



31% of Business Leaders Actively Recruiting College Students Believe Online Is Better Than On-Campus Education

A 17 Percentage Point Increase Year-Over-Year According to BestColleges.com's Annual Study

June 24, 2021 (Seattle, WA) - BestColleges.com's 2021 Trends in College Career and Employment Planning, releasing Thursday, presents perspectives from business leaders on college student hiring and recruiting over the past year. The study found that 31% of business leaders whose organizations are actively involved in recruiting college students believe online education is better than on-campus options — a 17 percentage point increase over 2020 (14%).

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The second annual report includes feedback from 1,000 business leaders, including 624 who reported their organization currently recruits and hires college students. An overwhelming majority of respondents (97%) were from the private sector and not self-employed.

Opinions about online learning differ among age groups, with 61% of college recruiting respondents age 55 and older saying online education is inferior to or worse than on-campus learning. Alternatively, the youngest business leaders (age 18-34) are most likely (44%) to favor online to on-campus learning. The respondents aged 35-54 are divided, with 33% believing online is better than on-campus learning, 33% believing online is worse than on-campus learning, and 29% believing they are equal.

"Young business leaders may have more experience with online programs and the technologies used to deliver them," said Melissa Venable, Ph.D., the report's author and online education advisor for BestColleges.com. "And some of this year's participants may have experienced virtual learning and remote working environments for the first time due to the pandemic, which could have impacted their perception — negative or positive — of the potential of online education."

Business leaders who actively recruit college students reported fewer educational incentives and partnerships in 2021 than the previous year, with 44% saying their organizations offer no such opportunities for employees— a 21 percentage point increase over 2020 (23%). Few of those whose organizations are involved in college recruiting reported offering discounted tuition to employees attending online schools or programs of their choice (18%), and even fewer (15%) offered discounted tuition to employees attending specific online schools or programs.

"As many businesses struggled to remain in operation and unexpected costs surfaced during the pandemic, funding for education and training may be in short supply," Venable said. "We can anticipate evolving changes in need for and acceptance of remote work and online education in the coming years."

When asked whether applicants are screened to determine whether their degrees were earned online or on campus, 55% of business leaders from organizations actively recruiting college students reported such screening took place this year. This is a notable decrease from 71% in 2020. Overall, respondents reported that recruiting strategies differ for online and on-campus students, which is consistent with last year's findings.

Over half of college recruiting respondents reported recruiting students and recent graduates from in-person (when possible) undergraduate (62%) and graduate (59%) programs this year. While recruitment from online-always undergraduate programs increased year-over-year with 37% in 2021 compared to 26% in 2020, recruitment from online-always graduate programs decreased by 10 percentage points (28% in 2021 compared to 38% in 2020). Slowed college recruiting and/or hiring practices over the next several years is anticipated by 25% of business leaders.

Methodology

BestColleges.com commissioned YouGov PLC to conduct a survey from April 1 - 9, 2021. Survey participants included 1,000 senior decision-makers, 624 of whom were involved with or working for organizations that directly recruit college students and/or recent college graduates. 97% of the business leaders work in the private sector. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov PLC. All data is self-reported.

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