

# Online learning provides college access to students who've been left behind, according to survey

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Adults who stopped out of higher education are finding their way back to finishing their degrees through online learning, according to Wiley's annual Voice of the Online Learner report, issued today.

Forty-two percent of online learners in Wiley's survey previously enrolled in a [college](#)-level degree or certificate program they didn't complete. These learners tend to see online learning as a quick, flexible way to help them rejoin the workforce, complete an industry requirement or achieve personal growth.

Nearly half (44%) of these returning non-completers identify as first-generation college students. Because they are the first in their family to enroll in postsecondary education, they may need additional support to complete their [degrees](#) and achieve their desired outcomes.

"There are more than 40 million students today with some college credit but no degree," said Deanna Raineri, Wiley senior vice president, university strategy and market innovation. "Returning to the classroom after you've stopped out can benefit your professional and personal success. Whether adult learners left school willingly or reluctantly, online programs are helping them find their way back."

## **Online learners look beyond traditional programs to degree alternatives**

Online learners express strong interest in alternatives to full degree programs. Two thirds of respondents said they are open to pursuing quicker, more affordable non-traditional degree programs such as trade skills certificates, industry certifications and non-credit certificates in place of college degrees, and most (83%) of these learners would remain interested even if financial aid wasn't available for them.

These findings are aligned with those of Wiley's recent Closing the Skills Gap 2023 report, which indicated 62% of human resources leaders are placing less value on whether applicants graduated from college, with most saying they would interview non-graduates who have relevant work

experience, certificates from colleges or universities, and digital badges or micro-credentials.

## **Degrees are still valued, but less so by Gen Z**

While most online learners recognize their degree can help them reach their career goals and advance their job prospects, Gen Z is less likely than other generations to feel this way. More than three-quarters (76%) of all respondents believe a college degree can lead people to better jobs, but that percentage falls to just 55% among Gen Z learners.

## **Synchronous learning continues to appeal**

Online learners remain open to at least occasional live learning sessions. Similar to last year's findings, 79% of respondents expressed a willingness to engage in a synchronous virtual learning session such as an online or on-campus gathering at least one time per course, and half would welcome it as often as once per week, preferably on a weekday evening.

Students find value in asking questions in real time and receiving better explanations from instructors during synchronous sessions.

## **Other findings**

Some additional findings have remained consistent over the 12 years this survey has been administered.

- Career goals motivate online learners—Most online students are employed, and the large majority are focused on [career goals](#).
- Modality comes first—Modality is the most important factor driving educational decisions for online learners, with few willing

to switch to an on-campus class if an online program isn't offered.

- Students are price-sensitive, but they value quality—Affordability has been online learners' top selection factor for 10 of the past 12 years, but not all learners base their decision on cost if a school can offer valued benefits to meet their needs.
- They prefer to stay local—Online learners don't want to stray far from home, with 70% this year choosing an institution within 100 miles of where they live.

The data in this report are based on the results of surveys conducted by Wiley University Services in the spring of 2023 among 2,610 adult online [learners](#). Respondents were at least 18 years of age and had a minimum educational credential of a high school degree or equivalent. They were also recently enrolled, currently enrolled, or planned to enroll in a fully online undergraduate or graduate degree or certificate program in the next twelve months.

The sample for this survey was weighted to make up approximately 60% graduate students, ensuring a large enough sample for meaningful conclusions for this segment of the [online learning](#) market. Wiley combined undergraduate and graduate data unless there were noteworthy differences. Additional details regarding the methodology may be found in the report.

**More information:** Report: [universityservices.wiley.com/v ... online-learner-2023/](https://universityservices.wiley.com/v.../online-learner-2023/)

Provided by Wiley

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