENTS



INTERNET ACCESS

PRIMARY INTERNET ACCESS DEVICE

About three-quarters of online students access the internet most often through a desktop or laptop computer. The remaining proportion largely does so through their smartphone.

Primary Internet Access Device	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
A desktop/laptop computer	75%	74%	77%
A smartphone (Android, iPhone, etc).	19%	20%	17%
A tablet (such as an iPad)	6%	6%	7%
Something else	0%	0%	0%

PRIMARY INTERNET ACCESS LOCATION

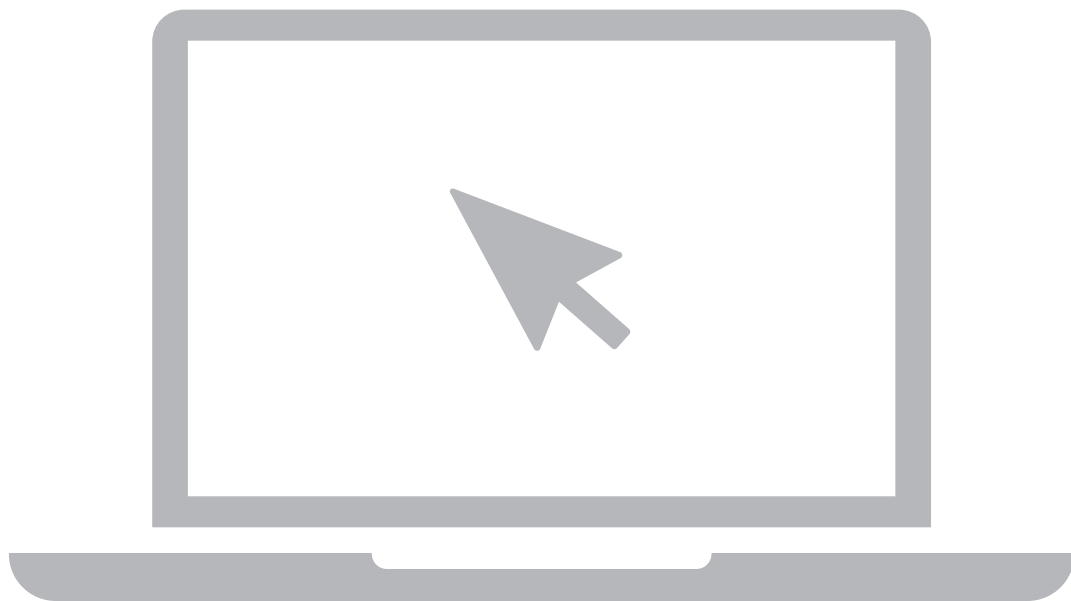
The vast majority of online students access the internet from their home.

Primary Internet Access Location	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
From my home	91%	91%	90%
From my school	5%	6%	5%
From a local library	2%	2%	2%
From the home of a friend	1%	1%	2%
From the home of a family member	1%	1%	1%
Somewhere else	0%	0%	1%

HOME ACCESS TO INTERNET HAS POSITIVE IMPACT ON STUDIES

While half of undergraduate online students believe they would have had an easier time completing their studies if they had more often accessed the internet from their home, a substantial 20 percent more of graduate online students, 71 percent, believe it would have positively impacted their studies.

Home Access to Internet Has Positive Impact on Studies	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Yes	56%	51%	71%
No	25%	28%	18%
Not sure	19%	21%	12%



STUDY ENVIRONMENT

STUDY ENVIRONMENT FACTORS

All but a few respondents have internet access at home and a quiet space available to them where they can complete coursework or study. Eighty-five percent of respondents have a computer dedicated to schoolwork. Family support is very high, with 88% stating support to enroll in higher education. While 74% own or lease a vehicle, 34% rely on public transportation.

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	92%	8%	91%	9%	93%	7%
I feel supported by my family to enroll in higher education	88%	12%	87%	13%	91%	9%
I have a computer dedicated to my schoolwork	85%	15%	83%	17%	89%	11%
I own or lease a car	74%	26%	70%	30%	85%	15%
I live in a home with my parents or grandparents	38%	63%	39%	61%	33%	67%
I rely on public transportation	34%	66%	34%	66%	31%	69%

SECTION 8:

DEMOGRAPHICS

The typical undergraduate online student is a female, about 29 years of age, is single and has no children living with them at home. They are employed full time, with a household income of \$60,700, and were not the first in their family to attend college. Respondents live in suburban and urban communities all over the nation.

The typical graduate online student comprises both male and female, about 31 years of age, and are married/partnered. Forty-five percent of graduate online students have 2 or more children in the home. They are employed full time, with a household income of \$89,350, and were not the first in their family to attend college. Respondents live in urban and suburban communities all over the nation.



GENDER

Almost two-thirds of online students are female. Graduate online students comprise 15 percent more men than undergraduate online students, with 47 percent of online students being male.

Gender	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Female	63%	66%	53%
Male	36%	32%	47%
Non-binary/non-conforming	1%	2%	0%



AGE

Online students are a wide variety of ages. About 25 percent of undergraduate online students are between the ages of 19 and 22; median age is 29. About 35 percent of graduate online students are between the ages of 24 and 31; median age is 31.

Undergraduate
Median Age is

29

Graduate
Median Age is

31



Age

Total Undergrad Graduate

17 or younger	0%	0%	0%
18	3%	4%	1%
19	6%	7%	1%
20	5%	6%	2%
21	6%	7%	3%
22	5%	5%	4%
23	4%	4%	3%
24	4%	4%	5%
25	3%	2%	5%
26	4%	4%	4%
27	3%	3%	3%
28	3%	2%	5%
29	3%	3%	3%
30	4%	3%	6%
31	2%	1%	5%
32	2%	1%	4%
33	2%	1%	4%
34	4%	4%	4%
35	4%	4%	3%
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43	2%	2%	3%
44	2%	2%	1%
45	2%	2%	1%
46	1%	1%	1%
47	2%	2%	1%
48	2%	2%	2%
49	1%	1%	0%
50	1%	1%	0%
51	0%	0%	1%
52	0%	0%	0%
53	0%	0%	1%
54	0%	0%	0%
55 or older	4%	3%	6%

RACE & ETHNICITY

About two-thirds of online students are white/Caucasian, while about one-quarter are Black or African American, and about one-tenth are Asian.

Race & Ethnicity	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
White/Caucasian	65%	65%	65%
Black or African American	23%	22%	25%
Asian	9%	9%	7%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2%	2%	1%
Native Hawaiian Other Pacific Islander	0%	0%	1%
Some other race	2%	2%	2%

HISPANIC IDENTIFICATION

The majority of online students are not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.

Hispanic Identification	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	85%	82%	91%
Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano	6%	7%	3%
Yes, Puerto Rican	3%	3%	1%
Yes, Cuban	2%	2%	1%
Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin - for example, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, Guatemalan, Spaniard, Ecuadorian, etc.	5%	6%	3%



MARITAL STATUS

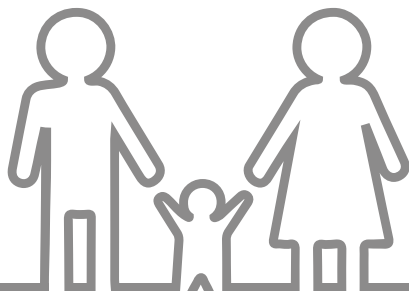
Online students are a rather equal mix of married/partnered and single. The majority of undergraduate online students, about 60 percent, are single, while the slight majority of graduate online students, about 55 percent, are married/partnered.

Martial Status	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Single	55%	59%	43%
Married/partnered	45%	41%	57%

CHILDREN PRESENT IN HOUSEHOLD

Over half of the online student population have 1 or more children in the home, with 52% of undergraduate students and 64% of graduate students reporting one or more children present in the household. 45% of graduate online students have 2 or more children at home.

Children Present in Household	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
1	22%	22%	19%
2	23%	20%	32%
3 or more	10%	9%	13%
None	45%	48%	36%



TOTAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME

The median household income for online students is \$66,550. Among undergraduate online students, the median household income was slightly lower, \$60,700, while among graduate online students, it was higher, \$89,350.

Total Household Income	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Under \$25,000	16%	19%	8%
\$25,000-\$39,999	12%	13%	10%
\$40,000-\$54,999	12%	13%	8%
\$55,000-\$69,999	13%	13%	11%
\$70,000-\$84,999	10%	11%	9%
\$85,000-\$99,999	8%	6%	14%
\$100,000-\$114,999	10%	10%	11%
\$115,000-\$129,999	5%	4%	7%
\$130,000-\$149,999	5%	4%	8%
\$150,000 or more	8%	6%	14%



COVID-19 IMPACT HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Slightly more than half of online students were impacted financially by the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 Impact Household Income	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Yes	55%	56%	51%
No	45%	44%	49%

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

The largest proportion of online students are employed full time, 45 percent, followed by about 20 percent who are employed part time. Note that almost a quarter of undergraduate online students are full-time students.

Employment Status	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Employed full time	45%	41%	57%
Employed part time	21%	20%	25%
Not employed, but seeking employment	10%	12%	6%
Not employed and not seeking employment	4%	4%	3%
Retired	1%	0%	1%
Full-time student	19%	23%	7%

FIRST IN FAMILY TO ATTEND COLLEGE

The majority of online students, about 70 percent of undergraduate online students and about 80 percent of graduate online students, are not among the first generation in their family to enroll in college.

First in Family to Attend College

	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
No	71%	68%	78%
Yes	29%	32%	22%

COMMUNITY TYPE

Online students reside in suburban areas slightly more often than in urban areas. Only about ten percent live in rural areas.

Community Type

	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
Suburban area	49%	51%	41%
Urban area	40%	37%	46%
Rural area	12%	11%	13%



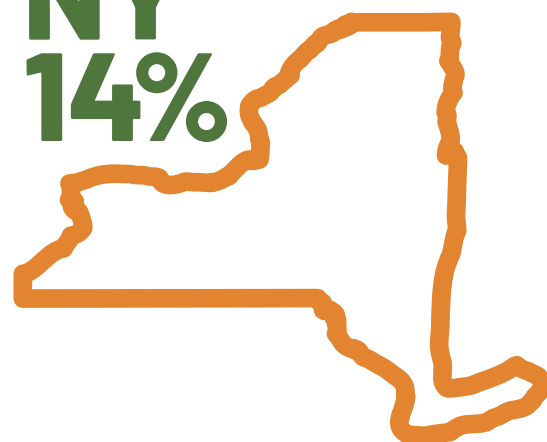
STATE OF RESIDENCE

State of Residence	Total	Undergrad	Graduate
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California	16%	16%	13%
New York	14%	11%	22%
Florida	7%	8%	5%
Colorado	6%	6%	6%
Texas	6%	6%	7%
Illinois	6%	6%	5%
Pennsylvania	4%	4%	5%
Georgia	3%	3%	2%
New Jersey	3%	2%	5%
North Carolina	3%	3%	2%
Virginia	3%	2%	3%
Massachusetts	2%	2%	4%
Ohio	2%	2%	2%
Missouri	2%	2%	1%
Tennessee	2%	2%	1%
Arizona	2%	1%	2%
Indiana	2%	2%	1%
Washington	2%	1%	2%
Another state	16%	18%	14%



NY
14%





SECTION 9:

KEY FINDINGS

To begin, after years of studying the online student market for higher education leadership, we also must share our opinion that the current market share of roughly 20 percent of fully online students will continue to grow at a steady pace. This is true not only due to the recent pandemic where many students were obligated to learn online but indicated they would continue to study online in the future (close to 60 percent), but also due to the continuously changing life circumstance among younger and older students who require flexible and accessible programs of study. In short, there is little doubt that online learning will increase steadily in the years ahead. Institutions can be ready to meet this demand for online study if they work into their programming and marketing what matters to online students:

Subject Fields Matter. Online students, most often, enroll in Bachelor's and Master's degree programs that will prepare them for careers in Business, Computers and IT, and Health and Medicine. Colleges that want to attract online students should offer these types of programs most often to serve the largest number of potential learners given that the most important reason in selecting one school over another is the program areas offered. It is noteworthy that, in comparing degree programs in which online students enroll, we have witnessed over the past several years increases in enrollments in IT/Computer Science and Health and Medicine in comparison to those in Business. There has been a steady decrease in Education and Teaching.

Degrees and Short-Term Credentials Matter. More and more, prospective online students are being attracted to short-term credentials (e.g., certificates and licensure programs and stackable certificates.) For those who have limited resources and need job skills quickly, these certificate and licensing programs are the routes to meeting career objectives in a timely basis.

Mobile Devices Matter. Mobile devices (phone or tablet) are used by the large majority of online students to carry out course-related activities. It is important that the learning management system is mobile enabled and that instructional designers create courses to be mobile friendly.

Access Matters. Institutions must be aware that online study options may not come easily to online students and the online modality can have some barriers. Ten percent of respondents indicated that their primary internet access location was out of the home. However, more than half of those respondents believe their studies would be easier if they could be conducted at home. Nearly 10 percent do not have a quiet location to conduct do their coursework or study. Fifteen percent of respondents must share a computer and do not have one dedicated to their studies. One-quarter of respondents use a device other than a computer to access the internet. These barriers to internet and learning access must be understood by an institution and, if possible, remedied in order to attract and retain online students. Many respondents (about 10 percent) indicated that an institution providing access points (such as a computer or tablet) would attract them to one institution over another. Moreover, 33 percent cited technology as a method to attract them to a school over 100 miles away. Thus, helping to bridge this technology equity gap among online students would attract students initially and allow them to persist through completion.

Career Services Matter. The career services colleges can offer are especially important to online students. Given the changing and evolving nature of current and prospective careers, colleges must help their students prepare themselves for the job market, including self-assessments, resume creation, and job search assistance....to name a few. Major reasons of online students for beginning or continuing their higher education are to enter a desired career, advance in their current careers or change careers, as well as increase their income. Assistance that a school can offer can make the difference in enrollment decisions. And these services should be made available to graduates over a lifetime. It is a fact today that lifelong learning has become more of a reality as the nature of jobs and careers steadily evolve and further education is a means to keeping up to date. College ties and partnerships with area employers are effective strategies for helping graduates connect with the employment market, given that the large majority live and, most likely will work in the region.

Cost of Education Matters. The single biggest hurdle faced by prospective online students is determining how to pay for their desired programs of study as well as completing financial aid forms. Moreover, “lower tuition” was the leading determining factor for many students. Schools need to offer their assistance early during the recruitment process and help students identify ways they can finance their intended study – using internal, external, and personal sources. While financing their education is of concern to online students, another prominent concern is balancing work, family, and school. Nevertheless, online students still believe their degree study is worth the cost. The median family income of online students is roughly \$70,000 which reflects the need among this population to find reasonable means to support their further education.

Support Matters. Institutions must ensure that students feel supported in their studies. Nearly one in three online students do not feel supported by their employer and more than 10 percent do not feel supported by their friends and family. The absence of either of these two support systems could prevent persistence through an online course of study. Meanwhile 13 percent of respondents indicated that “Feeling that school/program/staff cared about their success” was a top five enrollment decision factor, indicating that at least some students feel that this support is critical, especially when they do not receive it outside of the school.

Distance Matters. About two-thirds of online students live within 50 miles of the school in which they enrolled. Proximity makes a difference. Schools should design and engage in marketing activities that recognize this pattern to maximize their success. Also, given the importance of career preparation to online students as noted above, schools that have strong ties and partnerships with area employers have a competitive advantage. For those institutions that seek to attract students from a distance, the most important variables would be to offer competitive pricing as well as shorten as much as possible “time to degree” — as cost and time are major concerns to online students and are most influential in choosing between a nearby or distant school.

Reviews and Rankings Matter. In considering where to enroll, most influential are online reviews of a school, followed by college search/ranking websites. These two mediums are particularly important in developing an effective marketing campaign.

Age Matters. Online students are getting younger. Among undergraduate students, close to 40 percent are under the age of 25 and 20 percent of graduate students are under the age of 25. Age-based marketing terms (such as “adult” or “post-traditional” or “professional”) may miss some portion of the online student population. In short, students of all ages seek this form of education — and it is highly likely this pattern will continue.

Changing Demographics Matter. Online students are disproportionately white. Given that minority populations today will be majority by 2045, schools should begin to design and develop ways in which to more effectively recruit minority and underserved students to online study.



METHODOLOGY

In the Spring of 2021, EducationDynamics surveyed a sample of online students who studied online within the past 12 months (500 undergraduate and 175 graduate students). These were students who either studied online of their own volition or had their program converted to an online program in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Those students who had a program converted to an online program from a classroom program and did not view themselves as a “voluntary online student” also had to indicate that they would continue to study online in the future (rating of 3 on a 5-point scale of likelihood). Respondents were sourced from an online research panel and data was fielded over the course of three weeks between April and May 2021. Data collection was conducted using an online survey platform. We note that even though some students had a program converted to online study from a classroom or hybrid based program, all respondents had studied online during the previous 12 months during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Online College Students 2021

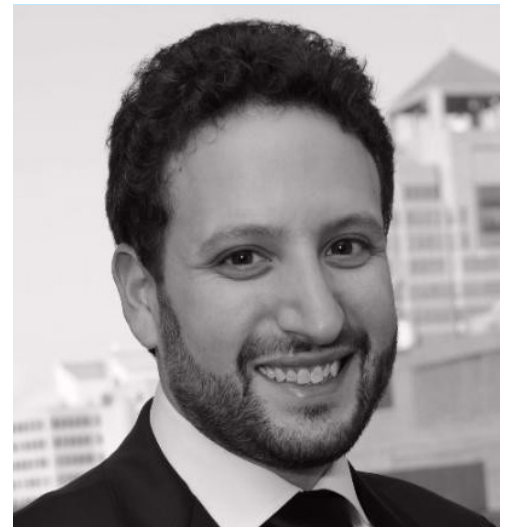
Meeting Online Student Demands and Preferences in a Reshaped World

About the 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.



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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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