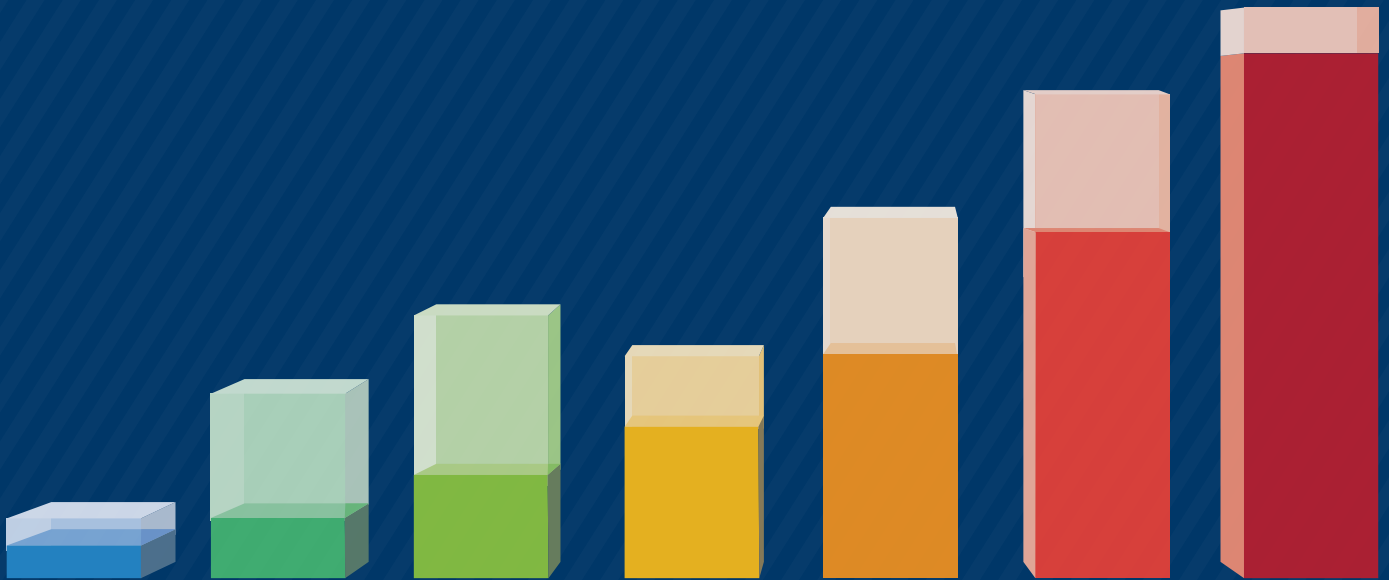


2013

Online College Students

Comprehensive Data on Demands and Preferences



Online College Students 2013:

Comprehensive Data on Demands and Preferences

*A joint project of The Learning House, Inc.
and Aslanian Market Research*

*Carol B. Aslanian
Dr. David L. Clinefelter*

A number of individuals contributed to the project.

Carol B. Aslanian led the Aslanian Market Research team, which included Scott Jeffe and Steven Fischer. Dr. David Clinefelter led the Learning House team, which included Wendy Parrish and Andrew Magda.

Suggested citation: Aslanian, C. B., & Clinefelter, D. L. (2013) *Online college students 2013: Comprehensive data on demands and preferences*. Louisville, KY: The Learning House, Inc.

June 2013

Copyright ©2013 by The Learning House, Inc. and EducationDynamics
All rights reserved.

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Key Findings and Observations	4
Perceived Value of Online Study	6
Investing in Education: It's Worth the Time and Money	6
Changes to Employment After Completing Online Study: Better Jobs and Compensation	7
Perceived Views of Online Study Among Key Constituents: Most Supportive	8
Intended Credential and Field of Study	9
Credential and Level of Study: Bachelor's and Master's Degrees Dominate	9
Certificates Pre- and Post-Degree: Level of Study Matters	10
Undergraduate Field of Study: Business Leads With STEM Growing	11
Graduate Field of Study: Again, Business Leads	12
Certificates and Licenses Field of Study: Career Topics Dominate	14
Stackable Certificates: Strong Interest	14
MOOCs: Massive Open Online Courses Are Appealing	15
Type of Institution	16
Selecting a College or University for Online Study: Not-for-Profits Dominate	16
Location: Proximity Makes a Difference	17
Preferred Institution Offering Program of Interest Online: A Good Match	17
Desired Institution and Program Features	18
Online Program Features That Matter: Reputation Is King	18
Assessing an Institution's Reputation: Accreditation Then Faculty	20
Academic Credit Through Portfolios or Outside Experience: An Opportunity to Expand	21
Preferred Course Length: Shorter Is Better	22
Importance of Financial Aid in Decision to Enroll Online: Critical to the Majority	22
Preferred Mode of Study	23
Greatest Advantage of Online Study: Having It My Way	23
Consideration of Hybrid or Classroom Program: Dedicated to Online	23
Online or Not at All: A Loyal Consumer	24
Reason for Not Completing Full Degree in Classroom-Based Program: Personal Commitments	25
Marketing to Online Students	26
Effective Advertising: Online Media Is Best	26
Length of Time From Online College Search to Enrollment: The Sooner the Better	27
Previous Enrollment in Online Study: Experience Matters	28
Methodology	29
Demographic Profile of Online Learners	30
References	34
Recap of "Online College Students 2012"	35
Partners	36

Introduction

Increasingly, people in the United States choose to go to college online rather than in a classroom. In 2011, there were approximately 21 million college students and about 6.7 million (32%) were taking at least one online course (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Eduventures estimates that in 2011, almost 3 million students were enrolled in fully online programs (Eduventures, 2012). Although the growth rate of online enrollment has slowed, it is still three to four times that of classroom enrollment, which declined last year after many years of steady growth.

Online college education is working. A survey conducted for this report, which comprises 1,500 students recently enrolled, currently enrolled, or planning to enroll in a fully online program, revealed that 44% did not even consider classroom-based programs when searching for a college. When asked about the likelihood of their enrolling in a classroom-based program if an online program had not been available, only 30% reported that they would have enrolled on ground while 45% responded that they would not. Classroom-based programs do not work for many students due to job, family, finances and personal issues. Online programs are the only option for many U.S. citizens who want a college education.

Online education is working for young people as well as adults. Roughly one-third of the undergraduate students surveyed are of traditional college age (18–24 years old), one-third are unemployed, and the same percentage had only a high school diploma when they began their online program of study. Students who choose to earn their education fully online are beginning to look more and more like traditional college students. Moreover, it appears that a substantial number of young people, for whatever reason, choose to bypass the campus completely.

Online education is working in the marketplace, as well. Among the respondents who had completed their program of study within the previous 12 months, about two-thirds were completely satisfied that it was a good investment of their time and money. Among all respondents, 44% improved their employment standing (e.g., by obtaining a first-time, full-time or new job). Salary increases and promotions were received by 45% and 36%, respectively, among those surveyed. All such new jobs, promotions and salary increases occurred within 12 months of graduation.

There is cause for celebration in these numbers. The U.S. higher education system has created a viable alternative to the campus and access to higher education has expanded exponentially. The entire system has multiplied its capacity. There are still significant barriers, such as cost and time-based credit, but the pathway to a college education is far wider than it was 10 years ago. The survey findings shed some light on how colleges and universities can widen that path even more.

This report is the second in a series focusing on the characteristics of college students enrolled in fully online programs throughout the U.S. Some topics covered in the Online College Students 2012 report were repeated in 2013, such as the students' field of study and his or her desired credential. A number of questions were added. For example, based on the 2012 finding that reputation is the greatest college selection criteria, one of the 2013 questions probed into what contributes to a college having a good reputation.

A number of the questions had similar responses in both surveys and the findings are not repeated here. This report concludes with a brief recap of the findings from last year's report. However, to gain a more complete understanding of the characteristics and preferences of college students in fully online programs, we recommend reading both reports; the 2012 report is available at www.learninghouse.com/OCS2012.

Key Findings and Observations

In the spring of 2013, Aslanian Market Research and Learning House conducted online surveys of 1,500 individuals nationwide who have recently enrolled, are currently enrolled, or plan to enroll in online undergraduate or graduate study in the near future. These surveys repeated the sampling procedures of the joint 2012 study between Aslanian Market Research and Learning House, and all respondents were at least 18 years of age.

The patterns and preferences of these students are reflective of online students as a whole. College and university leaders can use this information to attract and serve this growing population. The data reflect a national template of such practices and preferences. Individual institutions should also consider regional data and their positioning in the local marketplace—particularly given that about two-thirds of online students enroll in a local institution.

Throughout this report, the noted trends reflect aggregated data, comprised of both undergraduate and graduate online student responses. If striking differences between undergraduate and graduate students enrolled online exist, the report makes note of such differences.

Throughout, there are many recommendations for developing online programs based on the survey findings and field experience. These recommendations are presented in **orange text** at the end of most sections.

Key findings of the 2013 study include the following:

- Respondents who had completed their program of study considered it a good investment of their time and money. Many had already secured new jobs, full-time jobs, raises, and promotions.
- Fewer students were enrolled in certificate and licensure programs than in last year's sample. Undergraduate certificate students tend to enroll in certificate programs prior to earning a degree while graduate certificate students more often enroll after earning a degree. Students express strong interest in so-called "stackable" certificates that can be accumulated over time for a degree.
- Business studies are far and away the most popular field of study for both undergraduate and graduate students.
- Respondents have a favorable impression of MOOCs, though few have participated in one.
- Similar to 2012, about two-thirds of students attend not-for-profit institutions.

- Reputation and price continue to be important factors when online students select an institution. Reputation most often is based on accreditation, quality of faculty, and personal acquaintance with other attendees. Other important selection factors include freedom from specific class meeting times, liberal credit-transfer policies, and streamlined admission processes.
- An overwhelming majority of students prefer academic terms shorter than traditional 15-week semesters; two-thirds of students prefer academic terms of between six and 12 weeks.
- The greatest advantage of online study continues to be scheduling flexibility and the freedom to manage other responsibilities.
- A significant number of respondents did not consider classroom-based or hybrid programs. The survey shows that if a student's desired program is not available online, he or she is less likely to enroll.
- Once students decide to attend an online program, they make their school selection quickly, usually within three months.
- Students with some online study experience are more likely to enroll in fully online programs.

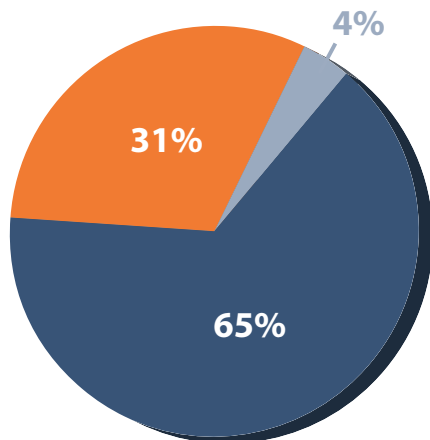
Perceived Value of Online Study

At the time of the study, about one-third of undergraduate and nearly half of graduate students had completed their programs of study within the preceding 12 months. These recent students were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statements relating to the perceived value of online study and changes in employment and salary.

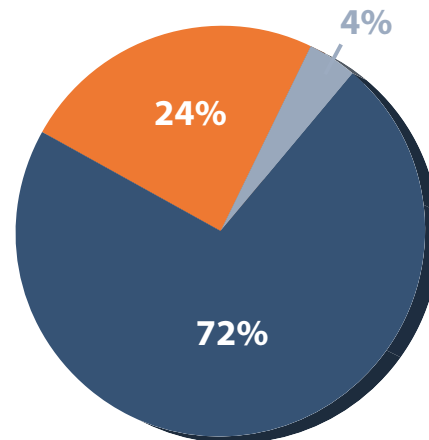
Investing in Education: It's Worth the Time and Money

Approximately two-thirds of those surveyed "completely" agreed that their online program was a good financial investment while nearly three-quarters "completely" agreed that it was a good investment of their time.

Worthwhile Financial Investment



Worthwhile Time Investment



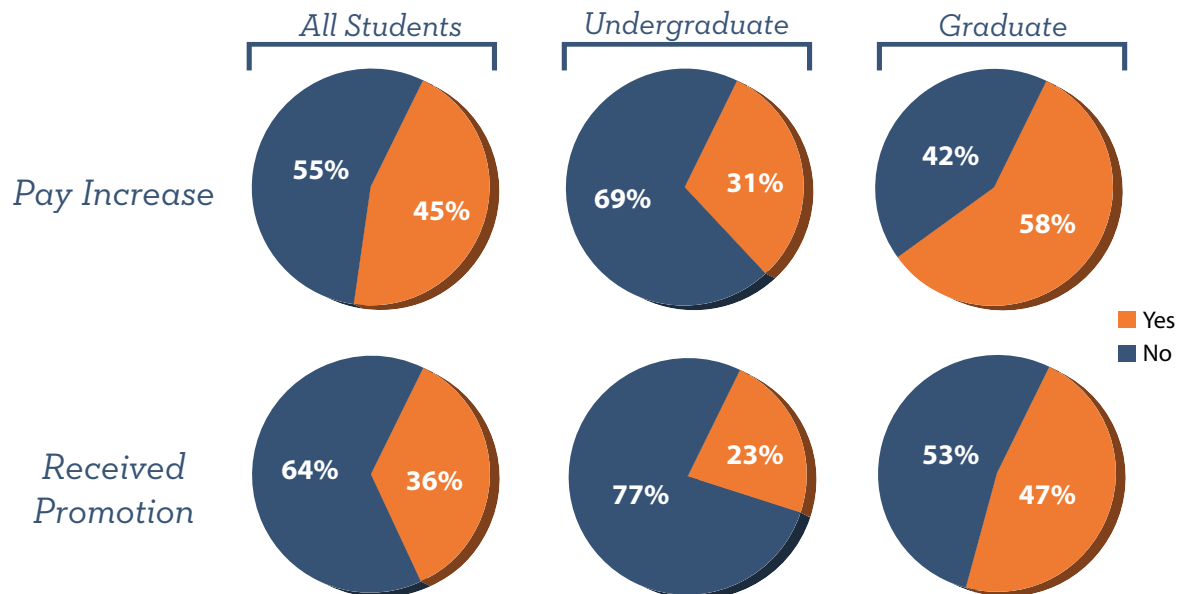
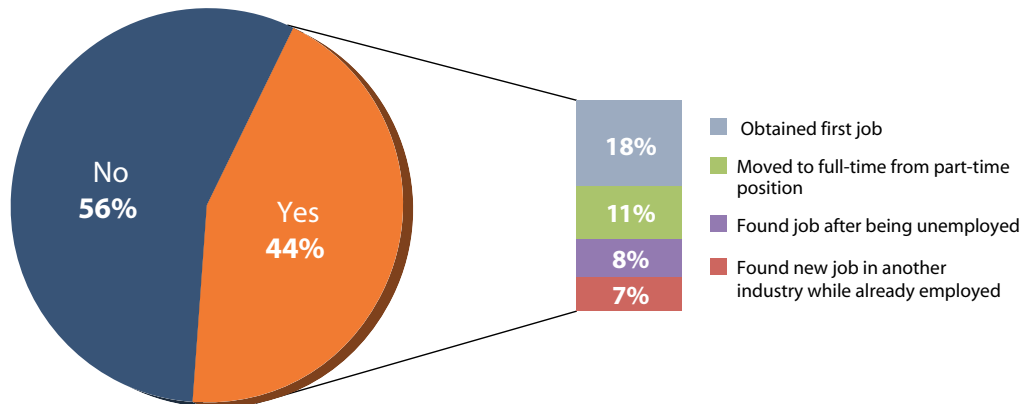
- Yes, completely
- Somewhat
- Not at all

Changes to Employment After Completing Online Study: Better Jobs and Compensation

There were a number of positive benefits for individuals who completed their online programs of study; 44% improved their employment standing by obtaining a first job, or a full-time or new job. Salary increases were received by 45% of those surveyed and 36% of respondents obtained promotions.

Keep in mind that only respondents who had completed their program of study within the preceding 12 months were included in the sample for these questions. These positive results came rather quickly and given more time, it is likely that additional students would also receive similar benefits. Also, a portion of these individuals may have been pursuing further education for their current position or for personal satisfaction and most likely were not searching for new positions or promotions. The survey showed that earning an online degree pays off in tangible ways.

Employment Change After Completion of Online Study



Online students who complete programs of study online value their investment of time and money and earn a number of tangible benefits. Colleges and universities seeking online students should discuss the benefits for students that can be accomplished through programs offered online. They should also highlight successful graduates.

Perceived Views of Online Study Among Key Constituents: Most Supportive

How others perceive the quality of online programs can be very important to prospective students, particularly the views of family members, other students and co-workers. Respondents were asked to rate several different groups' perceptions of online study, using a 5-point scale, with 1 being "cautious" and 5 "positive." Data show that online students perceive friends, family and other students as most positive, each achieving a 4.0 average rating. Employers achieved a slightly lower—albeit positive—average rating of 3.6.

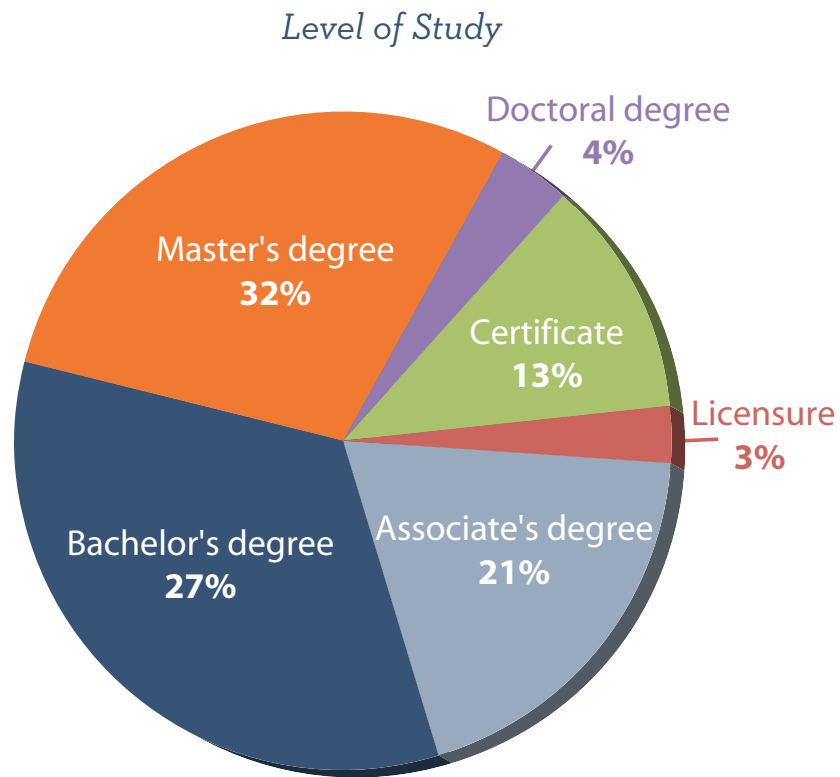
Perception of Online Study	Average Rating
Friends/Family	4.0
Other Students	4.0
Co-workers	3.8
Manager/Supervisor	3.6

Colleges and schools need not worry about negative influences these key groups may have on a prospective student's decision to study online. When they turn to their friends and family, other students, or even their co-workers, online students perceive them to have positive views of online study. These positive views can be reinforced by college communication and marketing plans.

Intended Credential and Field of Study

Credential and Level of Study: Bachelor's and Master's Degrees Dominate

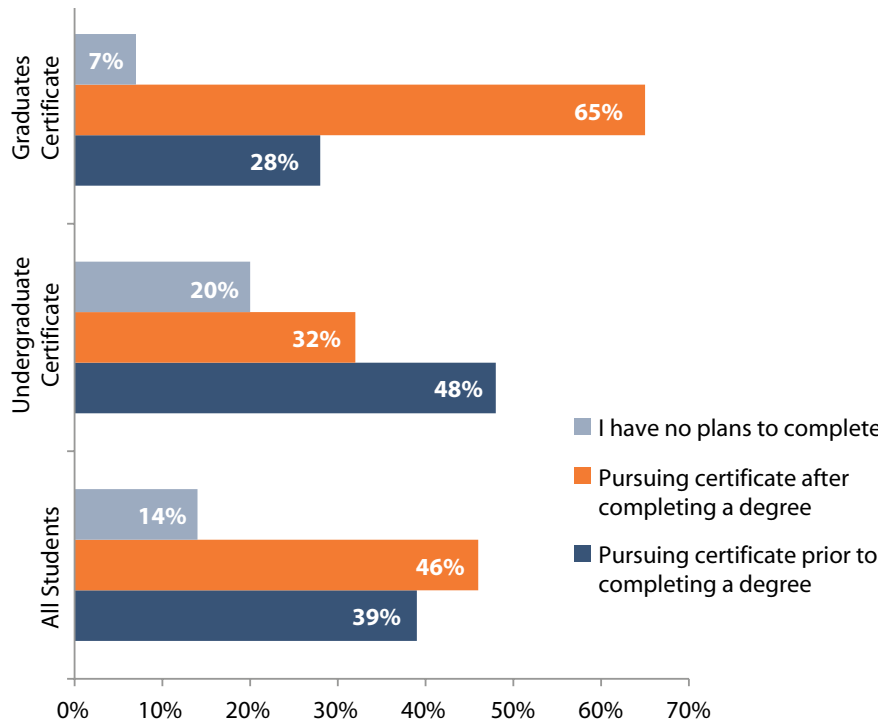
About half of fully online students pursue undergraduate degrees, and about one-third pursue graduate degrees. Another 16% intend to earn certificates or licenses, which is noticeably lower than the 2012 study. This will be tracked in subsequent studies.



Certificates Pre- and Post-Degree: Level of Study Matters

Students enroll in an online certificate program more often after earning a degree but there are clear differences between students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate certificate programs. Undergraduate certificate students more often earn a certificate prior to completing a degree, while graduate certificate students more often earn a certificate following a degree.

Timing for Certificate Students



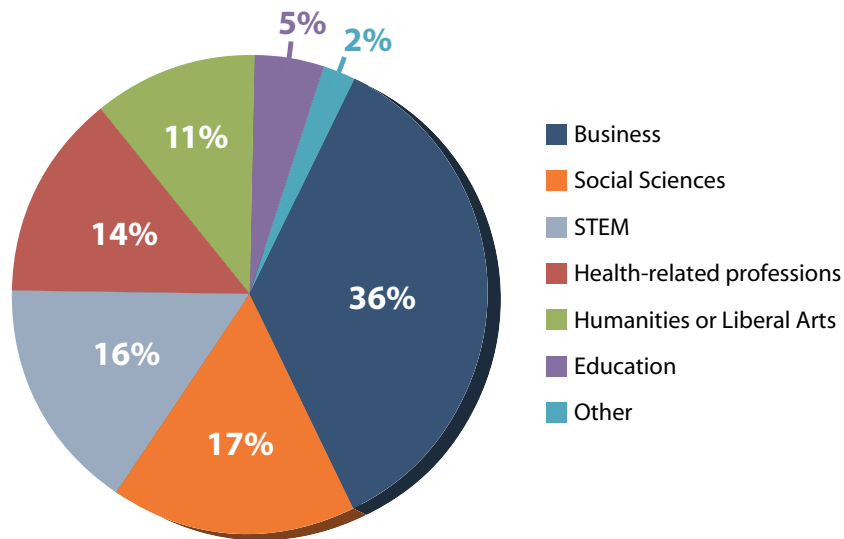
As college and university leaders plan their online offerings, one potential strategy is to direct their attentions up or down a level and use certificates as points of entry. For example, if the institution has a successful undergraduate degree, a good next step is to offer a master's degree in the same field. A graduate certificate in that field becomes a transition point for students with a bachelor's degree to begin the master's degree. Online certificates may be an excellent way to attract students into degree programs at the undergraduate level. At the graduate level, it may be effective to offer a strong array of online certificates to degree holders as a means to keep them attached to the institution and to help them remain current in their field.

Undergraduate Field of Study: Business Leads With STEM Growing

The largest proportion of undergraduate students enrolled in an online degree program overwhelmingly study business. Social sciences and the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) follow next, attracting one-third of the online learners. Health-related professions and the humanities or liberal arts together draw another one quarter of the online learners while education remains least popular.

Within business, business administration/management is by far the area attracting the largest enrollment, followed by accounting and finance. Criminal justice/law enforcement and psychology are the primary fields of study in the social sciences while information technology, computer science, and computer and information systems security are the high-demand areas within STEM. The health-related professions are dominated by study in healthcare administration, nursing, and medical billing, coding or administration while the humanities or liberal arts most often attract learners to its graphic design programs.

Field of Study: Undergraduate Degree

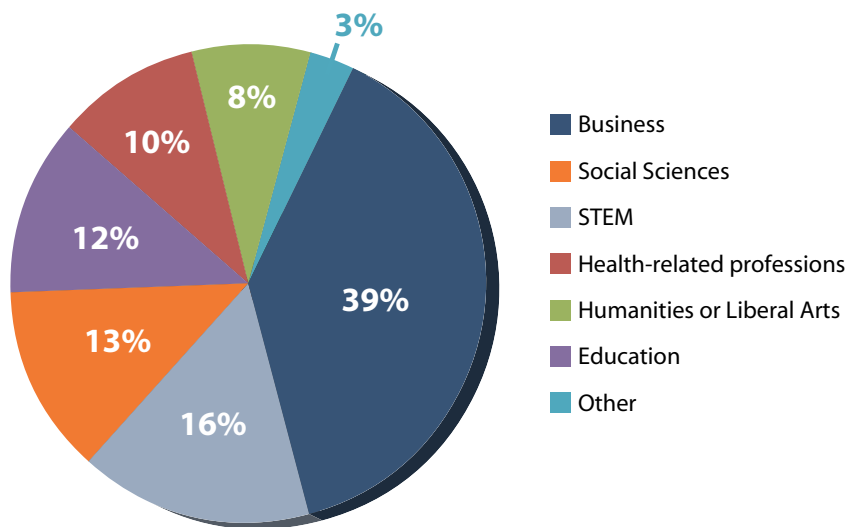


Graduate Field of Study: Again, Business Leads

The overwhelming favorite of graduate students enrolled in an online degree program was business, with 39%. Following are STEM, the social sciences and education.

Within business, business administration/management again is by far the area attracting the largest enrollment, followed by accounting and finance. The STEM topic most in demand is information technology. Psychology (both general and clinical) draws the largest proportion of students within the social sciences while education leadership and administration is the most popular topic of study within education. Healthcare administration is most in demand within the health-related professions and theology/religious studies is the strongest topic within the humanities or liberal arts.

Field of Study: Graduate Degree



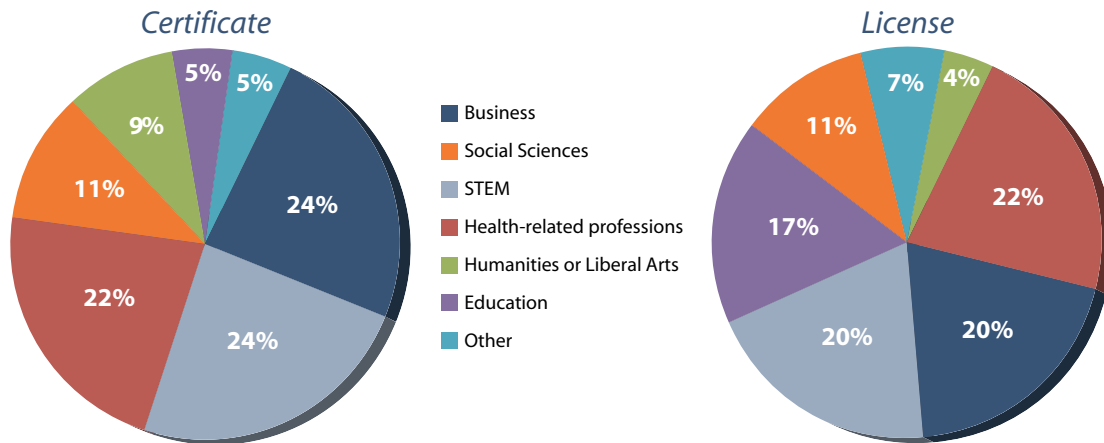
Top 15 Degree Programs	Undergraduate	Graduate
Business Administration/Management	1	1
Accounting	2	3
Information Technology	3	2
Criminal Justice/Law Enforcement	4	---
Business: Finance	5	4
Psychology: General	6	13
Graphic Design	7	---
Healthcare Administration	7	6
Nursing	9	9
Computer Science	10	10
Education: Early Childhood Education	11	---
Medical Coding/Billing/Administration	11	---
Computer and Information Systems Security	13	---
Law/Paralegal Studies	14	---
Human Resources	15	10
Business Information Systems	---	10
Education: Leadership and Administration	---	7
Education: Other	---	5
Psychology: Clinical	---	14
Theology/Religious Studies	---	7
Social Work	---	14
Business: International	---	14

Colleges and universities seeking to expand their footprint in the online marketplace should strongly consider offering online degree programs in business-related topics. Such programs should be designed to compete with other local business programs (particularly those that are not offered online) in order to capitalize on the fact that a significant majority of online students enroll at an institution close to home. While business dominates the market, offerings in STEM and health-related professions are also sound educational investments.

Certificates and Licenses Field of Study: Career Topics Dominate

Business, STEM fields, and health-related professions are the most popular subject areas among students seeking a certificate. Within licensing programs, the strongest enrollments were in health-related professions, followed closely by STEM topics, business and education.

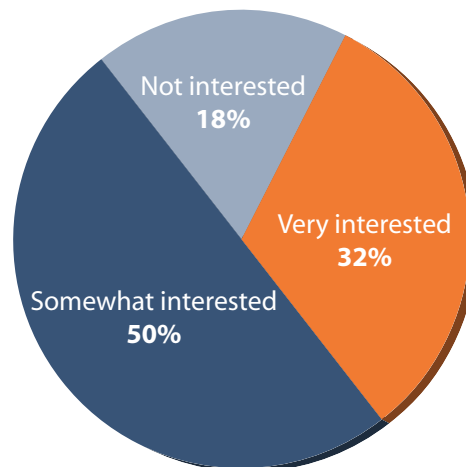
Field of Study: Certificate/License



Stackable Certificates: Strong Interest

“Stackable certificates” were described as a type of credential that can be earned individually and then combined with other certificates to be taken as equivalent to a degree. About one-third of the respondents were “very” interested in this path and half were “somewhat” interested.

Interest in Stackable Certificates



Certificates are relatively easy for institutions to add to their program offerings because many of the courses are already in the curriculum. Combining certificates in various combinations can separate the time and effort required to earn a degree into smaller chunks, which may be more manageable for some students.

MOOCs: Massive Open Online Courses Are Appealing

Survey participants were given a description of MOOCs as free online courses being offered by some institutions, and while these courses often do not carry college credit, they can provide students with a new skill or understanding of a subject area. About 80% of the students surveyed found MOOCs compelling; in fact, many found the option very attractive.

Although about one-third of the students had never heard of MOOCs, another one-third were aware of MOOCs but had not pursued them. About 30% had heard of MOOCs and plan to pursue them, have enrolled in one or more courses, or have already completed one or more courses.

A follow-up question for the approximately 15% of respondents who had enrolled in these free online courses asked how many MOOCs they had enrolled in. The large majority had enrolled in one or two, but some had enrolled in five or more.

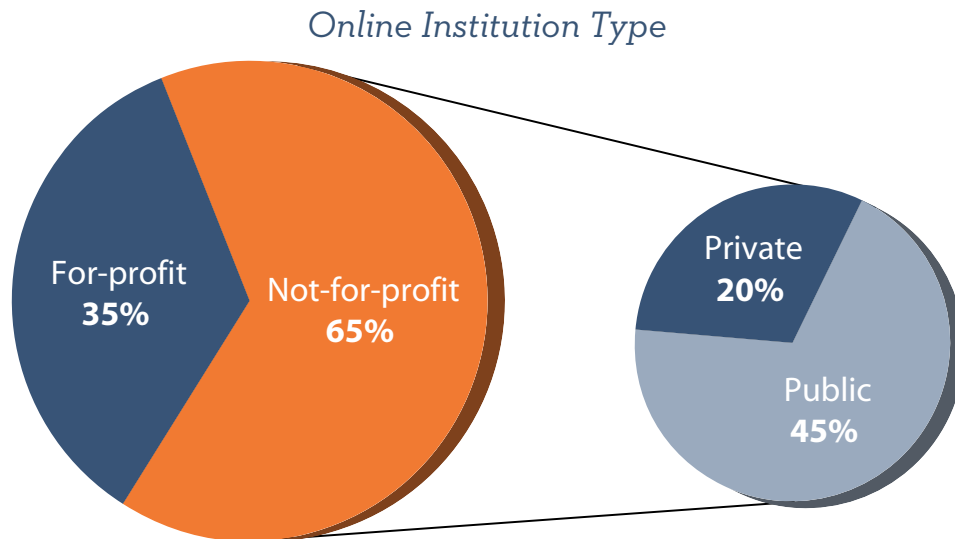
<i>Level of Awareness of MOOCs</i>	Percent
I have never heard of these types of courses	34%
I have heard of these types of courses but have not pursued them	36
I have heard of these types of courses and plan to pursue them	17
I have enrolled in one or more of these courses, but have dropped out of them	4
I have enrolled in one or more of these courses and am currently still enrolled in one	5
I have completed one or more of these courses	5

Obviously, MOOCs have made an impression on many online students. The rate of knowledge about them and the extent to which online students plan to enroll or already have enrolled in one or more courses is impressive. As college and university leaders develop their online offerings, MOOCs need to be considered as providers experiment with ways for students to earn credit through this avenue of study.

Type of Institution

Selecting a College or University for Online Study: Not-for-Profits Dominate

Similar to the findings from 2012, the largest proportion (65%) of online students are enrolled at not-for-profit institutions: public not-for-profits lead with about 45% of market share, and private, not-for-profit institutions add roughly another 20%. For-profit institutions attract about 35% of the market. In other words, two out of three fully online students study at a not-for-profit public or private institution.

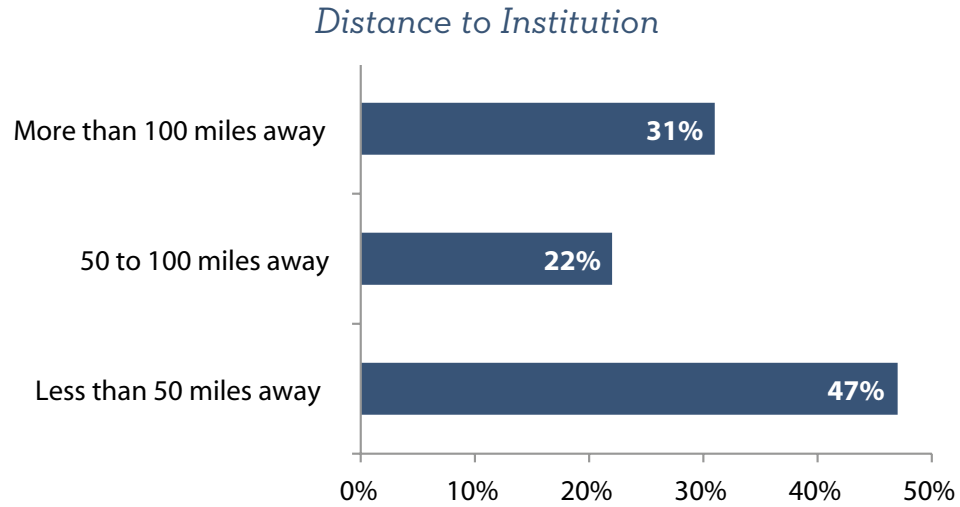


Interestingly, almost one-third of the respondents in the current study either did not know or miscategorized the type of institution in which they had enrolled or plan to enroll for online study. Approximately 15% of the respondents didn't know what type of institution they were interested or enrolled in, and another 15% didn't correctly identify their institution as a public or private not-for-profit or for-profit institution.

Among those who incorrectly categorized their institution of study, there was the greatest confusion with private, not-for-profit schools. Most frequently, these students thought that the private, not-for-profit institution in which they were actually enrolled was a public institution. A smaller proportion thought the for-profit institution in which they had enrolled was a not-for-profit school.

Location: Proximity Makes a Difference

As more and more institutions of higher education enter the online arena and expand their offerings, it is not surprising that prospective students can find a provider nearby that offers a number of advantages (e.g., the ease of being on campus if necessary, alumni in the region, employers that are familiar with the institution). The largest proportion of online students (about 70%) lives within 100 miles of the closest campus or service center of the institution in which they enrolled. The 2012 study found that about 80% of students resided within 100 miles of the institution. We will revisit this in 2014 to see if there is a trend of fewer students enrolling in online programs closer to home.



Local and regional institutions of higher education certainly have an edge in the online market. Familiarity, accessibility and recognition are key factors that draw students to providers nearer rather than further away. Unless an institution has unique programs or attractors, a good strategy is to capitalize on that natural advantage and expand program offerings locally rather than attempt to attract distant students.

Preferred Institution Offering Program of Interest Online: A Good Match

Only about 20% of online students said there was an institution they preferred that did not offer an online program in their area of interest. This is likely a result of colleges and universities converting many of their programs to online delivery in recent years.

<i>Preferred Institution Offers Program of Interest Online</i>	Percent
No	21%
Yes	79

These data present an opportunity. While most students find the program they want at their preferred institution, a sizeable number do not. It may be worthwhile for institutions to attempt to identify students who prefer to attend the institution as well as their area of interest.

Desired Institution and Program Features

Online Program Features That Matter: Reputation Is King

When selecting an online program, nothing is more important than the overall reputation of the institution offering the program. Having no set class meeting time and offering affordable tuition are also important, followed closely by the amount of transfer credits accepted and having a personal academic advisor.

A similar question was asked in the 2012 survey. In the 2012 survey, respondents could choose an unlimited number of features, but only three in 2013, so the percentages were not as high. However, the rankings in terms of importance were similar and there was considerable overlap in the top 10 rankings for each year. In the table on the following page, the items marked with an asterisk were among the top 10 ranked in 2012. The reputation of the institution leads both lists. Tuition ratings were very similar in 2012 but not as strong in 2013.

The table on the following page shows that online students have divergent views about some factors. Not requiring specific class meeting times proved important but offering “class sessions with set times providing facilitated group interaction” also appeared to be an important factor. Similar percentages responded that both “faculty that teach full time and hold a doctorate” and “faculty that teach part time and are practitioners in their field” were important. Online college students have different preferences regarding some of the program features that are important to them, thereby complicating the work of designing and delivering effective programs.

Online Program Selection Factors (choose up to 3)	Percent
*Overall reputation of the college or university	44%
*No set class meeting times	38
*Tuition and fees	35
*Amount of transfer credits accepted	32
A personal academic advisor who contacts me regularly	31
Availability of courses that teach workplace skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and teamwork	28
*Recognized in your field as a high-quality college or university	27
Students never have to visit campus during their study	25
Class sessions with set times providing facilitated group interaction	20
*Simplicity of admissions process	20
Faculty that teach full time and hold a doctorate	19
Employee tuition discounts/benefits	19
*Historically successful career placement	18
Positive interactions with financial aid personnel	17
*Faculty that teach part time and are practitioners in their field	17
Availability of “brush up” basic writing, math, and reading courses	16
Recommendation of a friend/family member	15
Known to be a rigorous program	14
*Scholarship opportunities	14
Placement/ranking on magazine or industry lists	11
Military tuition discounts/benefits	9
School has a relationship with your current employer	5
Extensive alumni network	4

**Ranked among top 10 in 2012*

Reputation matters, and not-for-profit institutions may have an advantage given their years of service and extensive alumni networks. While asynchronous learning is more desirable, a substantial percentage of respondents find a need for synchronous sessions with group interaction. Cost is important in terms of actual tuition and fees, but also the acceptance of prior credits. These are important elements in describing an institution's online offerings that make a difference in where students choose to study.

Assessing an Institution's Reputation: Accreditation Then Faculty

Because reputation was the most important factor in selecting an institution in the 2012 survey, a question was asked regarding the factors that influenced reputation. Accreditation is paramount. The quality of the faculty and knowing people who have attended the institution followed and were equally important. Of significantly less importance were factors such as having a campus, high rankings and admission standards. Graduate students rated "it has a high ranking in the *U.S. News and World Report* (and other) annual ranking" and "it has high admission standards" significantly higher than undergraduate students.

College Reputation Factors (choose up to 3)	Percent
It is accredited	67%
Quality of the faculty	38
I know people who attended and they recommend it	33
It has a campus	20
It has a high ranking in the <i>U.S. News and World Report</i> (and other) annual ranking	20
It has high admission standards	19
Accomplishments of its alumni	15
It is a public institution	12
Strong ties with employers	12
It has high tuition	7
It is over 50 years old	6
It is a private institution	3
It is a for-profit institution	3
Other	2

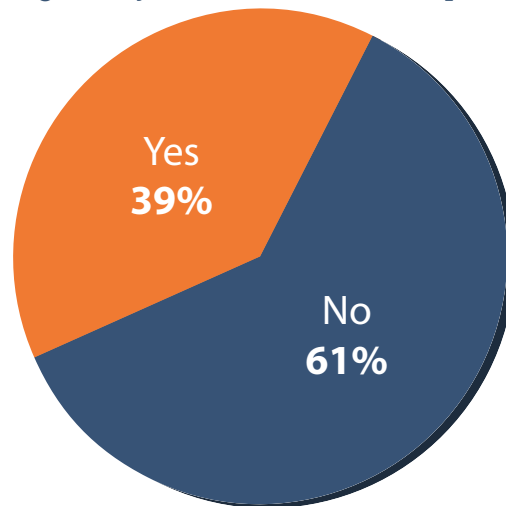
Institutions that want to attract online students should overtly promote their overall accreditation as well as the professional accreditation of their programs; they should seek such accreditation whenever possible. Online students may have differing views on what makes a quality faculty member, but it is important to them. Institutions have the opportunity to define and communicate about the quality of their faculty. Another good strategy is to emphasize local connections. Most online students attend an institution fairly close to home and value alumni endorsements. Although they may never come to campus, the campus is an important asset in determining the institution's reputation. Marketing campaigns should emphasize these local connections.

Academic Credit Through Portfolios or Outside Experience: An Opportunity to Expand

Similar to 2012, about 80% of undergraduate online students brought transfer credits to their online institutions. On average, they transferred about 40 credits. Acceptance of transfer credit is one of the top factors for online students in selecting an institution, and this factor can have a large impact on the overall cost and length of time to completion. Therefore, two new questions were asked to gain insight into alternative ways that these students earn credit.

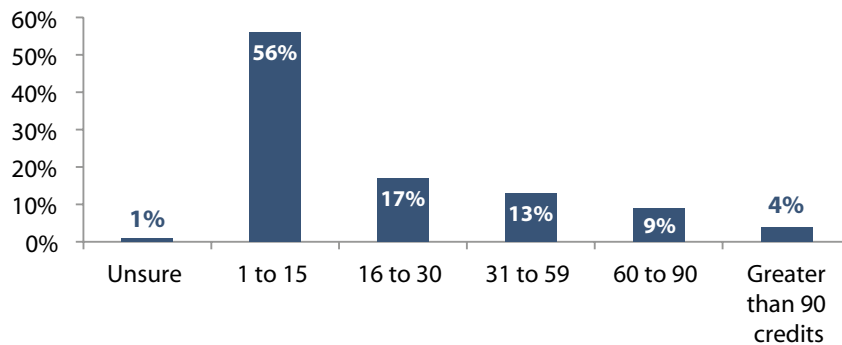
Close to 40% of online students receive academic credit through testing or portfolio reviews of experiential learning.

Gained Academic Credit Based on Testing, Portfolios or Outside Experience



Further, more than half of online students who earned academic credit through portfolios, outside experience, or testing accumulated fewer than 15 credits.

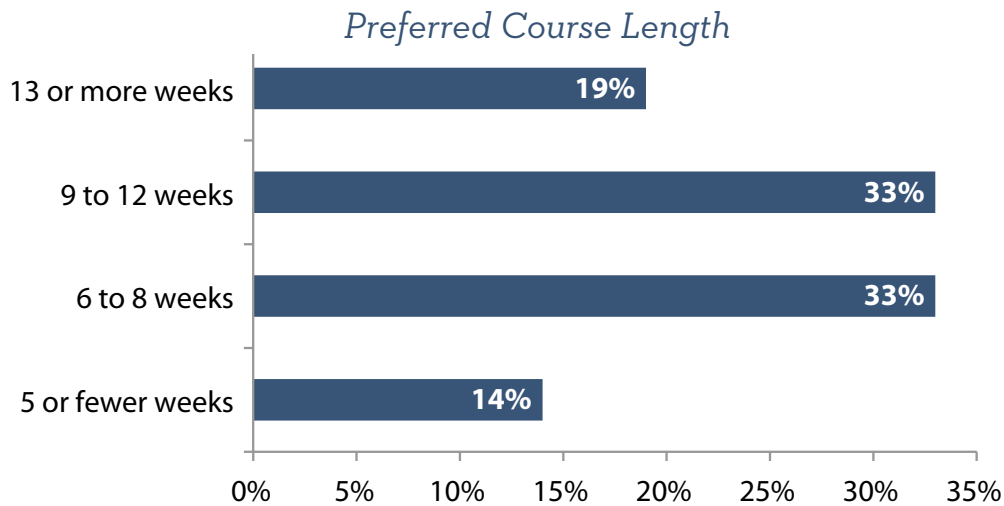
Accumulation of Credit by Testing/Experience



Online students typically want to expedite their progress to graduation. Therefore, institutions that want to serve these students should provide every possible path to earn credit, including credit by examination and experience. Liberal policies governing credit transfers are also helpful, including the acceptance of recommendations from the American Council on Education CREDIT service.

Preferred Course Length: Shorter Is Better

Respondents have a strong preference for terms that are shorter than the traditional 15-week semester. There is an even split of 33% preferring an online course of six to eight weeks or nine to 12 weeks. However, substantial numbers also prefer shorter programs of five weeks or less or longer programs of 13 weeks or more.



Online programs should be offered in accelerated formats. Online students select online study for its convenience more than anything else and courses and program acceleration is helpful.

Importance of Financial Aid in Decision to Enroll Online: Critical to the Majority

The majority of respondents reported that financial aid was essential to their decision to enroll in an online program.

<i>Importance of Financial Aid in Decision to Enroll Online</i>		Percent
Essential	I would not/could not enroll without receiving significant financial aid.	55%
Preferred	I needed financial aid to help pay for my studies, but I could have figured out how to pay without it.	25
Not essential	financial aid would have been nice, but I planned to pay on my own.	10
None	I did not (plan) to use financial aid.	10

Preferred Mode of Study

Greatest Advantage of Online Study: Having It My Way

The single greatest advantage to studying online is being able to study when and where one wants. This is followed by flexibility to study around work obligations and to study at one's own pace. A similar question was asked in the 2012 study with similar results.

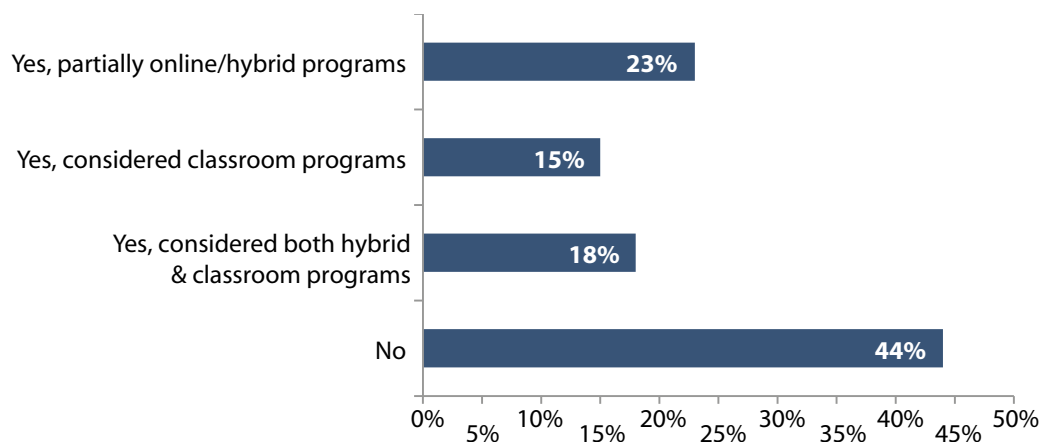
<i>Greatest Advantage of Online Study</i>	Percent
Ability to study when and where I want	32%
Flexibility to study around work obligations	17
Ability to study at my own pace	13
Study at home/elimination of travel	9
Overall lower cost	7
Flexibility to study around family obligation	7
Ability to study around family responsibilities/obligations	7
24/7 access to course material and resources	5
Can enroll at institutions beyond my home region	2
New and innovative teaching methods	1

Flexibility and convenience are key attributes that appeal to online students. College and university leaders should be slow to require class attendance at specified times and should provide alternatives when doing so.

Consideration of Hybrid or Classroom Program: Dedicated to Online

When asked if they had considered classroom or hybrid programs when they enrolled, 44% of online students reported they did not. When they do consider other formats, most often they lean toward online alternatives such as hybrid programs rather than fully classroom-based instruction. Graduate students (62%) are more likely to consider classroom or hybrid programs than undergraduates (50%).

Consideration of Hybrid/Classroom Programs



Online or Not at All: A Loyal Consumer

Online students are not likely to enroll in any higher education institution if they cannot enroll in an online program. When asked about the likelihood of their enrolling in a classroom-based program if an online program had not been available, only 30% reported that they would have enrolled on ground while 45% responded that they would not.

Using a scale of 1 (“would not have”) to 5 (“definitely would have”), online students gave an average rating of 2.7 to describe the likelihood of their completing study on campus were online studies not available.

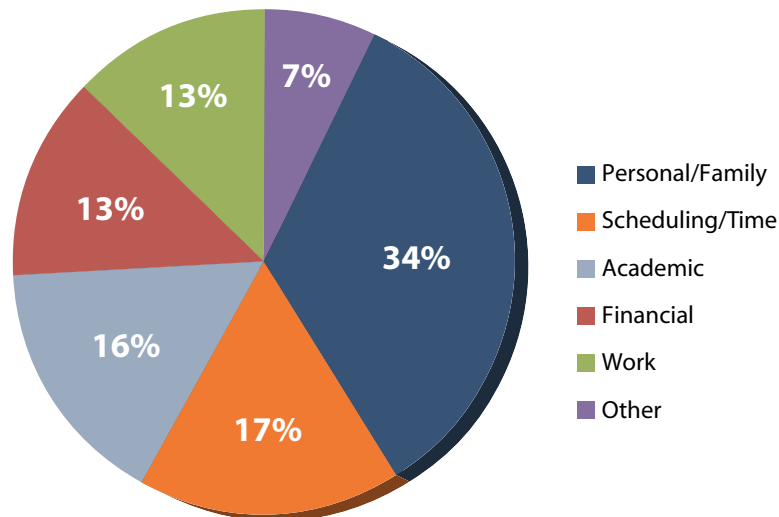
<i>Likelihood of Studying on Campus if Online Not Available</i>	Percent
1 I would not have	28%
2	17
3	25
4	13
5 I would definitely have	17
Average rating	2.7

College and university leaders often worry that if they offer online programs, enrollments in their classroom programs will decline. This may be true but if they offer the program online, they will retain those students and gain additional ones. By only offering classroom or hybrid programs, they miss a portion of potential students who will not consider classroom or hybrid programs and won't attend if the program is unavailable online.

Reason for Not Completing Full Degree in Classroom-Based Program: Personal Commitments

Students who had earned credit via classroom-based courses prior to enrolling in an online program were asked why they did not complete their degree in a classroom-based program. Approximately one-third cited personal or family reasons. However, fewer—but comparable—proportions indicated conflicts related to scheduling, work, finances and academic challenges.

Reason for Not Completing Full Degree in Classroom-Based Program



Following are some sample verbatim responses online students gave as reasons for not completing their degree through classroom-based study.

Personal and family reasons:

- “Life got too busy. I got married, had a career and two kids. I needed something more flexible without taking away from my time with my family.”
- “I work full time and have four children. I can’t make it to day classes and my husband takes night classes.”

Scheduling and time constraints:

- “I do not have the time to go to a classroom-based program and I need time and flexibility too.”
- “Commuting to class was very time consuming.”

Academic reasons:

- “All classes were not available in the classroom when I wanted to take them.”
- “My degree wasn’t offered in a classroom locally.”

Financial reasons:

- “[I] ran out of funds for traditional learning and the expense of transportation and child care.”
- “Campus learning was costly because of driving and gas programs.”

Work obligations:

- “I found a job and could only fit in online courses.”
- “I am a single mother and was working and going to school. The company I worked for went out of business and I could not find a job that would work around my school schedule.”

Marketing to Online Students

The 2012 report included a host of information about effective marketing procedures to attract online students. Specifically, the data showed that among electronic methods for advertising, students gave the highest rating to listings on institution websites, followed by ads on Google or other search engines. Among traditional methods, one cannot underestimate the effectiveness of word of mouth, followed by information from an employer. Mass media options (e.g., television and radio) follow electronic and traditional methods.

After prospective students become interested in a program and embark on detailed research about that program and provider institution, they most often visit institutional websites or conduct an online search. When employing offline research methods, prospective students most often call the institution directly or read printed institutional guides and other materials to gather detailed information about online programs of interest.

The most important information they look for on institutional websites relates to cost, or tuition and fees.

Effective Advertising: Online Media Is Best

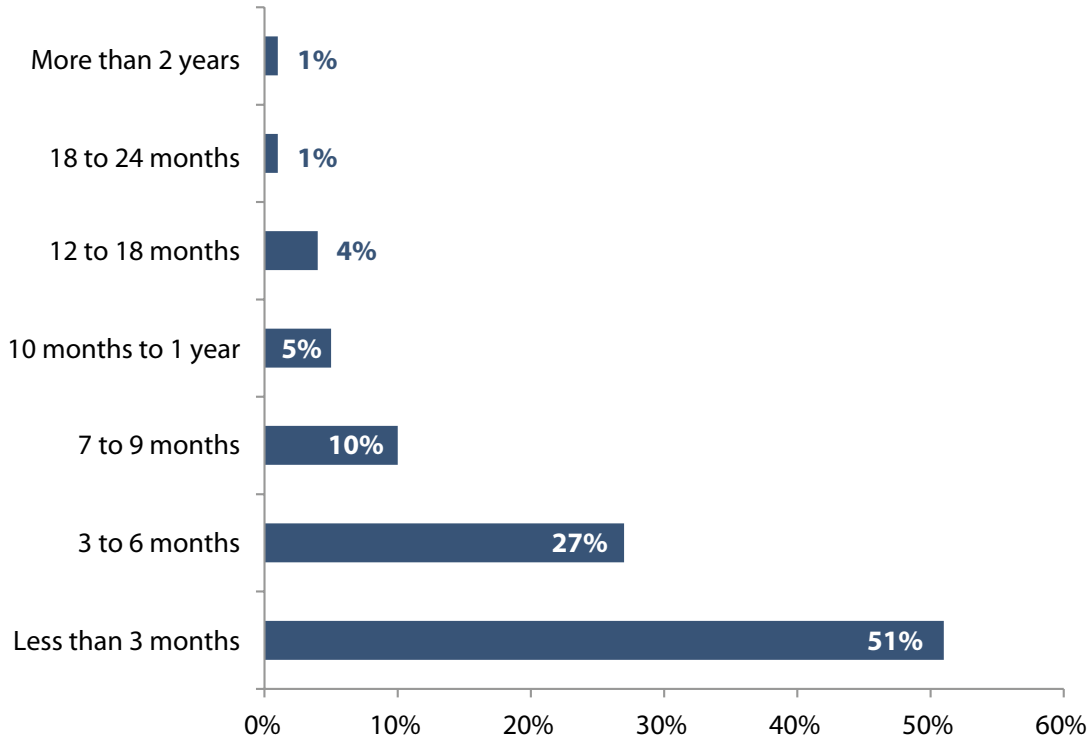
To embellish 2012 information gathered on marketing, this year online students were asked to rate the effectiveness of various forms of advertising in raising their awareness of online institutions during their college search. They rated online media as the most effective advertising method, with a 3.5 average rating (on a five-point scale with 5 being “very effective” and 1 “not effective”), and broadcast media least effective, with a 3.2 average rating.

<i>Effective Advertising</i>	<i>Average Rating</i>
Online media (ads on websites, social media, listings on college search sites, etc.)	3.5
Word of mouth (information from friends, family members, or employers)	3.3
Print media (ads in newspapers, magazines, billboards, etc.)	3.3
Broadcast media (ads on the radio, tv, etc.)	3.2

Length of Time From Online College Search to Enrollment: The Sooner the Better

Online students tend to choose their preferred programs at a faster pace than some of their classroom counterparts. In fact, the largest proportion of online students enrolled within three months of beginning their search for an online program. These ready-to-buy consumers do not waste time comparison-shopping. Consistent with their focus on convenience and flexibility, they know what they need and they want it quickly.

Length of Online College Enrollment Search



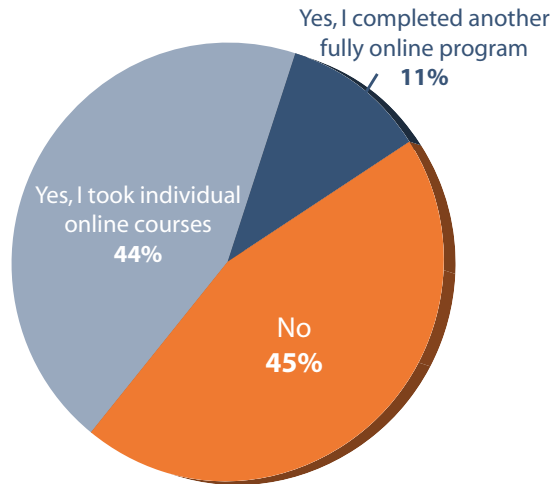
Colleges and universities that seek to attract and enroll online students must act quickly. These students are ready, willing, and able. While searching for the right opportunity, they will act sooner rather than later. In one sense, they appear to be impulse buyers. Institutions must be ready to respond to leads immediately, follow up with materials and conversations within days—not weeks or months—and must process admission and enrollment decisions with efficiency.

Previous Enrollment in Online Study: Experience Matters

Currently, about 6.7 million college students (about one-third of all students) take at least one online course during a typical term (Allen & Seaman, 2013). The growth rate steadily increases each year.

Survey respondents use online courses and programs at an even higher rate. More than 50% reported prior experience in online learning.

Previous Online Enrollment



When recruiting prospective students to fully online programs, institutions should note that many who eventually enroll have had experiences with this mode of instruction. Therefore, they would be wise to identify prospects that have had prior online experiences because they would likely be more motivated to enroll.

Methodology

In spring 2013, Aslanian Market Research and Learning House conducted surveys with 1,500 individuals nationwide. Respondents were at least 18 years of age, had a minimum of a high school degree or equivalent, and were recently enrolled, currently enrolled, or planned to enroll in a fully online undergraduate or graduate degree, certificate, or licensure program.

Resolution Research of Denver, Co., identified the sample of 1,500 respondents. The organization drew the sample from its actively managed, 100% market-research-only panel that represents the U.S. Census Bureau, which enables the selection of groups that prove difficult to source. Resolution Research has collected up to 250 behavioral and demographic data points on each consumer panelist, which allows it to target respondents for specific research objectives.

To recruit for this study, Resolution Research invited its panel of consumers from across the nation to participate in an online survey through custom email invitations. Invitations were sent randomly across the United States to reflect the basic population distribution targeting persons 18 years of age or older.

Respondents hailed from 47 states and the District of Columbia. The states that represent 52% of the nation's population (according to the 2009 U.S. Census) represented 70% of the study's respondents. These states included California, New York, Florida, Colorado, Illinois, Texas, Georgia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Ohio.

The Sloan Consortium states that in fall 2011, 6.7 million higher education students took at least one online course (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Eduventures (2012) estimated that of these 6.7 million students, approximately 3.0 million are earning their full degree online. Based upon these findings, a sample of 1,500 represents an approximate sampling error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level.

A similar sampling error was achieved in the 2012 survey; therefore, differences between the 2012 and 2013 survey results over six percentage points may be significant. Given that no professional body or government agency tracks online program enrollments and our survey sample was drawn based upon estimates, we only address differences between the 2012 and 2013 surveys that are at least 10 percentage points to err on the side of caution. The margin of sampling error is greater for subgroups.

Demographic Profile of Online Learners

Based on the 2013 study, online students nationwide most often fit the following general profile:

Online students are typically Caucasian females about 35 years of age who are not the first in their family to attend college and who typically have a total family income of about \$55,000. They live in a suburban community, are married, have no children under age 18 and work full time. English is their first language. They hold a high school diploma or have attained one or two years of college as they enter online undergraduate study. Close to one-third have a master's degree or more when they enter online graduate study.

The following tables present findings from the 2013 survey regarding the demographic profile of online learners nationwide. There are several instances where the data are significantly different from the 2012 survey and are so noted below. (A difference of 10% or greater is considered significant. For a detailed explanation of how the significance was determined, see the **Methodology** section above.)

- Male graduate students increased from 34% to 46%.
- 73% of the 2013 sample were Caucasian whereas only 62% of the 2012 sample were. Caucasian graduate students increased from 34% to 46%.
- 48% of the undergraduates in 2012 reported being employed full time and that number declined to 38% in 2013.
- 18% of the undergraduates reported incomes under \$25,000 in 2012 and that number rose to 31% in 2013.
- 18% of the 2013 sample reported their "highest level of education when initially considering enrolling" as a high school diploma compared to 6% in 2012. Among undergraduates this number increased from 12% to 31%. There was a corresponding decline in the number of undergraduates who reported "three or four years of college, no degree" from 17% to 6%.

To summarize, the 2013 sample is more male and more Caucasian. Among the undergraduates, fewer are working full time, more have family incomes below \$25,000 and more are beginning online study with only a high school diploma. Collectively, this sample resembles the traditional, on-campus college population more than the 2012 sample reported. Another round of sampling and data collection in 2014 will help verify this either as a trend or an anomaly.

Gender	Percent of Respondents		
	All	Undergraduate	Graduate
Female	62%	68%	53%
Male	38	32	47

Ethnicity	Percent of Respondents		
	All	Undergraduate	Graduate
Caucasian	73%	71%	77%
African American	12	15	8
Hispanic	7	8	7
Asian or Pacific Islander	5	4	6
Native American	1	1	1
Other background	1	1	1

Age When Last Enrolled	Percent of Respondents		
	All	Undergraduate	Graduate
24 or younger	23%	32%	12%
25-29	12	11	14
30-34	18	14	22
35-39	14	10	19
40-44	8	7	11
45-49	8	9	8
50-54	8	9	6
55 or older	8	8	8

Environment of Residence	Percent of Respondents		
	All	Undergraduate	Graduate
Suburban	44%	45%	43%
Urban	33	28	40
Rural	22	27	17

Marital Status	Percent of Respondents		
	All	Undergraduate	Graduate
Married/Partnered	62%	53%	73%
Single	38	47	27

<i>Number of Children Under Age 18</i>	Percent of Respondents		
	All	Undergraduate	Graduate
None	44%	50%	37%
1	21	21	20
2	19	17	22
3 or more	16	12	21

<i>First Generation to Attend College</i>	Percent of Respondents		
	All	Undergraduate	Graduate
No	57%	57%	57%
Yes	43	43	43

<i>English as Second Language</i>	Percent of Respondents		
	All	Undergraduate	Graduate
No	80%	82%	78%
Yes	20	18	22

<i>Employment Status</i>	Percent of Respondents		
	All	Undergraduate	Graduate
Employed full time	56%	39%	78%
Employed part time	16	21	10
Not employed	25	36	10
Retired	3	4	2

<i>Total Household Income</i>	Percent of Respondents		
	All	Undergraduate	Graduate
Less than \$25,000	19%	29%	6%
\$25,000 - \$39,999	17	23	9
\$40,000 - \$54,999	12	12	12
\$55,000 - \$69,999	9	9	10
\$70,000 - \$84,999	8	7	8
\$85,000 - \$99,999	7	5	9
\$100,000 - \$114,999	4	3	6
\$115,000 - \$129,999	4	2	6
\$130,000 - \$149,999	7	2	13
\$150,000 or more	8	2	14
Prefer not to say	7	7	6

<i>Highest Level of Education When Initially Considered Enrolling</i>	Percent of Respondents		
	All	Undergraduate	Graduate
High school diploma	18%	31%	---
One or two years of college, no degree	18	31	---
Associate degree	11	19	---
Three or four years of college, no degree	4	6	1%
Bachelor's degree	30	10	57
Some graduate courses, no degree	6	2	12
Master's degree	11	1	23
Some doctoral courses, no doctorate	---	---	1
Doctorate	3	---	6

<i>Method of Course Payment</i>	Percent of Respondents		
	All	Undergraduate	Graduate
Student loans and other financial aid only	37%	46%	25%
Personal funds only	23	19	28
Personal funds and student loans/other financial aid	20	22	19
Personal funds and employer tuition assistance	8	3	14
Employer tuition assistance only	6	4	9
Personal funds, loans and private scholarships	5	5	5
Other	1	1	1

References

- Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2013). *Changing course: Ten years of tracking online education in the United States*. Babson Park, MA: Babson Survey Research Group. Retrieved from www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/changingcourse.pdf
- Aslanian, C. B., & Clinefelter, D. L. (2012). *Online college students 2012: Comprehensive data on demands and preferences*. Louisville, KY: The Learning House, Inc.
- Eduventures, Inc. (2012). *Online higher education market update 2012/13: Executive summary*. Retrieved from <http://www.eduventures.com/insights/online-higher-education-market-update/download/>

Technical Notes

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

Recap of “Online College Students 2012”

In spring 2012, Aslanian Market Research and Learning House conducted a survey of 1,500 individuals nationwide who were at least 18 years of age and were recently enrolled, currently enrolled, or planned to enroll in a fully online undergraduate or graduate degree program, or a certificate or licensure program.

The surveys collected information on motivation for study; type, level, and field of study; provider institutions; preferred schedules; needed services; strengths and weaknesses of the online format; effective promotional strategies and advertising methods; and a variety of other topics.

These surveys also gathered information on the personal characteristics and circumstances of students recently or currently enrolled in an online program or who plan to enroll in the near future.

Our 2012 findings led to the following key observations directed toward institutions seeking to build online enrollments:

- Online students are typically Caucasian females with a total average family income of \$66,500. They work full time, most often in education, healthcare, professional services and computer/information systems. The large majority of their employers offer tuition reimbursement.
- Individuals of all ages participate in online education. About 40% of online students are younger than age 30; in fact, approximately one of every five online students is younger than 25. We expect this segment to grow steadily as secondary school and traditional-age college students gain experience with online courses.
- For-profit institutions do not dominate online education. About two-thirds of online students attend not-for-profit institutions, and we predict that percentage will increase as more not-for-profit institutions begin to offer online programs.
- Students who enroll in not-for-profit and for-profit institutions are similar, particularly with regard to field of study, desired credentials, and their goals and motivation to pursue online education.
- With the exception of age and ethnic background, they share similar key demographic characteristics such as gender, income, employment status and method of tuition payment.
- Although the large majority of online students enroll in degree programs, certificates attract 20% of the market and we predict online certificate programs will grow steadily.
- Institutions that have a nearby campus or service center are highly attractive to online students. Most online students enroll in institutions within 100 miles of their home.
- Most online undergraduate students bring prior credits to their intended institution and want to receive transfer credit.
- Online students want compressed, shorter terms of study at an affordable cost from institutions that have a strong reputation.
- Similar to on-campus students, most online students find their program of choice through visits to college and university websites. Online students rank tuition and fees as the most important information they seek. Institutional websites provide the most important communication channel.

For the complete 2012 report, go to www.learninghouse.com/OCS2012

Partners

The Learning House, Inc. helps colleges and universities create, manage and grow high-quality online degree programs and courses. Partnering with more than 100 schools, Learning House enables institutions to achieve their online education goals efficiently and affordably. Services include product development and market research, marketing and lead generation, admissions and enrollment management, student retention, curriculum development and management, faculty training and professional development, learning management systems and 24/7 technical support.

EducationDynamics is a proven leader in helping higher education institutions find, enroll, and retain students. The organization maintains its industry leadership through a deeply rooted philosophy of serving our schools best by serving students first. This commitment has been at the heart of its success since it began more than a decade ago, and it continues today as we proudly serve more than 1,200 colleges and universities of all types and sizes.

Aslanian Market Research (Education Dynamics' market research unit) conducts market demand studies, institutional audits, program and marketing reviews, and professional development seminars and workshops for colleges and universities seeking information and data on how to expand adult and online student enrollments. Throughout the last 25 years, our staff has worked with more than 200 colleges and universities of all types—public, private, large, small, rural, suburban, and urban—in every region of the U.S. Our seminars have provided thousands of college administrators with practical, hands-on tactics that they can implement at their institutions at minimal cost for maximum impact.

Authors

Carol B. Aslanian is Senior Vice President of Aslanian Market Research. She is a national authority on the characteristics and learning patterns of adult students, and she has made hundreds of presentations on the topic and led market research projects for more than 300 colleges, universities, and educational agencies.

Dr. David L. Clinefelter is Chief Academic Officer of The Learning House, Inc. Prior to joining Learning House, he served as Chief Academic Officer of for-profit, online universities Walden and Kaplan, and as President of Graceland University, an early innovator in online education.

For additional information, contact:

Aslanian Market Research

(201) 377-3321
caslanian@educationdynamics.com
marketresearch@educationdynamics.com
www.educationdynamics.com/market-research

The Learning House, Inc.

(502) 589-9878
wparrish@learninghouse.com
www.learninghouse.com

A joint project of The Learning House, Inc.
and Aslanian Market Research

Carol B. Aslanian
Dr. David L. Clinefelter



LearningHouse.com
427 South Fourth Street
Louisville, KY 40202

EducationDynamics.com
5 Marine View Plaza, Suite 212
Hoboken, NJ 07030