PLANNING A NEW ONLINE PROGRAM?
INSIGHTS FROM STUDENTS AND ADMINISTRATORS

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OLC ACCELERATE - 2018
Our Research Initiative - Students

1500 Online Students (current, prospective, graduates)

- 64% Female / 36% Male
- 59% Enrolled full-time
- 61% Undergraduate
- (1) Business and related (2) Education (3) Health professions and related

Why online education
- How students research online options
- Challenges in college decision-making
- Roadblocks to graduation
- Advice from online alumni
Our Research Initiative - Schools

295 School Administrators

- 32% 4-year / 58% 2-year / 7% grad-only
- 99% self-identified as not-for-profit
- (1) Program Dean or Director (2) Institutional-level Online Administrator or Manager (3) Admissions or Enrollment Manager

- Online program design factors (e.g., audiences, employment trends, career preparation)
- Perceived demand for and planning for new online programs
- Student demographic trends
- Deciding to launch a new online program
Today’s Objectives:

**Student Demographics**
Review feedback received from online students and administrators

**Online Program Marketing and Recruitment**
Identify current trends in enrollment motivation, learning environment expectations, and challenges faced by online college students.

**Online Program Design and Development**
Identify current trends in current online program administration and creating new online program offerings.
https://www.bestcolleges.com/resources/
STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS
Ladd, Reynolds, & Selingo, n.d.
(EDUTrends, 2018)
Online Learners Continue to be Career Driven.

- Career Changers: Transitioning into a new field (Industry Switchers)
  - 2016: 36%
  - 2017: 35%
- Get Academic Credential in Current Field (Career Accelerators)
  - 2016: 32%
  - 2017: 30%
- Lifelong Learners (Academic Wanderers)
  - 2016: 16%
  - 2017: 17%
- High School Grads on a Traditional Academic Path (Aspiring Academics)
  - 2016: 7%
  - 2017: 10%
- High School Grads Interested in Career Prep (Career Starters)
  - 2016: 4%
  - 2017: 8%
“What is the most significant trend in online student demographics at your institution?”
Online Learners are Getting Younger.

34% of schools reported online students are younger than in previous years.

“Our online students profile is now more closely matching our on-campus student profile in terms of looking like the ‘traditional’ student.”

“A large portion are concurrent enrolled high school students.”

“Online students seem to be getting younger, with some entering directly out of high school.”

“Average age of students is dropping, younger students want online courses due to increased schedule flexibility”
Online Learners Enroll From Near and Far.

14% of our school respondents report more students enrolling from out-of-state and internationally, while a few are seeing more local and on-campus students choosing online learning options.

“We’re attracting increasing numbers of non-local students from various corners of the U.S. As well as a wide range of international students.”

“Students are finding us more online from further away.”

“We see an upward trend in students from outside our county and state enrolling due to military service.”

“Many of the students are actually resident students, but want a flexible schedule for the one online course.”
BEST COLLEGES INSIGHTS

Tailor communication strategies for multiple, specific audiences
- Current high school students
- Recent high school graduates
- Working professionals / adult students

Consider and prepare for the needs of learners at different locations.
- International students
- Out-of-state students
- Residential students
ONLINE PROGRAM MARKETING
AND RECRUITMENT
Prospective students need more guidance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6 Biggest Challenges Students Face – Choosing an Online Program</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimating actual costs (tuition, books, etc.)</td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>#1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying for financial aid and identifying sufficient funding sources</td>
<td>#2</td>
<td>#2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a program that met my needs and interests</td>
<td>#6</td>
<td>#3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding information about how graduates fared in the workplace</td>
<td>#5</td>
<td>#4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding sufficient information about academic requirements</td>
<td>#3</td>
<td>#5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacting a real person to ask detailed questions about specific programs</td>
<td>#4</td>
<td>#6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“What is the most significant challenge you encountered when making decisions about college?”
### Most significant challenge to making a college decision (enrollment motivation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Recent H.S. Grads** | 1. Estimating actual costs (31%)  
2. Applying for financial aid and finding funding sources (24%)  
3. Finding a program that meets my needs and interests (20%) |
| **Career-Minded**  | 1. Estimating annual costs (30%)  
2. Finding a program that meets my needs and interests (20%)  
3. Applying for financial aid, finding funding sources (19%) |
| **Lifelong Learners** | 1. Estimating annual costs (27%)  
2. Finding a program that meets my needs and interests (23%)  
3. Applying for financial aid, finding funding sources (17%) |
Perceptions of Online Education are Changing.

A majority of students (79%) feel that online learning is either “better than” or “equal to” on-campus learning.

Students shared that:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Their current employers (61%)</th>
<th>Future employers (61%)</th>
<th>And the general public (58%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

… also have a general positive perception of online learning.
Do you have any concerns about choosing Online vs. On-campus education?

- 31% No concerns
- 11% Challenge of learning new technology and software
- 16% Lack of community and/or interaction with professors and classmates
- 18% Perception of online degree by prospective employers
- 23% Quality of instruction and academic support
Do you think your online degree has or will have a positive return on investment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online Student Status</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about enrolling</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently enrolled</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated from an online program</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall: 90% = Yes
“What is the most significant challenge you encountered when making decisions about college?”
What source of information did you rely on when comparing online programs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Source of Information</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recent H.S. Grads</td>
<td>1. Online reviews from students (22%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Contacted schools directly (19.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Visited campus(es) (18.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career-Minded</td>
<td>1. Online reviews from students (22%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. College websites (19%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Contacted schools directly (18%)</td>
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<td>Lifelong Learners</td>
<td>1. Online reviews from students (30%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. College websites (19%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. TIE - Contacted schools directly / Talked to schools or graduates (13%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
Students use multiple methods to research online programs.

- 23% Read online reviews from students
- 18% Researched college websites
- 17% Contacted schools directly
- 17% Researched rankings websites
- 10% Talked to students or graduates
- 13% Visited campus(es)
How did you learn more about your field of study or the job market, before enrolling?

| Recent H.S. Grads | 1. Explored professional associations in my field of interest (24%)  
2. Talked to employers in my field of interest (incl. my own) (21%)  
3. TIE - Looked at employment data sites / Reviewed company websites (19%) |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Career-Minded     | 1. Explored professional associations in my field of interest (30%)  
2. Looked at employment data sites (27%)  
3. Talked to employers (19%) |
| Lifelong Learners | 1. “All of the above “ (31%)  
2. Explored professional associations (28%)  
3. Talked to employers in my field of interest, incl my own (19%) |
“Do you wish you had done anything differently before enrolling?”
What would online program alumni do differently?

- **Compare More Programs**: 28% in 2016, 22% in 2017
- **Do More Research About Cost and Financial Aid**: 20% in 2016, 25% in 2017
- **Find Out If Credits Will Transfer**: 18% in 2016, 15% in 2017
- **Speak With Employers or Professionals in the Field**: 16% in 2016, 15% in 2017
- **Have Better Technological Resources**: 15% in 2016, 15% in 2017
- **Speak With Current Students or Alumni**: 14% in 2016, 13% in 2017
- **Better Understand How Long It Would Take to Complete the Program**: 7% in 2016, 11% in 2017
- **Research Faculty Experience and Credentials**: 7% in 2016, 8% in 2017
What would online students do differently? (by enrollment motivation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment Motivation</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Recent H.S. Grads             | 1. More research about cost and financial aid (24%)  
|                               | 2. Compared more programs (22%)              |
|                               | 3. *Spoken with employers or professionals in the field* (20%) |
| Career-Minded                 | 1. Compared more programs (23%)              |
|                               | 2. More research about cost and financial aid (22%) |
|                               | 3. *Spoken with current students, alumni* (20%) |
| Lifelong Learners             | 1. Compared more programs (26%)              |
|                               | 2. More research about cost and financial aid (21%) |
|                               | 3. *Had better technological resources* (18%) |
BEST COLLEGES INSIGHTS

Openly share how each program is designed.
- Meeting and supporting the needs of specific populations and goals
- Offering a unique experience

Provide transparent access to the information students want/need most.
- Accurate cost calculations and estimates
- In-depth financial aid resources and guidance
- Feedback from current students and alumni
ONLINE PROGRAM DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT
“What trends have you seen in student demand for online courses?”
Demand for online learning is steady.
“What are the primary factors in making the decision to offer a new online program?”
Schools consider enrollment growth *and* hiring trends.
“What was the most significant challenge you encountered while completing your online education?”
Perceptions of roadblocks to completion are mixed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Online Alumni Perspective (%)</th>
<th>Faculty Perspective (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paying for higher education while minimizing student debt</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unexpected circumstances or events in my personal life</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying on track with my classes so I could graduate in the planned timeframe</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having enough of transfer credits count toward degree requirements</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling on-campus visits to support my program (testing, orientation, tutoring, etc.)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a minimum GPA</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having access to the required technology or internet connectivity</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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SOURCE: BESTCOLLEGES.COM
The most significant challenge in completing online education (enrollment motivation)

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Paying for higher education while minimizing student debt (19%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Unexpected circumstances in personal life (13%)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Career Starters</td>
<td>1. Paying for higher education while minimizing student debt (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Staying on track with my classes (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Not having enough credits transfer (15%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lifelong Learners</td>
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BEST COLLEGES INSIGHTS

Maintain active support throughout an online program.

- Financial planning and minimizing debt
- Manage work-life-school balance
- Staying on track toward graduation
Questions?
Access our full reports online.

STUDENT’S GUIDE FOR ONLINE EDUCATION

CONSIDERING ONLINE EDUCATION? OUR EXPERT ADVICE CAN HELP YOU:
- Learn how online education works
- Identify your career goals
- Compare different online programs
- Prepare for success as an online student

2018 ONLINE EDUCATION TRENDS REPORT

LEARN HOW STUDENTS AND ACADEMICS SAY ONLINE EDUCATION IS CHANGING WITH ALL-NEW DATA ABOUT:
- How career goals drive decisions
- How schools invest in online programs
- Online students’ biggest challenges
- Changes in demand for online education
Thank You!

For more information:

- [http://www.bestcolleges.com/resources/](http://www.bestcolleges.com/resources/)
- [@BestCollegesCom](https://twitter.com/BestCollegesCom)

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- mvenable@highereducation.com
- @Melissa_Venable

#LetsTalkCollege – Twitter chat

- Every other Wednesday – 12pm Pacific / 3pm Eastern