



# ONLINE STUDENT Behaviors and Attitudes

*A Survey of Prospective Students, Current Learners,  
and Recent Graduates of Wiley Education Services' Partners*

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and Recent Graduates of Wiley Education Services' Partners*

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## **PROJECT CONDUCTED BY WILEY EDUCATION SERVICES**

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**Suggested Citation:** Capranos, D. & Dyers, L. (2020). Online student behaviors and attitudes: A survey of prospective students, current learners, and recent graduates of Wiley Education Services' partners. Orlando, FL: Wiley edu, LLC

April 2020

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# INTRODUCTION



As online learning grows in popularity, attitudes, expectations, and experiences continue to evolve. Student perceptions can guide the development and promotion of future programs, ensuring they meet the needs and desires of learners from various walks of life.

Wiley Education Services helps partners succeed in an increasingly competitive market and ever-changing education landscape. Exploring how students interact with online programs, from researching their first online experience to enrolling in their second program, provides incredible insight into how to best attract, enroll, and retain online learners. Our students' unique motivations, behaviors, experiences, and attitudes inform how university leaders can meet the current and future goals of a diverse student body.

For this report, Wiley Education Services surveyed more than 2,000 prospective, current, and recently graduated learners from our partner institutions and programs. While students at the undergraduate and graduate levels were included, this survey was comprised primarily of those seeking graduate-level education.

As part of Wiley's continuing efforts to identify and map online student personas, this research provides a foundation for understanding the differences among our online learners. This information assists higher education leaders as they help students find the right program and succeed in meeting their goals.

# KEY FINDINGS



This survey validated what our experience has already shown us: There is no one type of online student. There are many attitudes and behaviors for education leaders to consider when growing online programs and meeting student needs.

Key findings include the following:

## **Modality is chosen first, but there are competing priorities.**

- Students chose modality before all else, but it is not necessarily what they considered when narrowing down programs. Because modality is a given for many of our students, factors such as cost and tuition, reputation and ranking of institutions, and program curriculum and length were rated as priorities for Wiley students choosing programs.
- Students often compared the tuition and program design for an online program to that of a local, on-ground program to be sure they find the right fit. Keeping an awareness of on-ground competitors is important, even though modality is the highest priority for Wiley-supported students.

## **The internet tops the list of research tools across all generations.**

- Our students relied heavily on university and college websites and search engines to research programs of interest. This trend was consistent across different age groups and disciplines.
- Wiley-supported students also used rating and review websites often.
- Of the top four methods of research, only one was not internet-based. University guides, such as brochures, information packets, and other materials, were used by many of our students.

*Continued...*

### **Email and phone are the most preferred and used methods of communication, but Wiley students would like more access to alternative options (text, chat, and messenger) than are available.**

- Most people used the phone and email to communicate with admissions representatives. These are overwhelmingly the preferred methods of contact. However, there is an increased interest among our students in alternative methods of communication.
- Text, online chat, and messenger all have a higher percentage of students who would prefer to use them than those who were able to use them. These students relied on the methods of communication available to them, which were phone and email.

### **Our students found residencies valuable, but most Wiley students want a fully online program.**

- The majority of students surveyed felt visiting campus was either not important or only slightly important. Required time on campus was one of the top reasons why students chose not to apply or enroll.
- However, more than half of those who did spend time on campus, especially for a visit that was part of their program, felt it was a valuable experience. One of the most appealing reasons to visit campus, other than graduation, was to meet professors and network with others.

### **Instructor presence—and interaction—is critical.**

- Our students were concerned about instructor presence before enrolling.
- Students in programs can be frustrated by a lack of instructor presence.
- Instructor presence includes timely and quality feedback, as well as enough interaction to make up for the lack of face-to-face communication.

### **Online degrees are found to be valuable.**

- Wiley-supported students generally have positive perceptions and experiences with online courses. The positive aspects of online learning, such as flexibility and convenience, far outweigh the concerns or frustrations.
- The majority of our current and former students would recommend an online degree. Nearly all of them felt the value of the degree exceeded or matched the cost and would consider doing it again.

### **There is a tendency toward lifelong learning.**

- The majority of our online students had an online learning experience in the past. Some students were entering their second online program, indicating that once they experience online learning, they will return to it when there is an opportunity to increase skills, advance their careers, or change professions.
- Our students understand the importance of an online degree or certificate program in furthering their careers. However, newer alternative formats, such as badges and micro-credentials, are somewhat unfamiliar to them.
- While students have limited awareness of badges and micro-credentials, when asked about skill-based or career-specific noncredit learning, a majority were familiar with it and stated they would likely use it in the future.

## SECTION 1:

# RESEARCHING AND CHOOSING PROGRAMS

*Explore the steps students take when researching online programs and how they determine which one is the right fit.*

One essential element of a successful online education strategy is helping learners find the programs they want, in the formats they need, designed in ways that fit with their lives. Research and decision-making trends provide a roadmap for higher education leaders.

## WHAT ARE STUDENTS' PRIORITIES WHEN RESEARCHING?

Students selected their modality first. A significant portion of students surveyed stated they decided to pursue online education before deciding on other factors, including what institution to attend. An overwhelming 88% of respondents said they chose modality before any other factor.

### When looking for a program, did you decide on modality (online vs. on-ground) before anything else?



Students who wanted to attend an online program still highly considered many other factors in addition to modality. When our learners were able to give open-ended answers, the following program elements emerged as important priorities:



**Tuition/Cost**



**Institution Reputation/Ranking**



**Program Curriculum/Content**



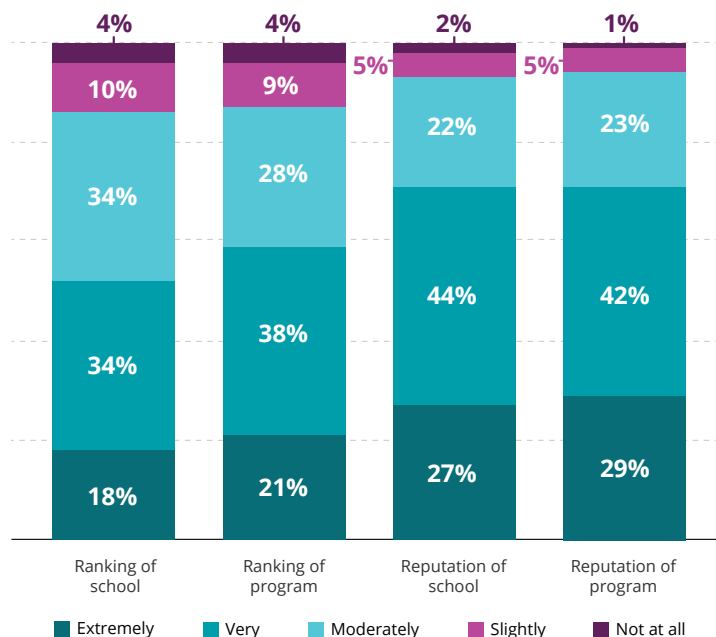
**Time to Completion**

**TUITION** was extremely or very important to 73% of Wiley-supported students when looking for a program.



**INSTITUTION FACTORS** were listed in the top three priorities for 62% of students. The reputation of the program or institution was considered more than the ranking of the institution or program. Giving open-ended responses, Wiley students expressed concern with the accreditation of specific programs.

**How important are the following in deciding to look at a program?**



**TIME TO COMPLETION** was a significant factor as well. Sixty-seven percent of Wiley-supported students surveyed stated it was extremely or very important. Our results indicated that 74% of students preferred a faster completion time over a staggered or spread out course schedule.

Even though students choose their modality first, program elements like cost, reputation, and time commitment may lead a student to research other options. Fifty-five percent of students said if they were to find a local, on-campus program that met their flexibility needs, they would consider it. This indicates that university and college leaders should consider both online and on-campus programs when assessing competition. Still, 88% of Wiley-supported students considered modality to be the most crucial factor when choosing a program, and it is uncommon for an online student to enroll in an on-campus program.

## WHAT FACTORS ARE NOT SIGNIFICANT PRIORITIES?

When looking for a program that met their needs, Wiley-supported students considered location, discipline, and family and friend recommendations the least.

**LOCATION** was most important for roughly a third of our students but also least important for about a third of our students. Overall, the location was not at all or only slightly important to 58% of those surveyed. Still, our experience tells us students overwhelmingly enroll in online programs in their geographical region.

Interestingly, students who stated location was a top priority were most likely to respond that discipline was their second priority. These students are likely unsure about what they want in a program and start their research with familiar institutions. For example, a student may explore a local university to see what business degrees are offered and which are online.

**DISCIPLINE**, such as business or health, was one of the lowest priorities for students, ranking at fifth or sixth for 56% of our learners. The majority of students researching programs had already narrowed their options to specific programs, rather than casting a broad net, so their discipline was chosen before this point in the research process.

**RECOMMENDATIONS** from family and friends were a low priority consideration for our students. This is likely because many students did not receive any endorsements for a program from friends or family. Sixty-two percent of our surveyed learners said personal recommendations were not at all or slightly important. Here, it is important to note that our sample included primarily graduate students who may be less reliant on others' input.

## HOW DO STUDENTS RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS AND PROGRAMS?

After creating a program that appeals to learners' priorities, colleges and universities must reach students in their search. How our students find the program they eventually enroll in is complicated, but data shows some apparent inclinations.

**INTERNET SEARCH** was the most common form of research done by our learners. The two most used types of internet search techniques, employed by nearly 80% of our students, were visiting university and college websites and using search engines. The next most common internet research technique, used by 54% of our students, was visiting school rating and review websites.

***Nearly 80% of our students were visiting university and college websites***

Social media was used by almost 25% of students to get information about a program or institution. Those who used social media for research felt that LinkedIn was the most trusted way to receive relevant news, followed by Facebook and Twitter. YouTube and Instagram were the lowest-rated platforms for receiving relevant news.

**TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION-SPECIFIC MATERIALS** and activities were the second most common form of research. The two most used resources were:

**52%** *Guides, such as brochures, information packets, and other materials*

**42%** *Phone calls to institutions or talking to an admissions representative*

## RELATED TOPICS

### What is the best way to contact students?

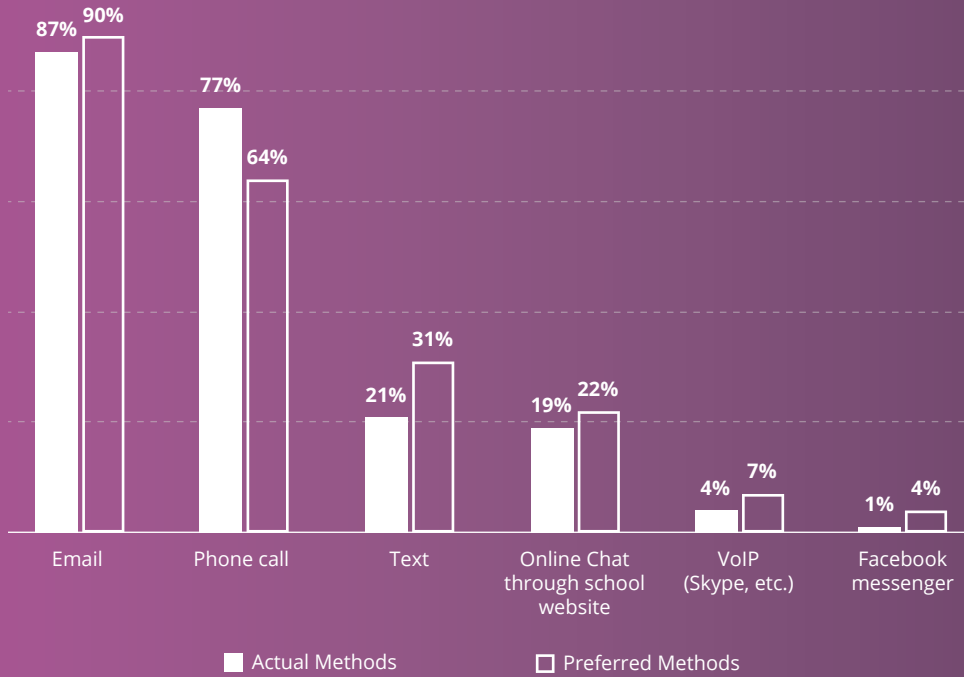
Eighty-seven percent of our students stated they were in contact with a university or college representative through email. Ninety percent preferred this medium, making it by far the most preferred method of communication. Program representatives should continue to use email heavily for contacting prospective learners.

Seventy-seven percent of Wiley students noted they were in contact with representatives by phone, but only 64% stated this was their preferred method of contact. This indicates that while students still prefer phone calls, there is a desire for alternative methods of contact.

Other forms of contact included text, online chat, voice over internet protocol calls (VoIP), and Facebook messages. All these options had a higher percentage of students who preferred them than those who used them, illustrating institutions should leverage these options more. Wiley continues to invest in new opportunities to meet the demand for alternative methods of contact, and our partners have seen an increased response from students using methods such as text.

Asking students via request for information forms for their preferred method of communication is a straightforward way to determine how to initiate a conversation with a prospective student.

## Methods of contact with schools of interest



**PERSONAL ADVISEMENT** with trusted individuals was the least common type of research students did. Only 32% spoke with friends and family about their education plans, and even fewer consulted with a trusted advisor or employer. Of note is that most of the students surveyed were at the graduate level, and many were pursuing a second online degree. Personal advice might be more important to a first-time undergraduate student.

**AGE** was considered in the survey to determine if there are generational differences in how our students research programs or prefer to be contacted. The preferred method of contact was email across all age groups, with people ages 18 to 45 slightly more open to communication methods such as Skype or Facebook.

**SOME NATURAL DIFFERENCES RELATED TO A PHASE OF LIFE OCCURRED** when Wiley-supported students researched programs. Students in the 18-to-24-year-old age group, who are less entrenched in careers, were less likely to consult an employer but more likely to consult a trusted source, such as an academic advisor. Those in the 65+ age group were less likely to use social media or attend a virtual open house, and those in the early-to-mid-career group, ages 24 to 44, were more likely to consult an employer.

Even with these differences, similar trends were found across all age groups. Overall, the top four methods of research consisted of:



**Visiting websites of institutions of interest**



**Using internet search engines (Google, Bing, etc.)**



**Visiting ratings and review websites (U.S. News & World Report, Princeton Review, etc.)**



**Reading brochures and other materials**

<b>Internet Research</b>	Visited university or college websites	<b>79%</b>
	Used internet search engines (Google, Bing, etc.)	<b>76%</b>
	Visited ratings/review websites (U.S. News & World Report, Princeton Review, etc.)	<b>54%</b>
	Used social media channels	<b>25%</b>
<b>Traditional Materials and Activities</b>	Read brochures and other materials	<b>52%</b>
	Made phone calls to institutions	<b>42%</b>
	Attended a virtual open house	<b>16%</b>
	Spoke with alumni	<b>14%</b>
	Used live chat on a university's website	<b>9%</b>
	Visited campuses	<b>8%</b>
<b>Personal Advisement</b>	Spoke with friends and family	<b>32%</b>
	Consulted with trusted advisors	<b>22%</b>
	Consulted with my employer	<b>18%</b>
	Other	<b>3%</b>
	I don't recall	<b>1%</b>

## HOW LONG DO STUDENTS RESEARCH BEFORE DECIDING?

For the most part, research is completed quickly. This indicates that swiftly initiating conversations with prospective students in their preferred method of contact is imperative. In fact, 57% of our students selected a program within three months. Just over 20% took more than six months.

### How long did it take you to select a program?



In the research phase, students typically requested information from more than one institution. Sixty-three percent of students surveyed requested information from three or more colleges.

Inquiries do not always translate into applications. More than half of our students only applied to one institution, suggesting that learners use the research process to significantly narrow down options and often select a program before the application process. Fewer than 17% of students surveyed applied to three or more programs.

		How many schools did you contact or request information from?						Total
		0	1	2	3	4	5+	
How many schools did you apply to?	0	0.4%	1%	2%	1%	0.4%	1%	<b>6%</b>
	1	1%	11%	15%	16%	6%	5%	<b>53%</b>
	2	0.0%	1%	6%	9%	5%	4%	<b>25%</b>
	3	0.1%	0.1%	0.7%	4%	3%	4%	<b>11%</b>
	4	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%	0.8%	2%	<b>3%</b>
	5+	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%	2%	<b>2%</b>
Total		<b>2%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>17%</b>	

Those surveyed who had not yet applied to any institutions most commonly stated they anticipated applying to fewer than three, following similar trends to those who had already applied.

Our students who took a long time to decide typically did more research. Those who researched longer requested information from additional institutions. Five or more requests for information were typical for this group. Students who spent extra time in the decision-making process were more likely to apply to more than one institution or not apply at all. This type of student has difficulty deciding to enroll and will need higher touch guidance from admissions representatives.

## WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCE A FINAL DECISION?

Knowing the top factors that lead a student to apply to a program is critical to converting prospects into enrollees. In our survey, a few trends emerged.

**PROGRAM DESIGN** elements were top considerations for Wiley students. For example, when researching programs, students considered the program curriculum and cost as top factors when choosing to apply. Nearly 50% of our students stated these were two of the top three factors in their final decision.

Availability in multiple study formats (part-time, full-time, and online) and the time it takes to complete a program were also important program design elements examined. More than 40% of students cited these features as top considerations.

**QUALITY FACTORS**, including the institution, program, and faculty, were secondary considerations for most students but still relevant. Reputations of the institution and program were top considerations for 24% to 28% of students. Those in this phase were also less concerned with actual rank than reputation.

Other elements were top factors for less than 10% of students. This does not mean they are not considered or unimportant. They were just not consciously top of mind for students when deciding to apply to a program. These factors included admissions staff, transfer credit policies, recommendations, and more.

Top Three Factors That Led You to Apply to a Program		Percentage of Students Selecting Factor
Program Design Elements	Program curriculum	49%
	Tuition and fees	47%
	Multiple study formats	42%
	Time to complete	41%
Quality Factors	Reputation of institution	28%
	Reputation of program	24%
	Ranking of program	14%
	Ranking of institution	13%
	Quality of faculty	11%
Other Factors	Admissions staff	9%
	Generous transfer credits policy	7%
	Friend/family recommendation	7%
	Networking opportunities	6%
	Connection to the college or university	6%
	Location of institution	5%
	Other	5%
	Religious affiliation	2%

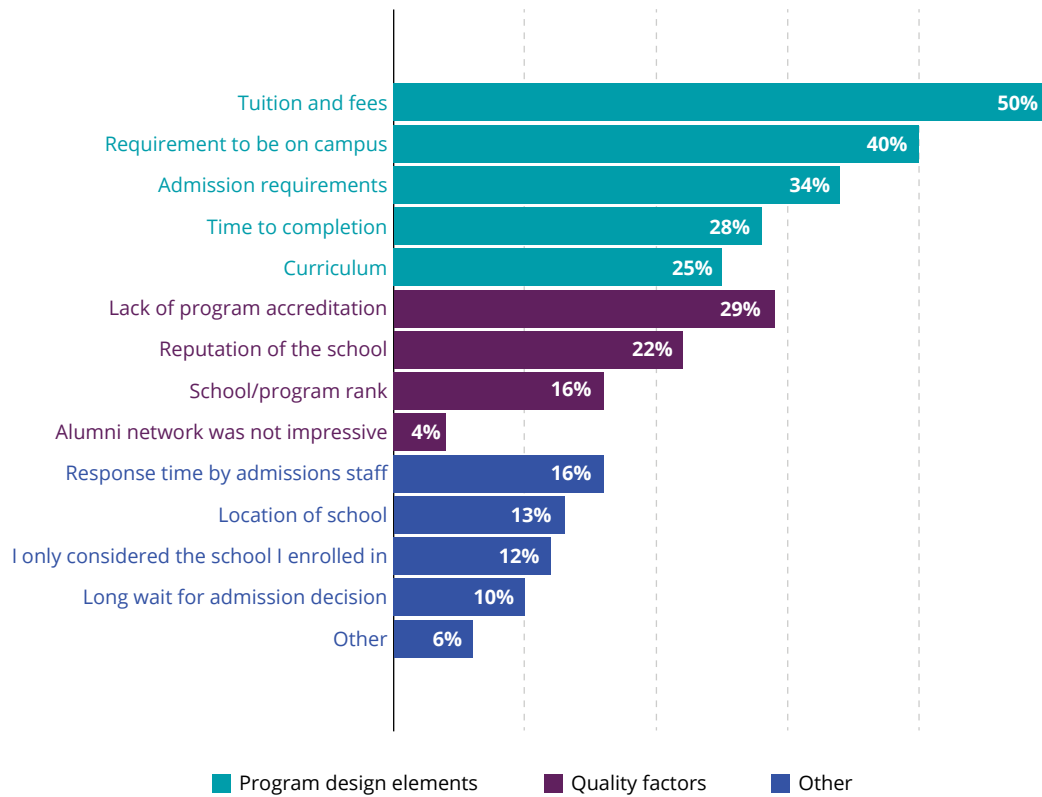
Just as it is imperative to know why students enroll, it is important to understand why they don't. These are the top reasons students surveyed chose not to enroll in a program:

- **TUITION/COST:** This is the top reason that students decided not to apply or enroll. Fifty percent of students surveyed cited this reason. This is not surprising, as it is a priority for students when researching and making their decisions.
- **A REQUIREMENT TO BE ON CAMPUS:** This program design element caused 40% of students surveyed not to apply or enroll in a specific program. Eighty-three percent of students in the survey said they would prefer a fully online program with no requirement to visit campus rather than visiting campus once for a 2- to 7-day requirement. This highlights that students choose modality first, and while that decision may be fluid given the right circumstances, a fully online program is vital to many learners.
- **ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS:** Thirty-four percent of students surveyed cited this as a reason they would choose not to apply or enroll. When asked in an open-response question about what specific requirements were barriers, many students responded that an entrance exam, such as the GRE or GMAT, prevented them from applying as they did not want to or could not take one.

The top reasons for not applying or enrolling validate that program design elements are the most important factors for students when choosing a program. For many of our students, if a program does not fit their needs, budget, lifestyle, and timeline, the fact that it is a prestigious or top-ranked program will not matter when the final decision is made.

## What were the main reasons you *chose NOT* to apply to or enroll in a program?

*Check all that apply*



## RELATED TOPIC

### Is a campus visit important?

A visit to campus is often exciting for students, but 74% of those surveyed said it was not at all or only slightly important to them to be able to visit campus and meet instructors or other students face-to-face. However, 55% of participants who have had online learning experiences said they visited or planned to visit their campus and 30% were required visits. This illustrates that while students want to visit campus, they don't want to be required to do so.

For those who did visit their institution, 53% found the visit valuable, while 33% indicated it was a neutral experience. When broken down by whether visiting was related to the program or not, those who visited as a program requirement felt the experience was more valuable than those who visited for other reasons. Required experiences included face-to-face academic interaction with professors and other students and are deemed more rewarding than a trip to campus to visit the bookstore or attend an athletic event.

Of all the reasons to visit a campus, 57% of students found attending graduation ceremonies most appealing. Meeting with professors was the second most appealing reason, chosen by 42% of students. Visiting campus for an optional program visit was appealing to only 35% of our students.

Attend the graduation ceremony	57%
Meet with professors	42%
Network with others	36%
Short, optional program visit	35%
Explore campus	24%
Meet with students	21%
None	17%
Attend on-campus student activities	14%
Other	1%

Other factors play a role in a student's decision-making process and warrant discussion.

**FLEXIBILITY** is a key element of online learning. It can afford a student who might not be able to make it to campus multiple days a week the ability to earn a degree. Flexibility comes in many forms, including when students can start and finish a course, how many courses are required, and whether students are required to attend class at a specific date and time.

Online students value flexibility, above all else.

**79%** *preferred asynchronous learning to synchronous.*

**67%** *wanted a flexible schedule as opposed to a lockstep or cohort model.*

**89%** *wanted multiple start dates per year, even if it meant interaction with fewer peers.*

**ECONOMIC FACTORS** play a significant role in decision-making. We have already explored how the cost of a program was a top consideration for most students. This is understandable because nearly 60% of Wiley-supported students must take out loans or receive financial aid to attend programs, and 38% of students dipped into savings or paid out of pocket. About a third of students surveyed received a form of employer tuition assistance.

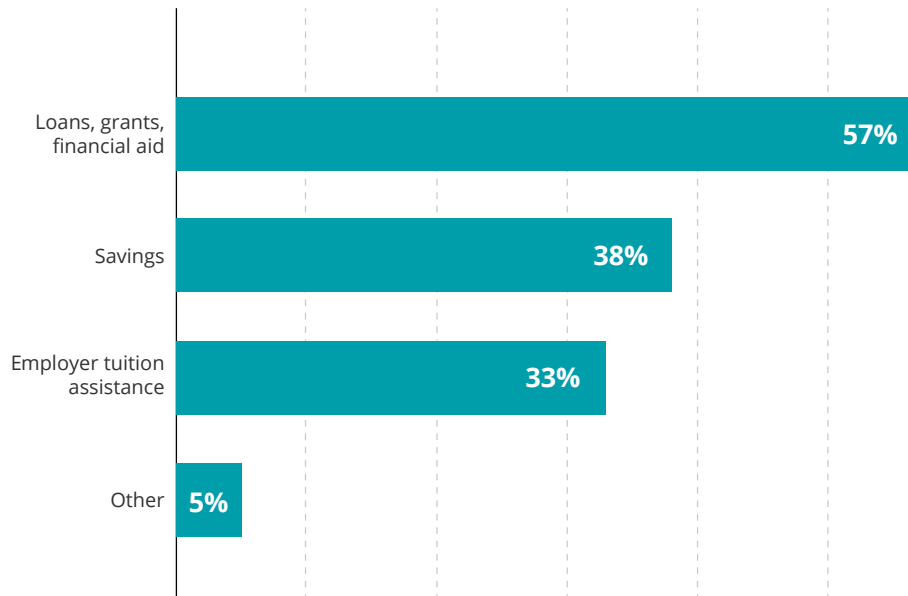
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***About a third of students surveyed received a form of employer tuition assistance.***

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## How do you plan to pay for school?

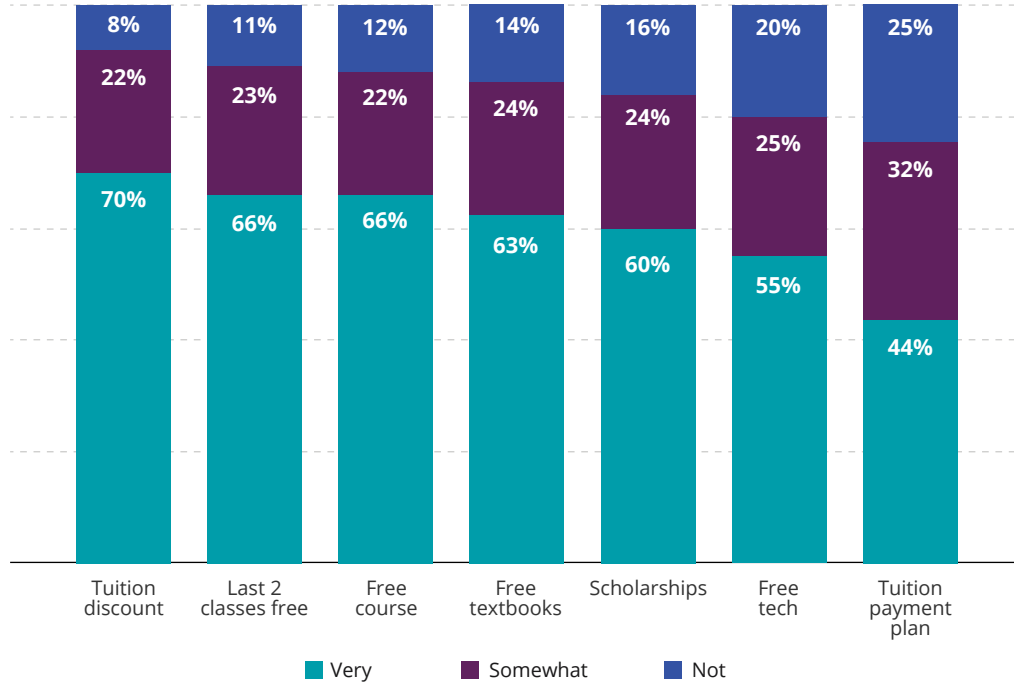


Being aware of financial situations is important because student debt is top of mind for many learners today. Some ways to alleviate financial stress on students include:

- **TUITION DISCOUNTS:** Seventy percent of students surveyed stated that if they were to receive a tuition discount, it would very likely lead them to choose one program over another. This is higher than if they were to receive a scholarship, with only 60% stating that it would be very likely to sway them. Surprisingly, 16% said an annual scholarship would not affect their decision.
- **FREE COURSES OR MATERIALS:** Something as simple as a free course or offering the last two courses free would be an incentive for 66% of students surveyed. Free textbooks would be an incentive for 63% of those surveyed.

The least powerful incentive was a tuition payment plan. While this may ease the burden in the short term, it does not cost a student less money. Therefore, it is less likely to sway them to choose one program over another.

## How likely would the following incentives be in swaying you to choose one program over the other?



## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

In general, the three primary considerations for students when choosing programs are cost, design, and flexibility. The following findings stand out for those considerations and others:

**COST:** Students are generally cost-conscious. Programs should be affordable and comparable to other programs in the market. Even top-ranked institutions must be priced at a competitive rate if the goal is to attract a wider audience and grow program enrollment.

**LOCATION:** While [previous research](#)<sup>1</sup> shows that students tend to choose an institution that is somewhat close to their residence, it is not something they are consciously targeting as a top priority. Students gravitate toward institutions with good reputations, and they are familiar with the reputation of universities in their area. While location may not be a priority, it still ends up being a factor based on these other variables.

**INTERNET RESEARCH:** Wiley students research degrees in the same way regardless of age. Internet research tops the list. It is imperative to have user-friendly websites with all the information students need. There must be a simple way to request more information and indicate preferred contact methods.

**PROGRAM DESIGN:** Factors that lead a student to apply and enroll in a program are mostly the same reasons that cause a student not to apply or enroll. They include program design elements, such as curriculum and content, cost, time to complete, and multiple study formats. These elements take priority over the ranking or reputation of an institution or program.

# STUDENT ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOR MAPPING

## ATTITUDE/BEHAVIOR 1

### 100% ONLINE ONLY



### OPEN TO OTHER MODALITIES

Those with an online-only attitude know their chosen program must be 100% online.

For those with a modality-fluid attitude, online is important, but they are open to other local, reputable, and affordable options with residencies and are willing to shop around.

## ATTITUDE/BEHAVIOR 2

### DEEPER-LEVEL EXPLORING



### HIGHER-LEVEL EXPLORING

Deeper-level explorers have a good idea of what program they want and are most concerned with program curriculum and content, as well as their ability to afford the program. They look at institutions for the specific degree they are interested in when starting research.

Higher-level explorers are not sure what specific degree program they want, so they start with local, familiar institutions to explore what is available in certain areas of study, such as business or healthcare, to start the program selection process.

## ATTITUDE/BEHAVIOR 3

### QUICK DECISION-MAKING



### DIFFICULTY DECIDING

Quick decision makers take less than three months to pick a program, request information from three or fewer institutions, and apply to one, sometimes two, colleges or universities.

Those who have difficulty deciding, take more than six months to choose a program, request information from multiple institutions, have difficulty narrowing down their options, and either do not apply or apply to more than one university or college.

## SECTION 2:

# ATTITUDES ABOUT ONLINE LEARNING

*Discover students' attitudes and perceptions of online learning.*

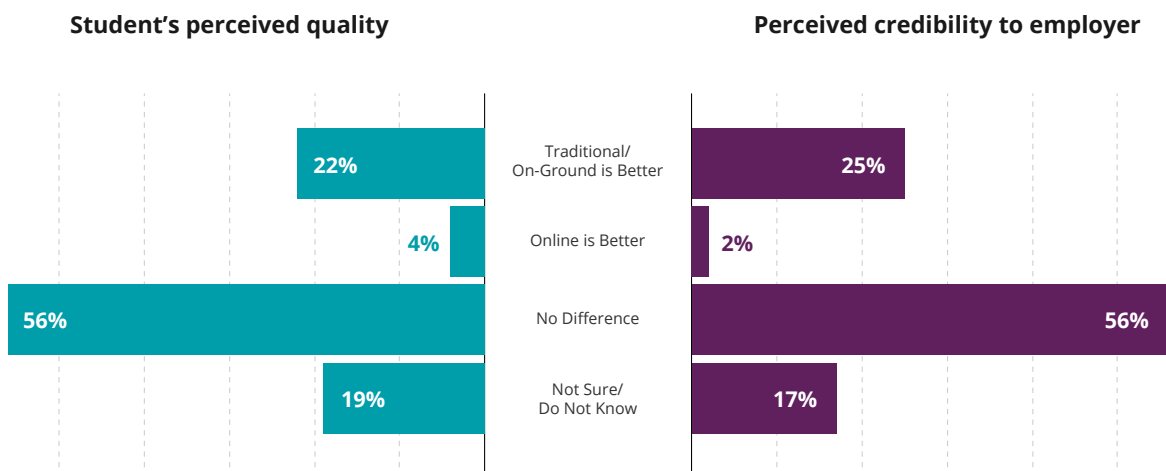
Online learning has become a mainstream staple for education. With online delivery comes unique opportunities and considerations that impact students' behavior and their attitudes about the mode of instruction. Here, we will explore how survey respondents view online learning.

## WHAT ARE STUDENTS CONCERNED ABOUT WITH ONLINE DEGREES?

Many of our students have some common fears and hesitations about online learning that we will outline in this section.

Given that Wiley students are often career motivated, one thing on their mind is whether their degree appears credible to future employers. That said, 56% of survey respondents did not think there is a perceived difference in the **CREDIBILITY** of an online degree.

Even though the percentage of students concerned that employers would see an on-ground degree as more credible is low at just 25%, there are still slight lingering concerns about the quality of online programs. Twenty-two percent of students stated they felt a traditional program would be better quality. Very few thought that an online program would be higher quality or viewed as more credible.

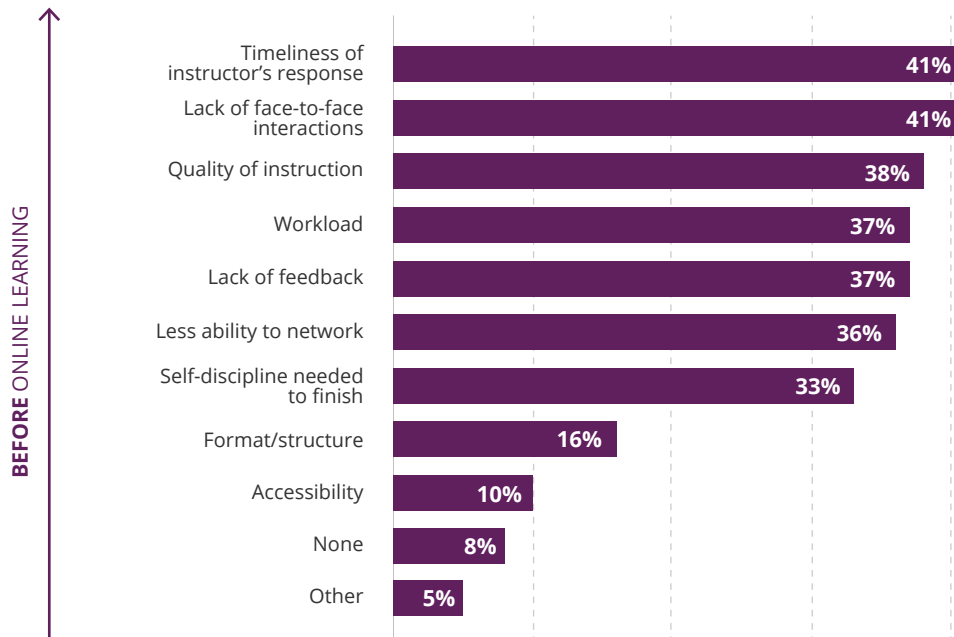


Other common apprehensions about online learning among our students focused on participation. Students surveyed had concerns that fell into the following three categories:

- INSTRUCTOR FACTORS:** Forty-one percent of Wiley-supported students surveyed were concerned about instructor presence and instructor response in an online learning environment. Other instructor factors were a concern for nearly 40% of students. They included quality of instruction and the potential for lack of feedback. Highlighting instructor involvement and availability is imperative when presenting an online program to potential students.

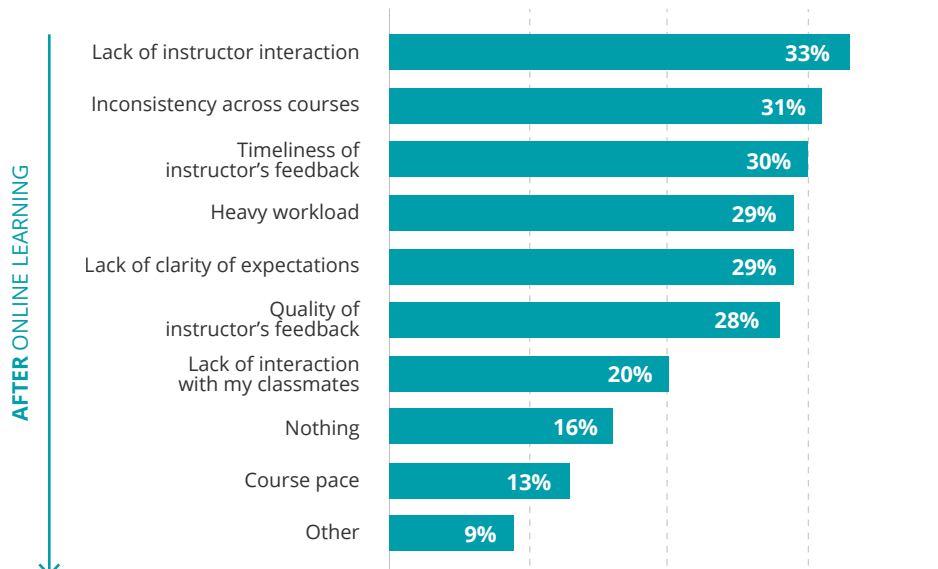
### What are your concerns about online learning?

*Check all that apply*



### What has frustrated you about learning online?

*Check all that apply*



- **PEER FACTORS:** With face-to-face interaction with instructors being a concern, it is not surprising a decreased ability to network with peers was a concern for 36% of students surveyed. Thus, online programs need to demonstrate the ways they connect students and foster peer-to-peer networking.
- **PERSONAL FACTORS:** Motivation and self-discipline are two concerns of students that fall primarily on their shoulders. Thirty-three percent of learners surveyed expressed concerns about having the self-discipline to maintain a steady pace with an online program without the structure of in-person courses.

Unfortunately, many of the concerns expressed by students matched actual frustrations students encountered during online learning experiences. Hindrances of enrolled students included:

- **INSTRUCTORS:** The top areas of frustration for students who completed online learning were all related to instructors. Two top issues with online learning experiences were lack of instructor interaction and timeliness of instructor feedback.
- **HEAVY WORKLOAD:** Workload was a concern for many prospective students and a top frustration for those who have already participated in online learning. Most students surveyed also had a full-time job and other responsibilities to balance, so a heavy class workload was a stressor and potential barrier to success. Setting clear expectations upfront is crucial to help students prepare to balance coursework with other facets of their life.

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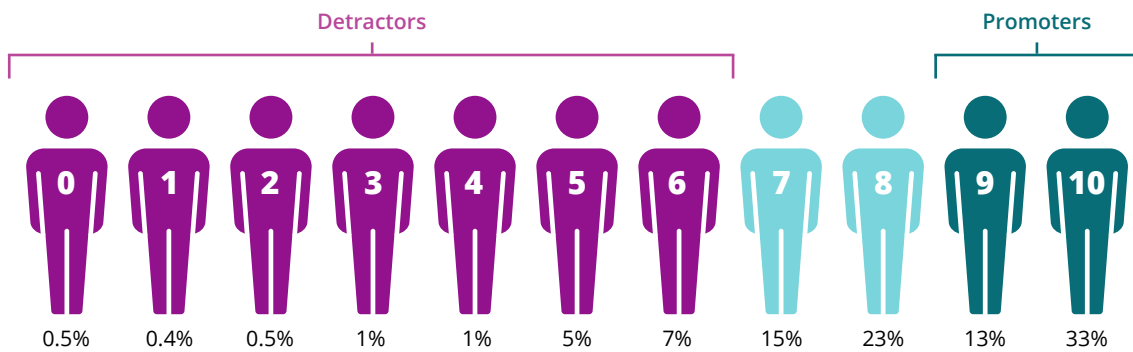
***Students reported taking an average of two courses a semester and spending between 6 to 20 hours a week on coursework.***

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## WHAT IS OUR NET PROMOTER SCORE?

Our students generally have positive perceptions and experiences with online courses. Online learning has a positive net promoter score with our respondents. Nearly 50% of Wiley students surveyed are considered promoters when it comes to online learning, and more than 90% said they would probably or definitely enroll again.

In this survey, our NPS was 31, placing us firmly in the “good” NPS category. This score is lower than our recently [reported NPS<sup>2</sup>](#) because not all students represented in this report have enrolled in a program with our partners. Enrolled and graduated Wiley students have a higher NPS than our blended sample here shows.



## RELATED TOPIC

### What does Net Promoter Score mean?

A Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a standard measurement of customer satisfaction. Education leaders and marketers can use this metric to determine the likelihood that students will suggest a program to friends and family.



$$\text{NPS} = \text{Smiley Face} \% - \text{Sad Face} \%$$

This study assigned an NPS to the survey population by asking how likely students were to recommend online learning to a friend or coworker.

Questions for determining an NPS are based on a scale of 1 (low loyalty) to 10 (high loyalty). Based on the rating they provide, respondents are assigned to one of the three categories.

## WHAT DO STUDENTS APPRECIATE ABOUT ONLINE PROGRAMS?

Wiley-supported students appreciate the flexibility and convenience that online learning offers, which outweighs most of their concerns and frustrations.

Ninety-seven percent of students stated that they like the **FLEXIBILITY** of online learning. Of the students surveyed, 86% liked the **CONVENIENCE**. These two factors illustrate that our students need programs that allow them to balance their commitments with education. Nearly 70% felt that online learning was the right choice because it fit their individual needs better than an on-campus program. This proves that even though more than half of students may look at on-campus programs during the research phase, they are not feasible options for most Wiley learners.

**PROGRAM DESIGN**, which was shown to be a top factor for students when choosing the right program, is also one of the main reasons students like online learning. Time to completion and format, as well as the ability to watch lectures multiple times, were positive factors for about half of students.

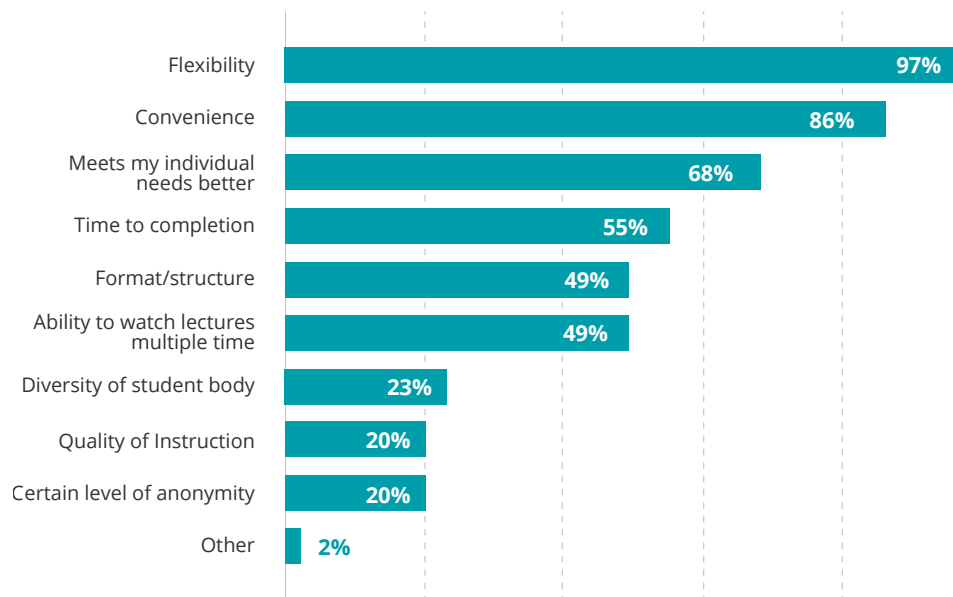
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***Ninety-seven percent of students stated that they like the flexibility of online learning. Of the students surveyed, 86% liked the convenience.***

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### What do you like about online learning?

*Check all that apply*





## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The following points highlight the primary considerations concerning attitudes about online learning and meeting the needs of online students.

**INTERACTION:** There are student concerns about the quality and perceived credibility of online learning. Part of this is likely based on students' anxieties, which are primarily focused on instructor presence. Apprehensions exist about the lack of interaction between peers, as well. Talking to students about the level of interaction in courses would help ease some of these worries. Universities and instructors must ensure students are getting feedback and feel as connected with instructors and other students as they would during an in-person course.

**FLEXIBILITY:** Nearly all students stated that flexibility and convenience were the top two reasons they liked online learning. This can take the form of a program being 100% online, courses being spread out or sped up, revisiting lectures, or even changing workload mid-program. While programs need structure to keep learners accountable and thriving, offering ways for students to tailor a program to meet their individual needs is essential for online learning.

## STUDENT ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOR MAPPING

### ATTITUDE/BEHAVIOR 4

#### HIGH TOUCH

High-touch students need a lot of interaction and consistent, quality feedback from instructors. They seek more interaction with their classmates.



#### ANONYMOUS

Anonymous students prefer less interaction and work well independently. They still crave quality feedback and want to know instructors are present but will not need much high-touch interaction.

## SECTION 3:

# STUDENT MOTIVATIONS AND CHALLENGES

*Chart students' motivations for starting and continuing online programs, as well as the barriers they face when enrolling.*

Students seeking and enrolled in online programs often experience unique sets of challenges and motivations. Understanding what drives online students and the hardships they face is essential to creating and marketing successful programs.

## WHAT MOTIVATES STUDENTS TO FURTHER THEIR EDUCATION?

Factors influencing students' decisions to pursue a degree or certificate program were often career-related. Forty-five percent of our students considered whether an institution would afford them access to career services when choosing a program.

In a [previous survey of graduate students](#)<sup>3</sup> by Wiley Education Services, results showed that graduate students fell into one of three categories: career advancers, career launchers, and altruists. Looking at each type of student reveals distinct motivations.



### The Advancer

The opportunity for career advancement influenced the decision to pursue education for 76% of students. Other career-related motivations included:

- **Better job prospects: 70%**
- **Salary increases: 60%**
- **Networking: 44%**

Computer science and education students were less interested in the ability to network than their peers in other disciplines.



### The Launcher

More than 50% of students stated a change in career was a significant motivation for pursuing a program. This was most prevalent in the human services and computer science disciplines.

Along with career-launching, employer or industry requirements can be a motivating factor. While this was not a common stimulus overall, it was found more prevalently in the health and human services disciplines where many occupations require licensure or similar credentials.



### The Altruist

Altruists seek personal growth. Seventy percent of students stated that personal growth influenced their decision a great deal. The impact of personal growth on decision making is higher for students in human services.

The love of learning was also a significant motivation for 67% of students, especially those in human services and education.

## WHAT CHALLENGES DO STUDENTS FACE, AND HOW CAN THEY BE ADDRESSED?

Many of the challenges students face correlate to the factors they consider when choosing a program. They value flexibility, are concerned with tuition and workload, and will decide not to enroll in a program if it requires too much time on campus. These aspects encompass some of the top challenges for our learners.

**TIME MANAGEMENT** and **FINANCES** were the two most significant concerns for students. Sixty-three percent of those surveyed cited these challenges. Work commitments were close behind, with 59% of those surveyed citing jobs as a challenge. These issues are what we often hear on the phone as we support our students through their programs, as well. This survey finding validates the need for a program to be affordable and to take other commitments into account.

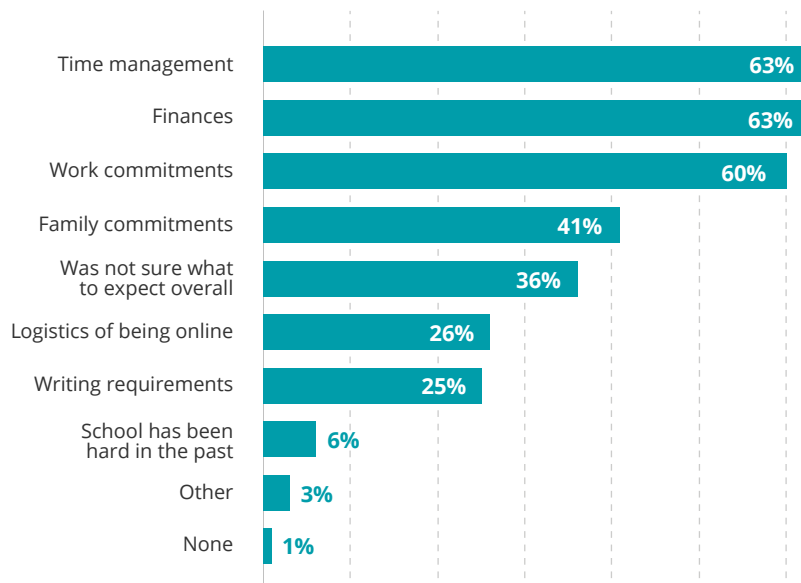
***Time management and finances were the two most significant concerns for students.***

Allowing for flexibility while maintaining the right level of accountability at the program and course level is essential for students to be successful. Some ways to help with accountability include:

- **DESIGNATED ACADEMIC ADVISING:** Thirty-six percent of students surveyed considered whether a college or university had academic advising for them. Fifty percent of students would prefer a reminder to register, and 29% would like weekly check-in calls.
- **CLEAR EXPECTATIONS:** Thirty-six percent of students surveyed stated that one of their biggest concerns was knowing what to expect. Showing prospective students learning management systems, curriculum, sample course schedules, and more can make students more comfortable.

### What are/were your biggest concerns about starting a new program?

*Check all that apply*



- **WRITING SUPPORT:** One of the concerns surveyed students had was a fear of writing. Many had not had to complete any formal writing in a long time, so the thought of writing papers seemed daunting. Twenty-five percent of Wiley students stated writing was a concern for them. Forty-two percent of students said they considered whether a college or university offered a writing center or writing support. Twenty-four percent of students who had online learning experience stated they used a writing support center.
- **TECHNICAL SUPPORT:** Twenty-six percent of students surveyed were concerned with the logistics of courses being online. Fifty-five percent of students considered whether an institution had 24/7 technical support when choosing a program and 47% stated they would prefer to receive this resource from their college or university. Further, 48% of our learners have used technical support during an online learning experience.

Additionally, students report the most critical help they received, outside of support from the university, was in the form of family and financial support.

## WHAT MOTIVATES STUDENTS TO CONTINUE, AND WERE EXPECTATIONS MET?

While career advancement is the number one motivator for Wiley-supported students when starting a program, personal growth keeps them going. In our survey, 59% of students stated the desire to achieve personal growth motivated them to continue with their program.

Career-related factors, such as better job prospects and a desire to advance or increase salary, were the next most common motivators for our students. The impetus for starting a program is often what pushes a student to persevere through it.

WHAT MOTIVATES/MOTIVATED YOU TO CONTINUE WITH YOUR PROGRAM? <i>Check all that apply</i>	
Desire to achieve personal growth	59%
Better job prospects	56%
Desire to advance in current career	50%
Salary increase	50%
Desire to broaden knowledge	49%
Love of learning	41%
Desire to transition to a new career	40%
Network opportunities	17%
Employer or industry requirement	15%
Desire to return to the workplace	6%
Other	2%

A large portion of our learners reported outcomes tied to their motivations, both before and after graduating. The most common occurrence for Wiley students that could be attributed to their program was increased confidence in the workplace. Twenty-seven percent of all enrolled or graduated students surveyed reported that their increased confidence was directly attributed to being a student or receiving a degree.

There were also several tangible outcomes among our current students and graduates that matched their motivations for pursuing an online degree.

**34%** of those who were motivated by a salary increase received a salary increase.

**30%** of students motivated by networking felt they were able to increase these opportunities through the program.

**29%** of students who were looking to transition to a new career switched career paths.

**24%** of those pursuing a degree to increase their job prospects secured a new job.

**22%** of the students who desired to advance their current career or get a promotion were given increased responsibility at work.

**18%** of the students who desired to advance their current career or get a promotion received a promotion.

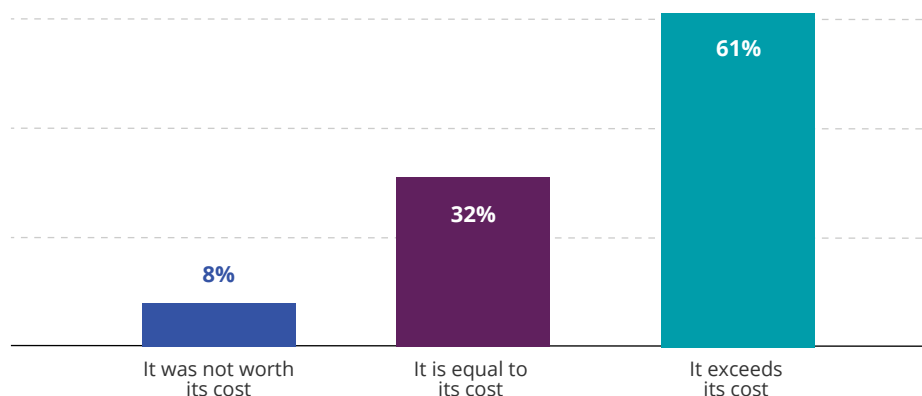
Research showed that despite concerns about online learning and the perceived credibility and quality of online degrees, our students had positive experiences. They would recommend online programs to others and enroll again themselves.

Does this mean they think the value of the degree was worth the cost? Our survey results indicate it was worth it for the vast majority students.

**NINETY-TWO PERCENT OF WILEY-SUPPORTED STUDENTS FELT THE VALUE OF THEIR ONLINE DEGREE WAS OF GREATER OR EQUAL VALUE TO THE COST.**

Further, 48% of those who reported having completed an online degree previously were currently enrolled students, which means this is at least their second online program. While there can be apprehension for students starting their first online program, students become more comfortable with online learning and find it easier to do again.

### Which of the following is most true about the “lifetime value” of your degree/certificate?



## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The key takeaways from this section can be used to attract and retain students in programs. Knowing these important statistics should inform the decisions of leaders at institutions and programs.

**MOTIVATION:** Most students have career-related motivations, such as advancing their careers, securing better job prospects, or increasing their salaries. These aspirations also motivate them to continue through their program. However, personal growth is a stronger motivator for pushing our students to persevere. Program administrators and faculty need to cater to different types of student motivations and be aware that they can change over time.

**SUPPORT:** Many students have concerns that can be mitigated by support services. Having student support available helps students know what to expect, keeps them motivated, and helps them plan in a way that balances coursework with other commitments. Not all students will need the same level of support but having resources available can mean the difference between dropping out and graduating.

## STUDENT ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOR MAPPING

### ATTITUDE/BEHAVIOR 5

#### CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Those looking for career advancement seek a promotion, salary increase, or job change with their degree program.



#### PERSONAL GROWTH

Students seeking personal growth pursue education for personal goals and skill development.

### ATTITUDE/BEHAVIOR 6

#### SUPPORTED

Supported students crave a one-on-one academic advisor to guide them through a program, as well as writing and technical support.



#### INDEPENDENT

Independent students seek to complete their online education primarily on their own and will only reach out for help if there is a problem.

## SECTION 4:

# THE FUTURE OF ONLINE LEARNING

Explore emerging trends in education, including the idea of lifelong learning, as well as how students feel about them.

Most modern-day students have had an online learning experience at least once. There are several reasons students encounter this modality. People are becoming lifelong learners to increase skills, advance careers, complete training for work, and quench their curiosities and need for personal growth. Online learning will need to evolve to meet students' growing desires for convenient, flexible opportunities.

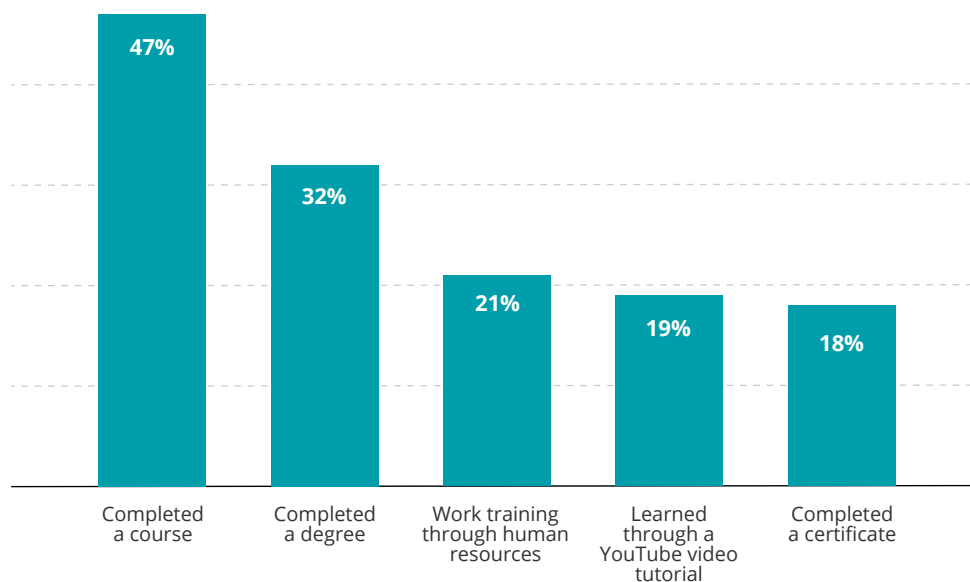
More than 80% of survey respondents were either currently enrolled or recently graduated from an online program. Of the students who were still looking for a program, 81% had experience with online learning. **LESS THAN 3% OF STUDENTS IN THIS SURVEY HAD NO EXPERIENCE WITH ONLINE LEARNING.**

The online learning experience includes everything from learning through a YouTube tutorial to completing a degree. Completing a course was most common. However, most students who had completed a course were currently enrolled in a degree program, so the courses did not stand alone. Only 21% of those who completed a course were not currently enrolled.

Of those who had completed an online degree, 48% were currently enrolled, meaning their present program was at least their second online degree. Further, 59% of students surveyed stated that after they finished their program, they would likely pursue more education. Our learners do not consider themselves done with learning after completing a degree and prefer to increase their skills and knowledge continuously.

### What kind of online learning have you done?

*Check all that apply*

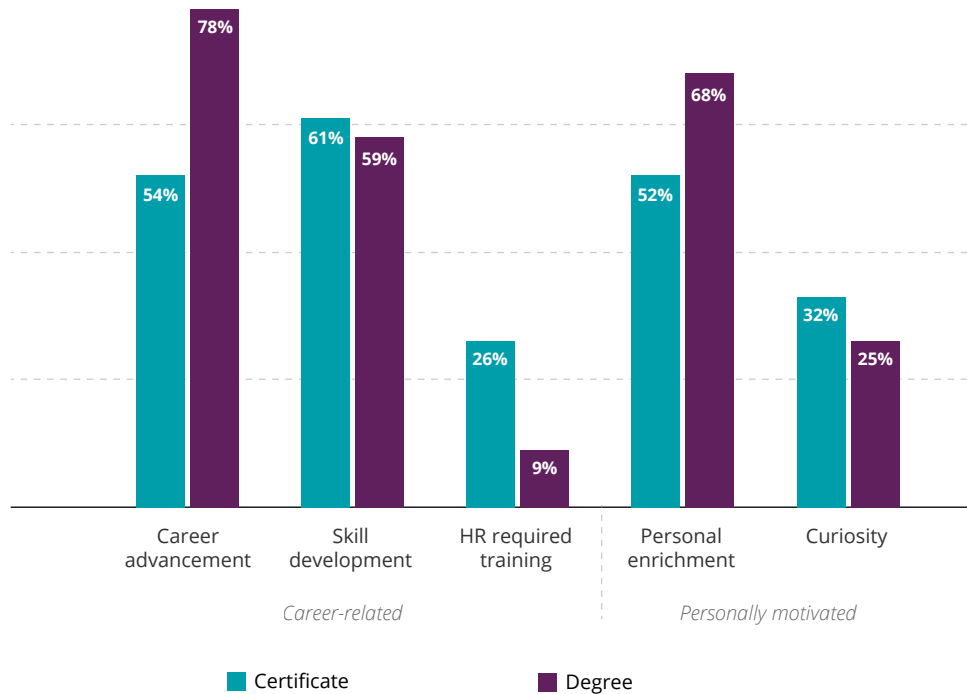


## WHAT IS THE GOAL OF ONLINE LEARNING?

Both degrees and certificates have career-related and personal motivations for students. It is the depth of those motivations that differs. They were both sought for skill development by about 60% of our students. However, degree programs are much more likely to be for career advancement or personal enrichment. Certificates are more likely to be used for HR training or to satiate curiosity about a subject.

### What was the purpose of your online certificate or degree?

*Check all that apply*



With students' growing need for convenient, flexible ways to increase skills, gain personal enrichment, and advance their careers, there are several non-traditional alternatives to degrees available. Students are aware of certificates and non-credit learning to an extent, but offerings such as badges, micro-credentials, or stackable credentials are still unfamiliar to the majority of students.

Have you heard of?	
Certificate	<b>80%</b>
Skill/career specific non-credit learning	<b>57%</b>
Competency-based education	<b>37%</b>
Badges	<b>16%</b>
Micro-credentials	<b>14%</b>
Stackable credentials	<b>12%</b>



# RELATED TOPIC

## How many students have enrolled in a MOOC?

Eighteen percent of students surveyed had enrolled in a massive open online course (MOOC). Of those students:

**40%** had not completed.

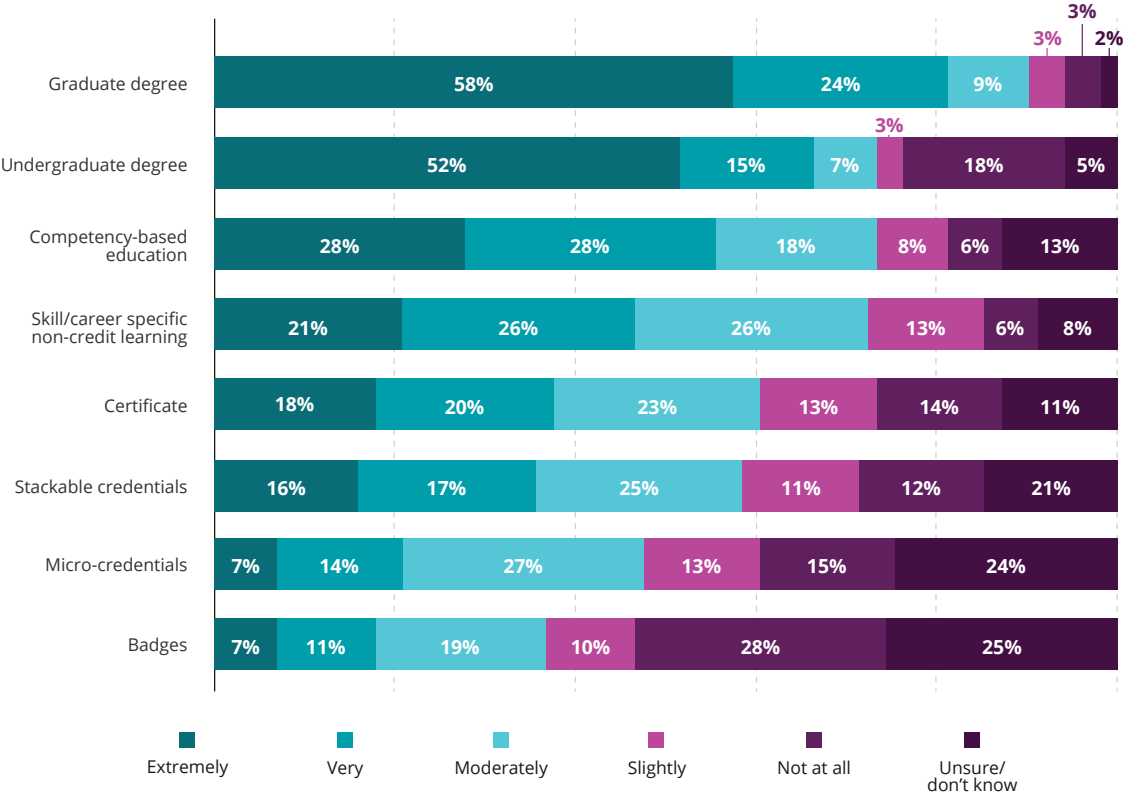
**37%** had completed and received a grade.

**29%** audited the course only.

Our students find undergraduate and graduate degrees to be more important when furthering a career than other offerings. Competency-based education is viewed as important to an extent, as is skill or career-specific non-credit learning. Seventy-four percent of our students said they are likely to enroll in non-credit courses to increase or develop skills related to their careers.

Badges and micro-credentials are not highly important to Wiley students. This is likely due to an unfamiliarity with these types of learning and this terminology. Many students reported being unsure of the value that these credentials provided. Stackable credentials seemed to be a bit more important to students, but many of our learners were unsure.

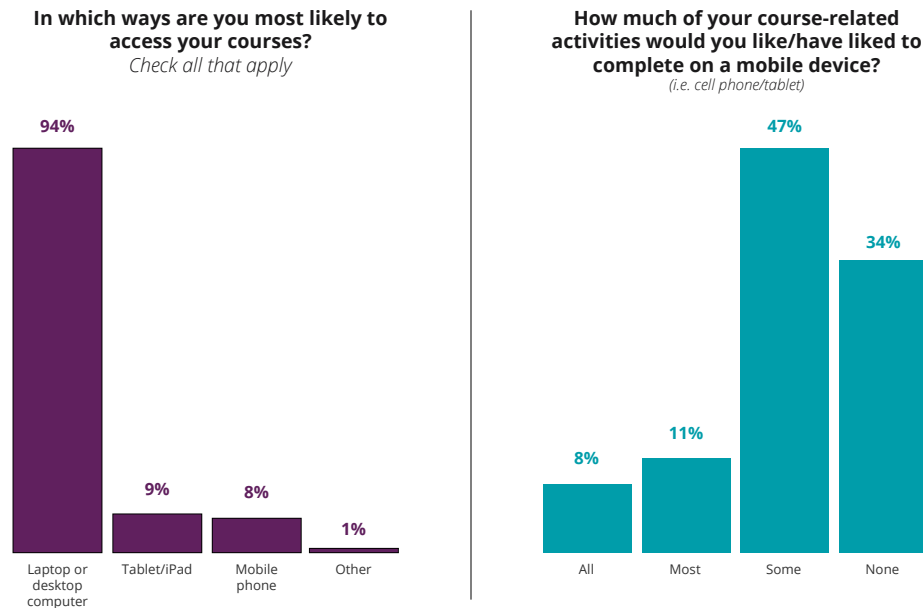
**How important are the follow learning opportunities in furthering your career?**



Education of the market about the advantages and value of alternative education is essential. Prospective students must learn how these options will help their careers and give them a worthwhile return on their investment. Because many of these choices are more affordable than full degree programs, it is likely students would be open to using them if the value can be demonstrated.

## HOW DO STUDENTS ACCESS ONLINE CLASSES?

Most students use laptops, but there is a desire to access some course materials through a mobile device or tablet.



Mobile-friendly courses are extremely or very important to 60% of our students, and mobile-friendly websites are very or extremely important to 68% of our learners. While students may not access all their courses on their mobile device, they want it to be an option.

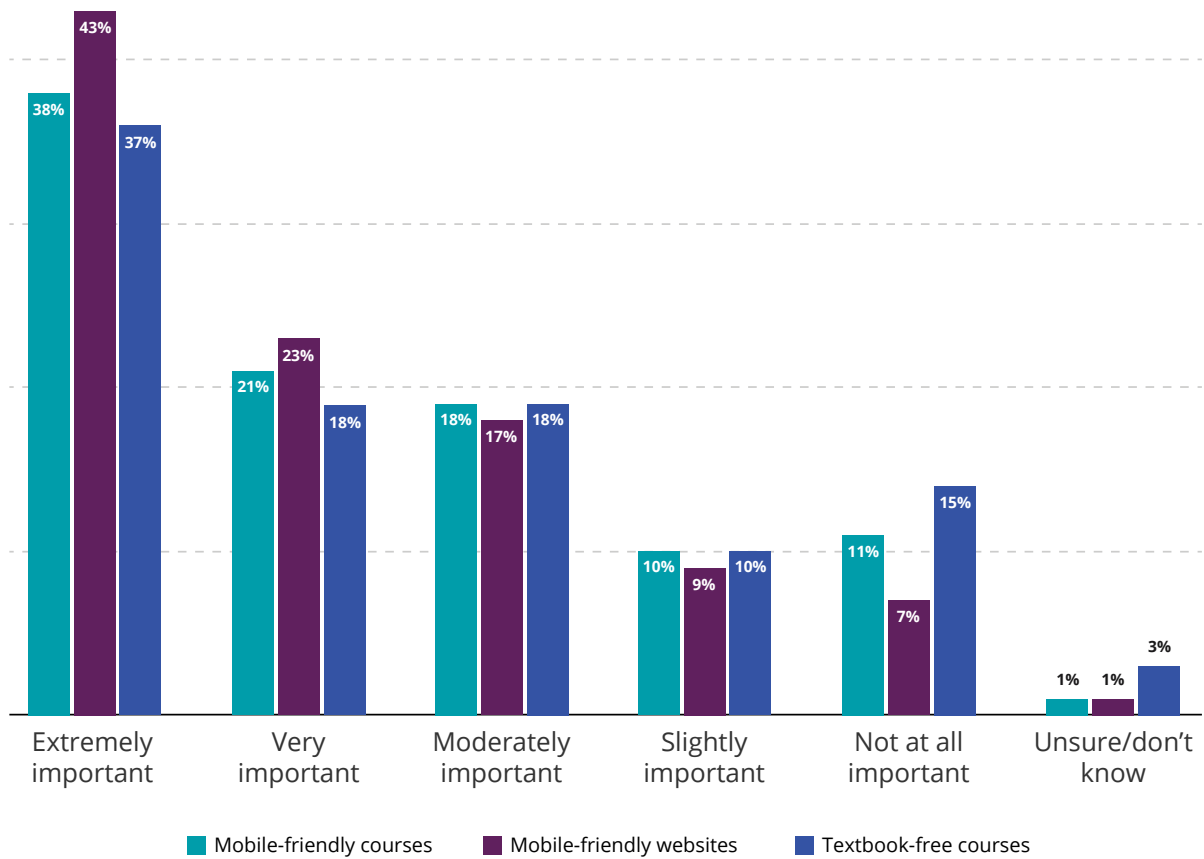
Textbook-free courses are also important. Wiley-supported students want to be able to access their course material anywhere, so needing a book makes an online course less convenient and often more expensive.

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***Mobile-friendly courses are extremely or very important to 60% of our students, and mobile-friendly websites are very or extremely important to 68% of our learners.***

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## How important are the following features to you in a program?



## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The needs of online learners will continue to evolve as students look for even more affordability and flexibility in their programs.

**LIFELONG LEARNING:** Once students experience online learning, they are more likely to pursue it in the future. The majority have had good experiences and report they would do it again or go back once they finish their current program. Less than 3% of surveyed students have not had experience with online learning. A large segment of current students who had also completed an online degree were enrolled in at least their second online program.

**ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS:** Wiley students understand the importance of undergraduate and graduate degrees in furthering their careers but are unfamiliar with badges, micro-credentials, and stackable credentials. However, they do believe that non-credit skill building is important. Working to educate students about the utility of these types of programs and illustrating their value will build familiarity and increase student demand.

# CONCLUSION



The behaviors and attitudes of Wiley online learners vary. Still, some trends emerged in this survey relating to how our students research, choose, enroll, study, and continue learning in an online environment. Our research validates that there is no one type of online learner, and institutions must cater to many attitudes and behaviors when reaching and motivating online learners.

**OUR LEARNERS CHOOSE MODALITY FIRST WHEN RESEARCHING UNIVERSITIES.** There are other competing top priorities, though. Students report their top priorities are cost, reputation, curriculum, and time to completion. Even though these students want to go to school online, modality can be fluid when it comes to comparing programs. Students are often equating on-ground and online programs during their selection process. If prospective students cannot find the right program at the right price online, some will consider researching on-campus options to find out more.

**INSTRUCTOR PRESENCE IS THE TOP CONCERN FOR OUR STUDENTS** before enrolling, and students already in programs can be frustrated by the lack of instructor presence. Lack of interaction with peers is also a worry, so online program administrators must be mindful of having enough interaction between not only instructors and students, but also between students. This should mirror the collaboration received in a face-to-face course. While all learners might not need this higher-touch interaction, it is vital for many students to feel value and quality in the program.

**STUDENTS NEED TO FEEL THEY ARE RECEIVING ALL THE BENEFITS OF A CAMPUS-BASED STUDENT**, which can include financial, technological, and career support. Flexibility and convenience were cited as the elements students like most about online learning, which is understandable given a vast majority of our learners work full time. Many of them expressed the need to balance the time commitment needed for school with other obligations. Therefore, programs must remain flexible enough for students to create balance and adjust their schedules when needed.

**STUDENTS ENROLL BASED ON CAREER MOTIVATIONS.** Given our surveyed students were primarily graduate learners, this was no surprise. Many attribute positive outcomes related to their career motivations while still in the program or shortly after graduation. While career motivations are often the impetus for students enrolling, personal growth is what keeps them going. Being aware of students' motivations and how they evolve is imperative in helping them achieve success throughout their journey.

**OUR STUDENTS FIND SUCCESS AND VALUE IN THEIR PROGRAMS.** Those who have enrolled in an online program would recommend an online degree and feel the lifetime value of their degree exceeds the cost. Lifelong learning is prevalent. Most students surveyed had some form of experience with online learning, and some were enrolled in or open to enrolling in a second online program.

**THE NEEDS OF THESE LIFELONG LEARNERS WILL CONTINUE TO CHANGE OVER TIME.** As a partner in higher education, Wiley Education Services is committed to understanding and adapting to changing student needs, as well as building upon the diverse attitudes and behaviors of online students.

## SUMMARY OF ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

### ATTITUDE/BEHAVIOR 1



### ATTITUDE/BEHAVIOR 2



### ATTITUDE/BEHAVIOR 3



### ATTITUDE/BEHAVIOR 4



### ATTITUDE/BEHAVIOR 5



### ATTITUDE/BEHAVIOR 6



# METHODOLOGY



For this report, we surveyed 2,087 respondents nationwide. All students who had contacted, enrolled in or graduated from a Wiley-supported partner as of April 2019 were eligible for the survey. Individuals were emailed in July 2019 to complete the survey. Participants were at least 18 years of age with a high school diploma or equivalent. This survey was comprised of students engaged with nearly 30 of Wiley Education Services' partner institutions. Our partner institutions consist of both nationally and regionally ranked, public and private not-for-profit institutions located in more than 15 states across the United States. These colleges and universities range from M2 master's colleges to R1 research universities.

The sample consisted mostly of students pursuing graduate education due to the portfolio of programs Wiley Education Services supports. Although graduate students represent a small portion of the total college population, this survey sample was not intended to represent the general higher education population but rather the population of students Wiley Education Services supports. Ninety-one percent of the sample was pursuing a master's or higher, and 94% had already obtained a bachelor's degree or higher.

To recruit for this study, we invited a panel of students from across Wiley Education Services' partners to participate in an online survey. Custom email invitations were sent targeting learners 18-years-old and older who were currently enrolled, recently graduated, or planning to enroll in an online higher education program. Panelists were then allowed to participate in the study if they had graduated from an online program within the past 12 months, were currently enrolled, or were actively looking for an online higher education program.

This report represents data from the full sample, as well as subgroups within this sample. Any differences between groups were not considered statistically significant unless noted. The sample represents students across more than 100 areas of study, comprised of all the major academic verticals within higher education institutional portfolios. All percentages in this report have been rounded. Therefore, the total percent figure in a table may not equal 100. Furthermore, if the total percentage is substantially more than 100, it is because the question allowed respondents to choose more than one option.

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# ABOUT



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