

# Pandemic has cultivated new segment of online learners

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A newly released report from Wiley Education Services, a division of Wiley, suggests that not only did online learning gain traction during the pandemic, but a new segment of online learners emerged who tend to be

younger and largely liked what they experienced. The report, entitled Voice of the Online Learner, lends insight on the impact of COVID-19 on the online learner, the growing demand from students that online learning connects to career outcomes, and top considerations for learners when choosing an online degree program.

"This year's report takes a close look at the transformative impact the pandemic has had on how learners access their education. We're seeing that [online learning](#) is playing an increasingly important role in providing education that is flexible, affordable and setting learners up for success in their careers," said Todd Zipper, President of Wiley Education Services. "With this, our 10th annual report, we are proud to again share our insights on the attitudes and behaviors of online learners to help universities build impactful programs that enable students to achieve their goals."

The report, released in previous years as Online College Students, provides guidance to colleges and universities serving the unique and evolving population of online learners. Highlights include:

## **New segment of online learners emerges due to COVID-19 impact**

Not surprising, the pool of online learners has grown considerably during the pandemic. The report indicates one-third of current prospective online students and those enrolled in an online [program](#) for the 2020–2021 [school year](#) had not considered learning entirely online prior to the pandemic.

Wiley has labeled this emerging segment of students the "post-pandemic online learner" and suggests they skew younger than traditional online learners, are interested in pursuing undergraduate degrees, and are more

likely to be unemployed or working part-time. Specifically, 45% of this "post-pandemic online learner" population is under the age of 25, as compared to only 24% of students under the age of 25 who were already studying online prior to the pandemic.

## **Views Toward Online Learning Improve**

When asked if the pandemic changed their views of online learning, 51% of learners said they now have more positive views of online learning, while 42% said it did not change their opinions of the medium. Further, more than half (59%) of prospective online learners and those enrolled in an online program in the 2020–21 school year said that the pandemic motivated them to enroll in an online program.

## **Online students are motivated by career goals**

Career aspirations—including getting a job and changing careers—are the top two factors that influence students to pursue an online degree. Online learners, including alumni, ranked the following as most important:

- To get first professional/salaried job (50%)
- Switch to a new career that is more aligned with my interests (42%)
- Obtain a promotion within my current profession (37%)
- Switch to a new career to earn more money (37%)
- Obtain a salary increase within my current profession (36%)

## **Top considerations when choosing online programs**

Learners are increasingly choosing programs that help them earn their degrees faster, with more flexibility and more affordably.

**Speed:** Students increasingly want quicker pathways to degree completion. In fact, 70% would choose to take more than one class at a time or back-to-back courses to complete their program faster versus having their courses spread out or taking breaks between classes.

**Flexibility:** Online learners want flexibility in terms of class format, course line-up and timing. Sixty-five percent of online learners would favor the flexibility to choose or change the course lineup instead of being in a lock-step cohort or degree plan. Eighty-seven percent of students value multiple start dates per year. Sixty-eight percent would choose a program with an asynchronous format over synchronous programs.

**Affordability:** More than half of students (55%) selected affordability as the most important factor in their decision to apply/enroll in an online program. However, "affordability" may not mean the least expensive option. Sixty-seven percent of students selected programs that were not at the lowest price point, citing considerations such as reputation of the program or relevant course content when weighing their options.

## **Methodology**

The data in this report are based on the results of surveys conducted by Wiley among more than 3,000 online [learners](#) in the spring of 2021. Specifically, the sample consisted of 3,082 respondents comprised of a national external panel of 1,552 responses and an internal survey of 1,530 prospective, current, and recently graduated students serviced by Wiley partner institutions. 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 the next twelve months in a fully online undergraduate or graduate degree or certificate program. The sample was weighted to consist of approximately 66% graduate students. Additional details regarding the methodology may be

found in the report.

**More information:** Voice of the Online Learner 2021: Amplifying Student Voices in Extraordinary Times. [edservices.wiley.com/voice-of-...-online-learner-2021/](https://edservices.wiley.com/voice-of-...-online-learner-2021/)

Provided by Wiley

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