Building Quality Online Bachelor's Programs That Students Want: *What the Data Say*

SUNY Online Summit

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Today's Experts

The Researcher
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The Student Study:

- 1,609 respondents
- 524 bachelor's candidates
- Administered February 2022
- Respondent target:
  - Considered enrolling in an online program in the last 12 months
  - Plan to enroll in an online program in the next 12 months
- Survey focus:
  - How they search
  - Decision-making priorities
  - Expectations of programs they consider
  - Program format details
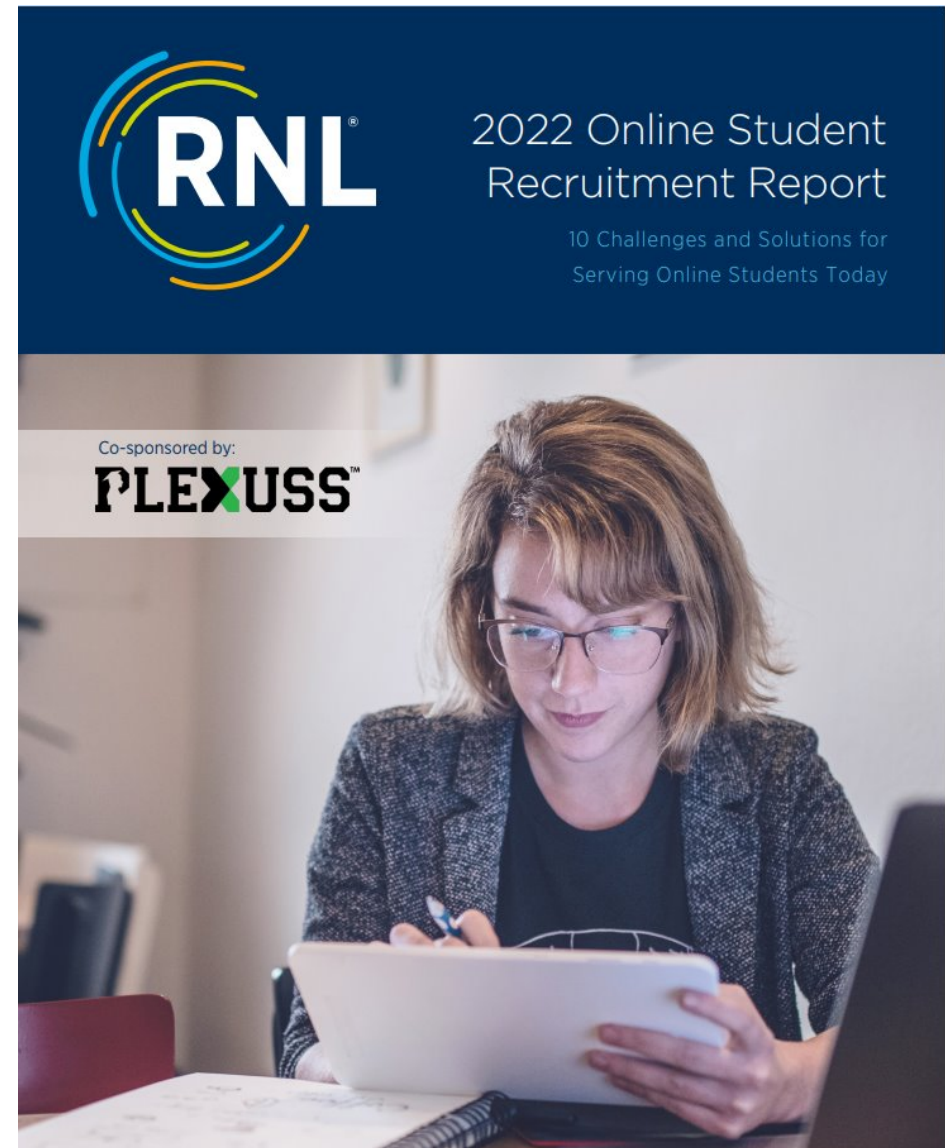
Get early access to RNL's upcoming research

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8 Dimensions of Online Learning

McKinsey & Company

A Caring Network

A Seamless Journey

Engaging Pedagogy

8 Dimensions of Online Learning

McKinsey & Company

Strong Community

Timely Support

Adaptive Learning

Practical Learning

Clear Road Map

Easy Digital Experience

Balanced Learning Formats

Captivating Delivery

Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies

Georgetown University School of Continuing Studies

- Launched online in summer 2023, first launched in 1978
- A blend of humanities, social sciences, and professional disciplines
- 273 students ranging in age from 18-57 (median 33)
- 97% are domestic students
- 48% of students identify as students of color
- 64% of student identify as women
- 13% of students are military-connected
- Average number of transfer credits: 52 (max. of 64)
- $400 per credit hour as of summer 2023
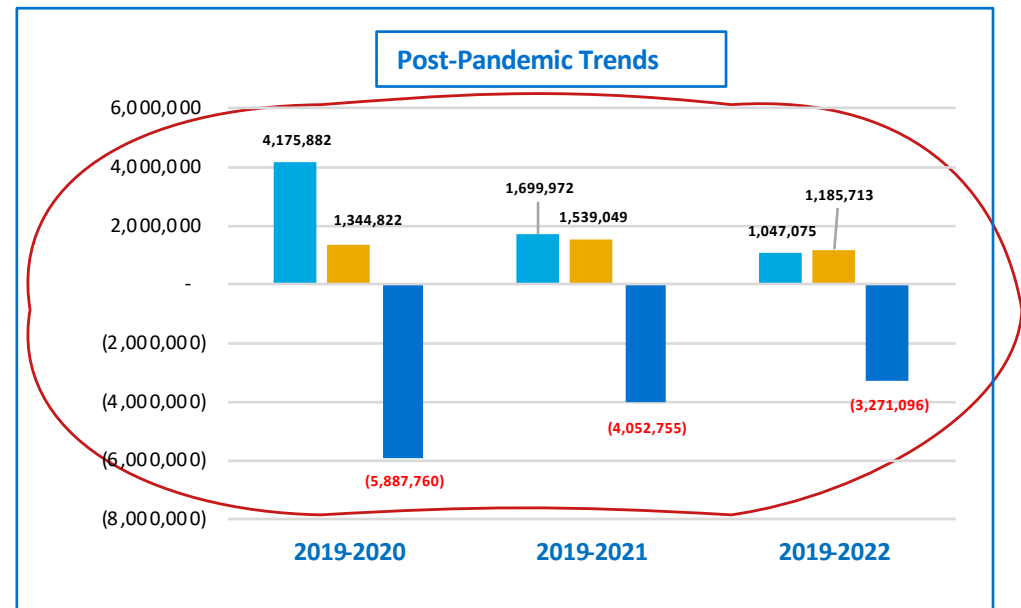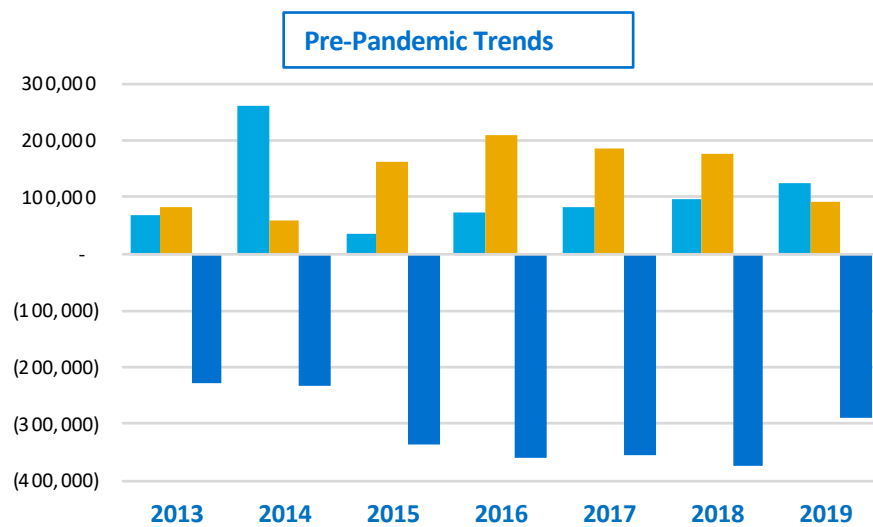- Articulation agreements with local community colleges

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
School of Continuing Studies

Online Education in Context

1

Fewer UNDERGRAD students are choosing to enroll in classroom programs, even post-pandemic.

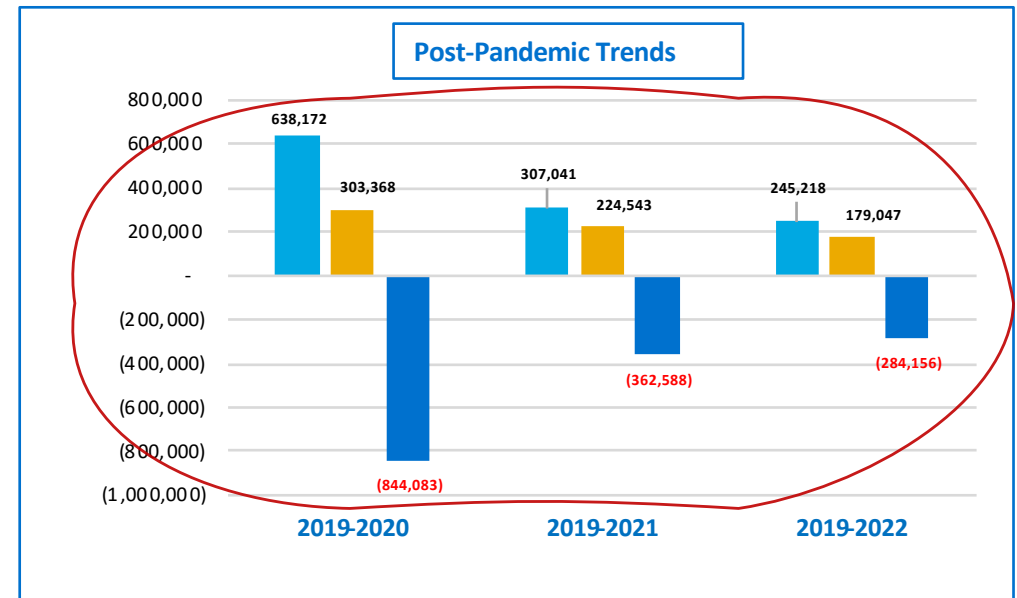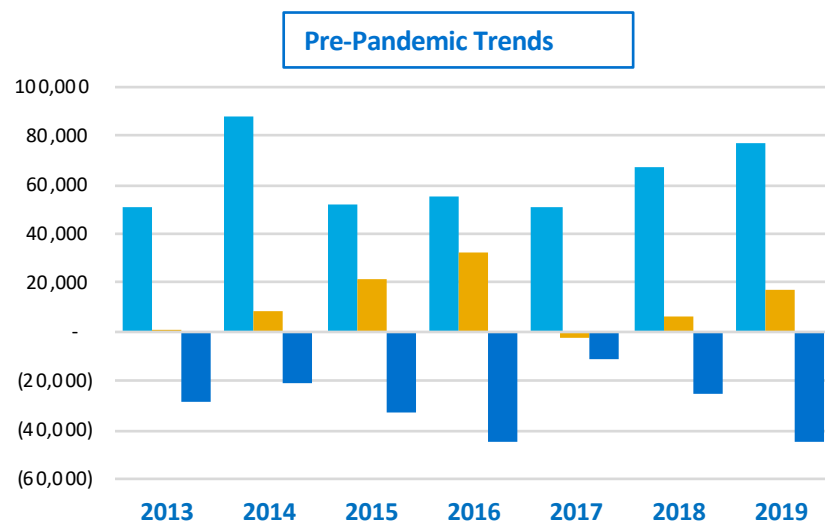**Undergraduate -** Annual Enrollment **Change** by Format

Pre-Pandemic Trends

Post-Pandemic Trends

- ■ All Online
- ■ Some Online
- ■ All Classroom

More GRAD students are ALSO choosing to enroll in fully or partially online programs, even post pandemic.

Graduate - Annual Enrollment **Change** by Format

Pre-Pandemic Trends

Post-Pandemic Trends

Post-Pandemic values:
- 2019-2020: All Online 638,172; Some Online 303,368; All Classroom (844,083)
- 2019-2021: All Online 307,041; Some Online 224,543; All Classroom (362,588)
- 2019-2022: All Online 245,218; Some Online 179,047; All Classroom (284,156)

■ All Online   ■ Some Online   ■ All Classroom

Undergraduate Online degree production is growing as a classroom is contracting

Associate and Bachelor's Degree Production by Format
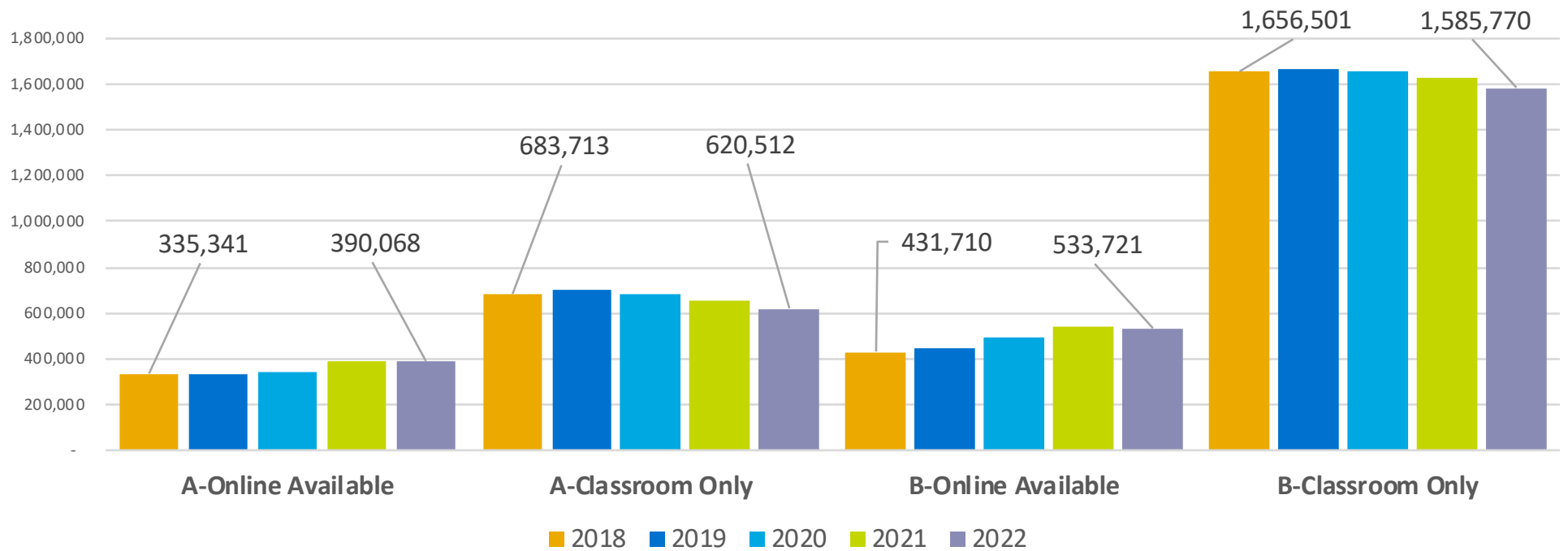
Legend: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

Data labels shown:
- A-Online Available: 335,341 / 390,068
- A-Classroom Only: 683,713 / 620,512
- B-Online Available: 431,710 / 533,721
- B-Classroom Only: 1,656,501 / 1,585,770

Y-axis: 200,000 to 1,800,000

The Online Education Opportunity

2

The largest opportunity for online growth is at the bachelor's level.

TABLE 7: INTENDED ONLINE CREDENTIAL

- 4% Post baccalaureate certificate/certification
- 6% Graduate certificate/certification
- 6% Undergraduate certificate/certification
- 3% Professional doctorate
- 6% Doctorate
- 24% Master's
- 34% Bachelor's
- 18% Associate
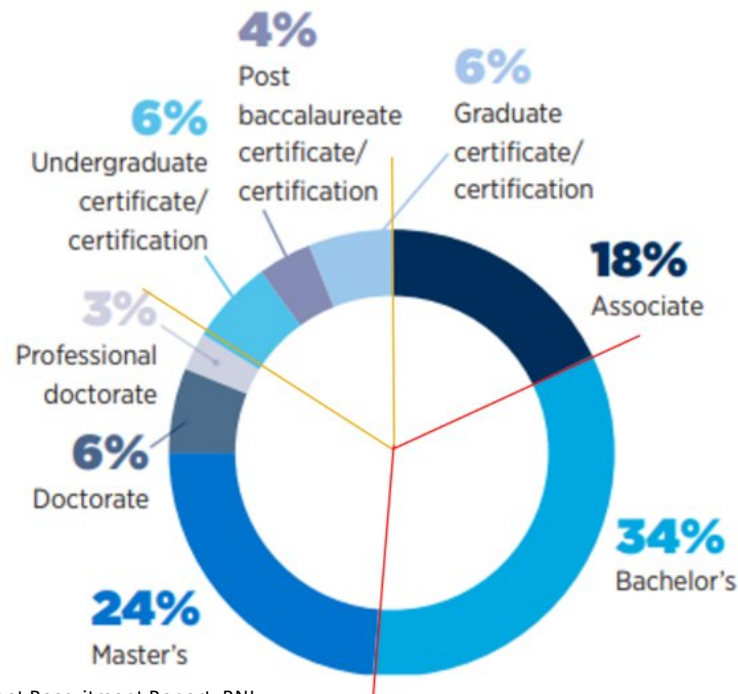
34%

The largest share of prospective online students plan to enroll in a bachelor's program.

Poll 1
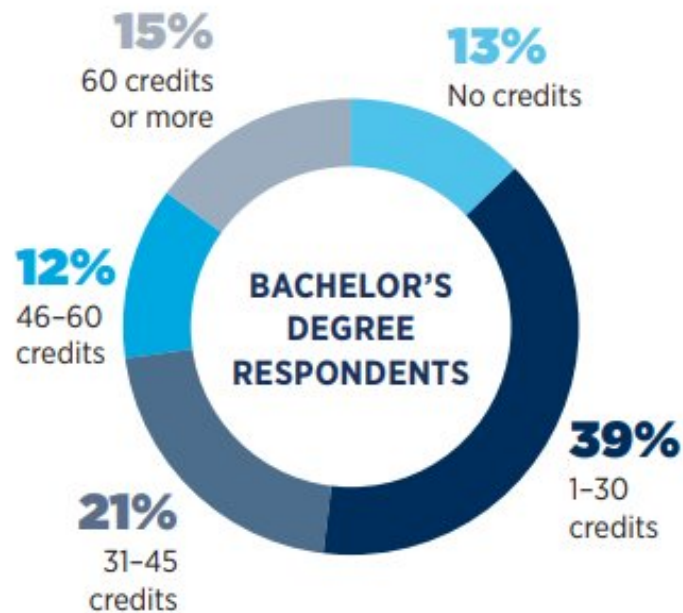
How many of you offer any online bachelor's programs?

A. We have many

B. We have a few

C. We don't have any yet

D. This will never happen

Virtual Attendees: *Please comment on what is going on at your institution.*

Online bachelor's need to offer lower division courses.

And must have generous transfer credit policies.

TABLE 8: PREVIOUSLY EARNED UNDERGRADUATE CREDITS
(bachelor's degree respondents only)

- **15%** 60 credits or more
- **13%** No credits
- **12%** 46–60 credits
- **39%** 1–30 credits
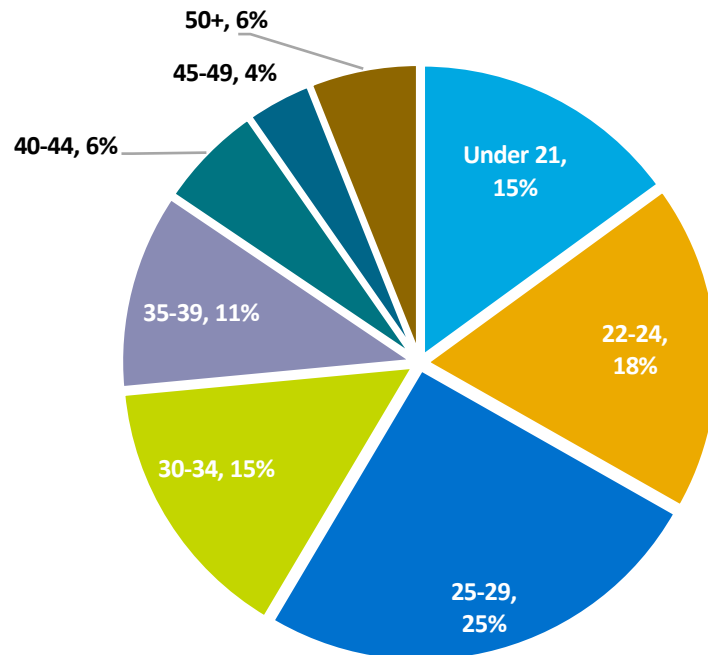- **21%** 31–45 credits

BACHELOR'S DEGREE RESPONDENTS

45 credits

More than half of online bachelor's students have fewer than 45 credits, but only 13% have none.

Online bachelor's programs should be designed for adults.

But don't exclude younger students who can demonstrate ability.

Age: Online Bachelor's Students

- 50+, 6%
- 45-49, 4%
- 40-44, 6%
- 35-39, 11%
- 30-34, 15%
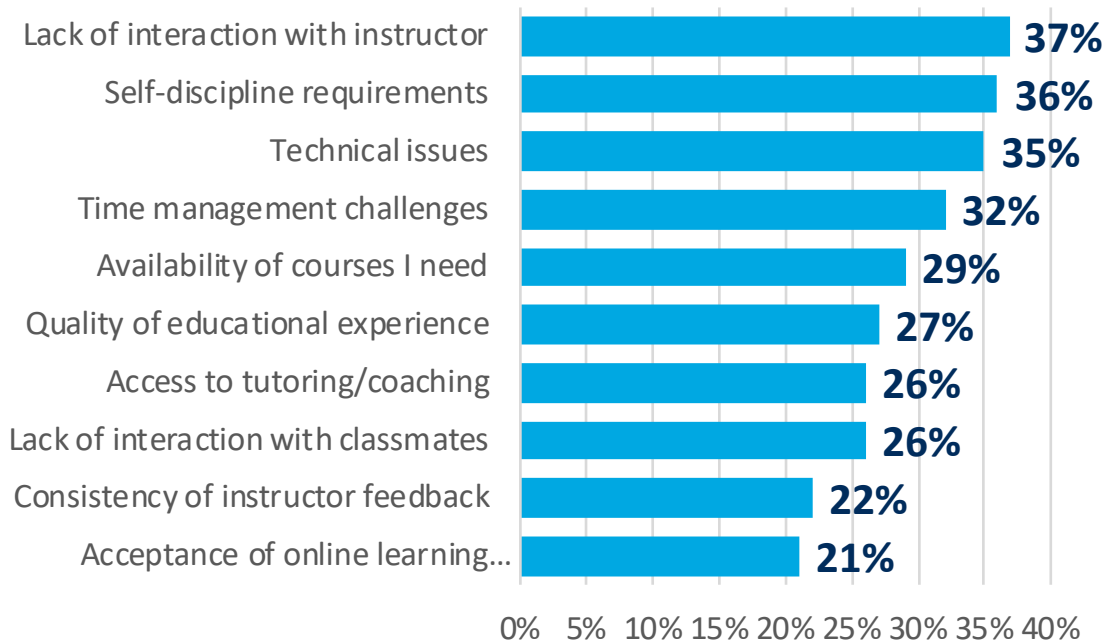- 25-29, 25%
- Under 21, 15%
- 22-24, 18%

Source: 2022 Online Student Recruitment Report, RNL

85%

Online bachelor's students are typically over age 21. But those younger are unlikely to be considering classroom.

Online bachelor's students are most concerned with interaction with instructors

Concerns with Online Study

Concern	Percentage
Lack of interaction with instructor	37%
Self-discipline requirements	36%
Technical issues	35%
Time management challenges	32%
Availability of courses I need	29%
Quality of educational experience	27%
Access to tutoring/coaching	26%
Lack of interaction with classmates	26%
Consistency of instructor feedback	22%
Acceptance of online learning…	21%

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35% 40%

37%

No more than 37% of online bachelor's students are concerned with any of these factors.

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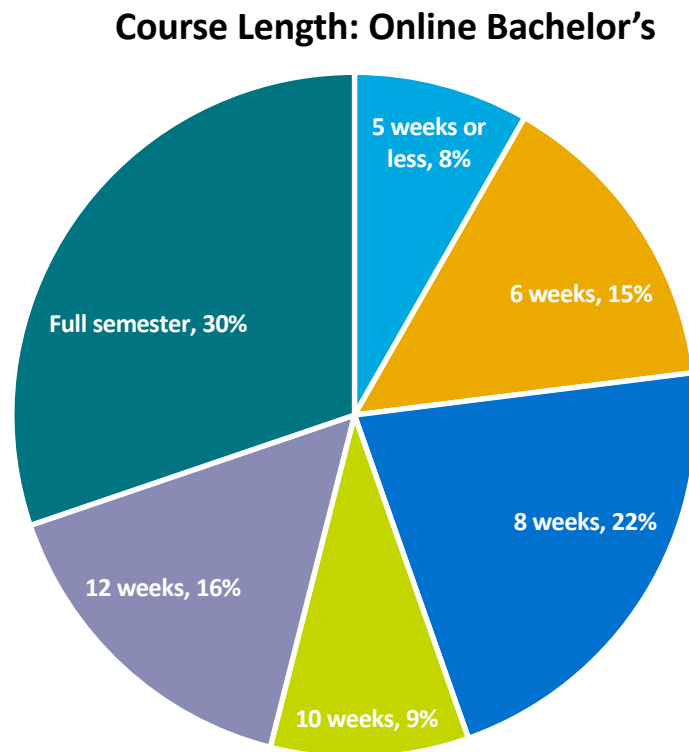
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2024 Graduate Student Recruitment Report
Key insights for enrollment leaders based on a survey of 1,500 prospective graduate students

What's Hot, What's Not?

3

Offer bachelor's programs in accelerated formats.

Course Length: Online Bachelor's

- 5 weeks or less, 8%
- 6 weeks, 15%
- 8 weeks, 22%
- 10 weeks, 9%
- 12 weeks, 16%
- Full semester, 30%

70%

Fewer than 1 in 3 bachelor's students seek semester-length study.

Ensure bachelor's students can stack courses.
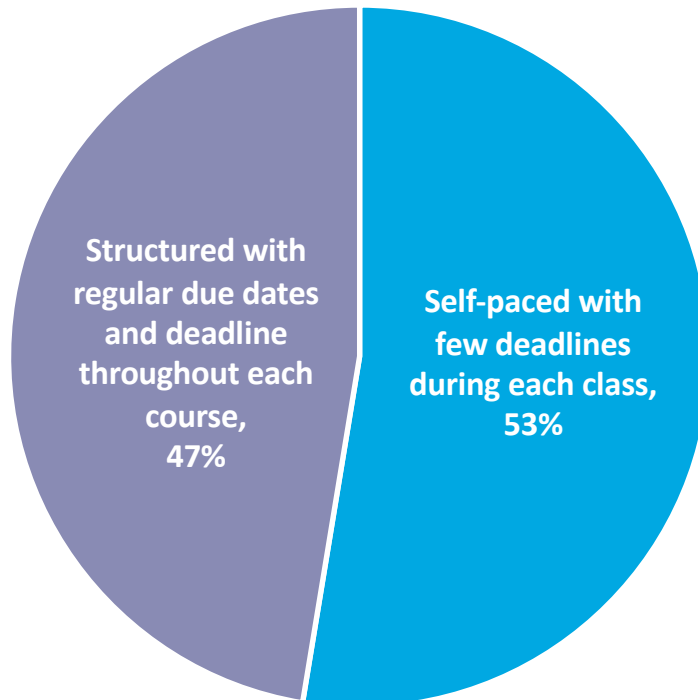
Number of Courses: Online Bachelor's

- 1, 14%
- 2, 47%
- 3, 20%
- 4 or more, 19%
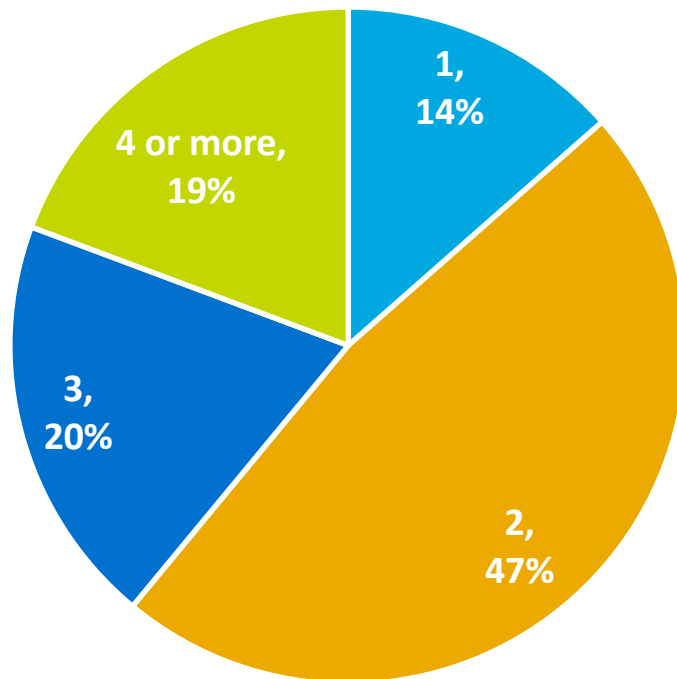
2 courses

Online bachelor's students want to stack courses (in accelerated terms).

Build bachelor's program with a mix of structure and self-pacing.

Course Structure: Online Bachelor's

Structured with regular due dates and deadline throughout each course, 47%

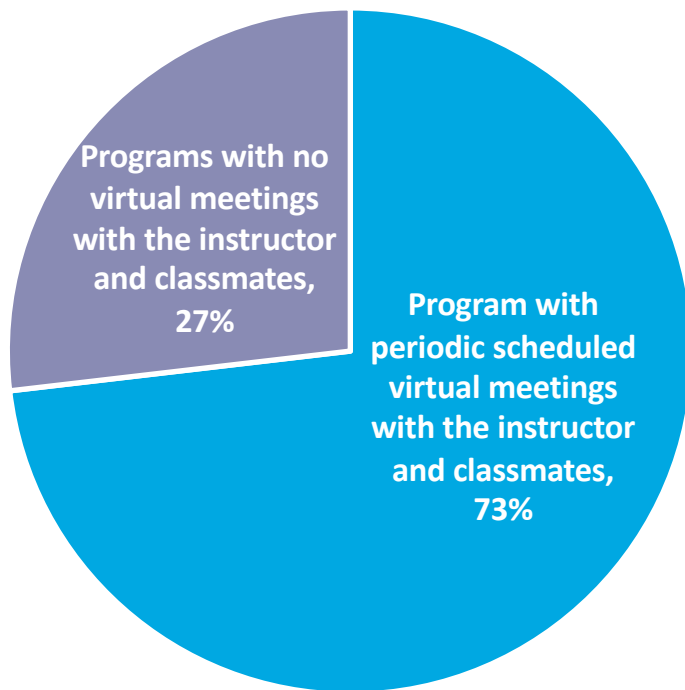Self-paced with few deadlines during each class, 53%

Source: 2022 Online Student Recruitment Report, RNL

50/50

Online bachelor's are equally likely to plan on structured and self-paced online.

Consider how to leverage synchronous engagement.

Engagement: Online Bachelor's

Programs with no virtual meetings with the instructor and classmates, **27%**

Program with periodic scheduled virtual meetings with the instructor and classmates, **73%**

Source: 2022 Online Student Recruitment Report, RNL

70+%

Prior to enrollment, online bachelor's students think they want synchronous engagement.

Limit the number of synchronous activities.

(and ensure they are optional)

Frequency of Synchronous Engagement	Bachelor's	ALL
Once per course	18%	18%
Twice per course	43%	36%
3 times per course	19%	23%
4 or more times	20%	21%

2

Online bachelor's students say 2 synchronous opportunities is ideal.

Poll 2

How important is (or will be) synchronous engagement in online bachelor's programming at your institution?
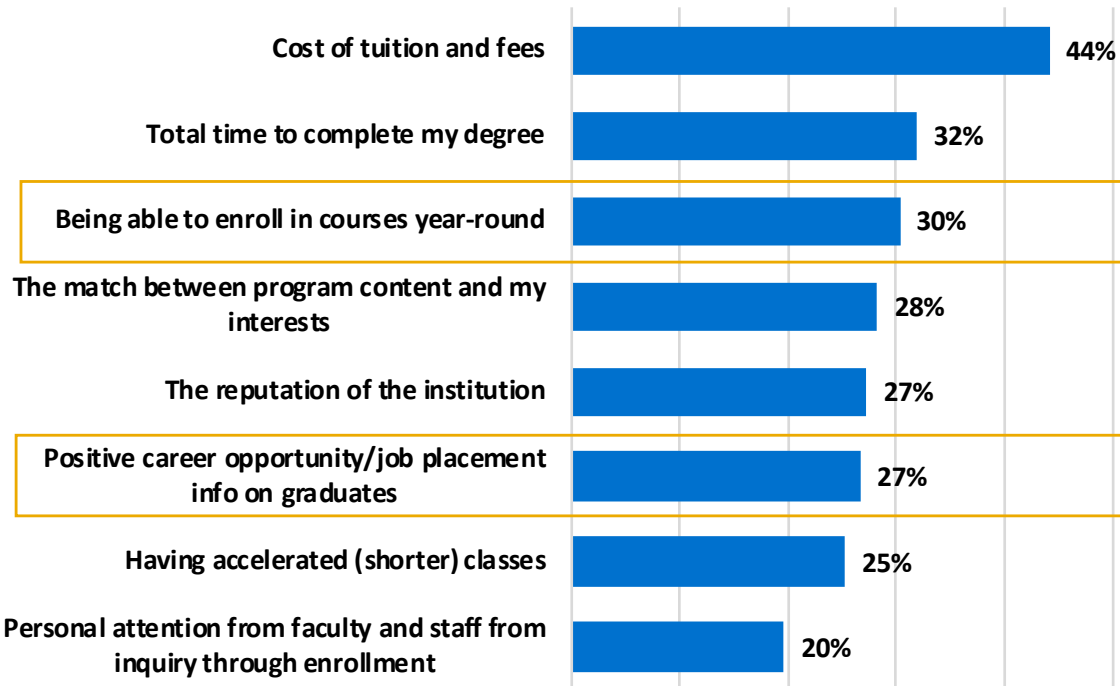
A. Essential

B. Important

C. Somewhat important

D. Not essential

Discussion: *Among those who indicated "essential" or "important," how are you building synchronous engagement into your programs?*

Focus on time to completion and total cost.

All other priorities are related.

Enrollment Decision Priorities: Online Bachelor's

Priority	Percentage
Cost of tuition and fees	44%
Total time to complete my degree	32%
Being able to enroll in courses year-round	30%
The match between program content and my interests	28%
The reputation of the institution	27%
Positive career opportunity/job placement info on graduates	27%
Having accelerated (shorter) classes	25%
Personal attention from faculty and staff from inquiry through enrollment	20%

Source: 2022 Online Student Recruitment Report, RNL

Time & Cost

Nearly every online bachelor's enrollment decision priority links to time to complete and cost of study.

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Thank You