

2022

Online Education Trends Report

Prepared by BestColleges

BestColleges' eighth annual Online Education Trends Report provides the latest online and remote learning experience data with insights from students and school administrators.





2022 Online Education Trends Report

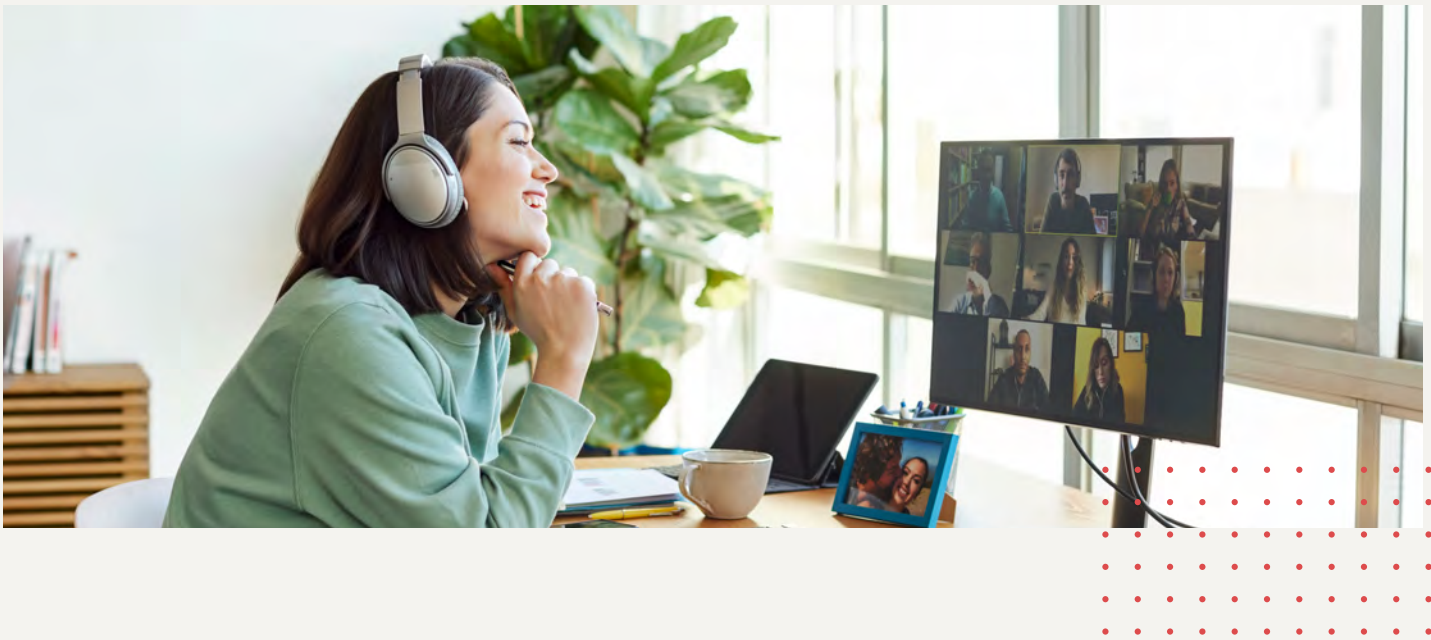
An Annual Survey of Students and School Administrators

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This report is the result of a collaborative effort of BestColleges contributors. The team included: Neil Foto, Reece Johnson, Andrew Rice, Jordan Stewart-Rozema, Quinn Tomlin, and Liz Zvereva

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Executive Summary

BestColleges' eighth annual Online Education Trends Report continues to track trends through feedback provided by online students and school administrators captured through nationwide surveys. This report represents our sixth year of original data collection, with participation from 351 school administrators and 1,800 students. Student respondents included prospective online students, current online students (i.e., those enrolled in fully online programs), current remote learners (i.e., those enrolled in courses not offered in person due to COVID-19), and graduates of online programs. This year's findings are presented in four categories: the learning experience, marketing and recruitment, the continued impact of COVID-19, and student satisfaction.

Key Findings:

The Learning Experience

- Financial challenges, indicated by one-quarter of online program graduates, continue to be the primary roadblock to graduation.
- Finding work-life-school balance is the biggest concern prospective students have about enrolling in an online program.
- A majority (60%) of remote learners said they were likely to enroll in online courses or programs after their campuses return to normal operations, which is an increase from the previous year (49%).
- One in five remote learners anticipates that the changes they've experienced in their education due to COVID-19 will have lasting effects on their mental health.

Marketing and Recruitment

- Current and prospective online students shared that the biggest challenge to making an enrollment decision was/is finding a program that met or meets their needs and interests.
- Students shared that college websites and online student reviews are or were their primary sources of information when researching and comparing programs.
- Online program alumni continue to identify not *doing more research about cost and financial aid* as a top regret in their enrollment decision process.

Continued Impact of COVID-19

- Forty-three percent of administrators reported that their institutions will continue to offer both remote and online format options for students in the future, up from 33% last year.
- Administrators shared that their institutions are taking steps to build long-term flexibility into course design, facility design, student support, and remote work due to their experiences during the pandemic.
- Top priorities for the coming academic year for a majority of institutions include providing a variety of student services — including academic (87%) and non-academic (86%) support.

Student Satisfaction

- Seventy percent of students said that online education is *better than or equal to* on-campus education, which is a slight decrease from the previous year (74%).
- However, 95% of online program graduates said they would recommend online education to others.
- This year 90% of online program graduates said that their degree has had a positive return on investment (ROI), which is down from 93% last year but up from 82% in 2018.

Introduction

Project Goals

The goals of the BestColleges research initiative are to identify and track long-term trends in higher education. In 2021 we expanded our focus to include research related to [bootcamp training programs](#) and [alternative education pathways](#). We also published new editions of the [Trends in Online Student Demographics](#) report and the [Trends in College Career and Employment](#) report.

This eighth annual Online Education Trends Report captures current perspectives from both students and school administrators. In 2021 we included references to the remote learning that emerged due to COVID-19-related campus closures. Remote learning continued through 2021 and into 2022. Our 2022 report presents our sixth year of original data collection, which includes responses from 351 school administrators and 1,800 students. This year's student participants included online students, remote learners, graduates of online programs, and prospective online students. Our findings are organized into four categories:

- The Learning Experience
- Marketing and Recruitment
- Continued Impact of COVID-19
- Student Satisfaction

Methodology

Data Collection

Two online surveys were conducted between November 2021 and February 2022. All data are self-reported.

The first survey collected information from 1,800 college students. Respondents included current remote and online learners, prospective online students, and online degree program graduates. The survey was fielded by Lucid LLC, in partnership with GLG Research, using a quota sampling approach to provide a sample that represented the four continental U.S. geographical regions (i.e., Midwest, Northeast, South, and West). Additional quotas were implemented to ensure the sample included gender and racial diversity.

Our outreach team connected with schools offering online courses, as reported by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System with the second survey. Representatives from public and private two- and four-year institutions responded to questions via the Qualtrics platform. This year, 351 school administrators responded to questions about online program design and administration, student support needs, and the continued impact of COVID-19 on their institutions.



Definitions

The disruption of campus closures related to COVID-19 precautions continued through 2021. We asked school administrators and students to provide insights into their second year of disrupted experiences. For the purposes of this study, we provided the following definitions:

- **Online Student:** A student who chooses an online program over an on-campus program, enrolling in a program that was designed for online delivery.
- **Online Courses and Programs:** Courses and programs designed to be delivered online and that take place predominantly online with no required face-to-face sessions but may incorporate on-site activities such as residencies, fieldwork, and practicum requirements.
- **Remote Student:** A student who enrolled in an on-campus program but is taking all or some classes online because they are not offered in person due to COVID-19 and/or are offered in a primarily synchronous (i.e., live) format that simulates an on-campus course schedule.
- **Remote Learning Courses and Programs:** Courses and programs designed to be delivered in person but were moved to virtual learning environments when campuses closed due to COVID-19 restrictions and/or that are offered in a primarily synchronous (i.e., live) format that simulates an on-campus course schedule.

The definition of remote learning was modified slightly for this year's report to reflect the ongoing adoption of an online format that closely mirrors an on-campus schedule. This adoption, and the potential for it to continue, emerged in the school administrator survey feedback we collected in 2020.

Participants

Students

Student respondents self-selected their status via a screening question, choosing one of four options:

currently enrolled online, currently enrolled remotely, graduate of an online program, or prospective online student.

Currently an ONLINE student - 25% (n=450) ONLINE program graduate - 28% (n=500)

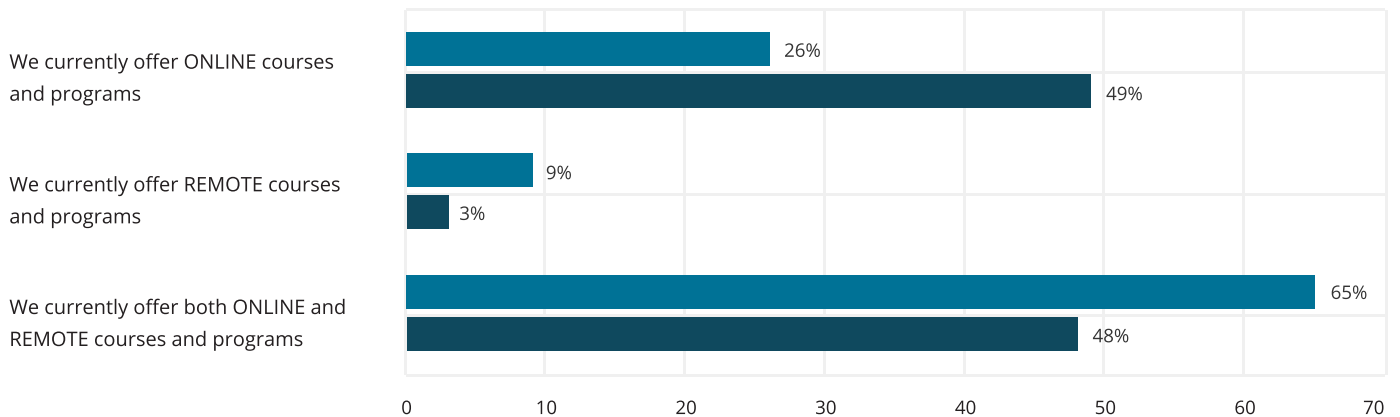
Currently a REMOTE student - 28% (n=500) Prospective ONLINE student - 19% (n=350)

School Administrators

Participants representing a wide variety of higher education institutions were screened with a question to ascertain whether or not their institution offered online and/or remote courses at the time of the survey. Fewer administrators reported that their schools offered both formats than in the previous year; however, more offered online options than in the previous year. In addition, a majority of administrators (91%) indicated that their institutions offered online courses or programs prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Course and Program Formats Offered - By Report Year

2021 (n=366) 2022 (n=351)



Higher education professionals often work in multiple roles at their institutions. This year, 319 participants voluntarily identified their primary role. The top three roles were institutional-level administrator, program dean or director, and admissions or enrollment manager or staff member, which is similar to the representation we had in previous years.

Institutional-level online education administrator or manager - 40% (n=127)

Program dean or director - 22% (n=70)

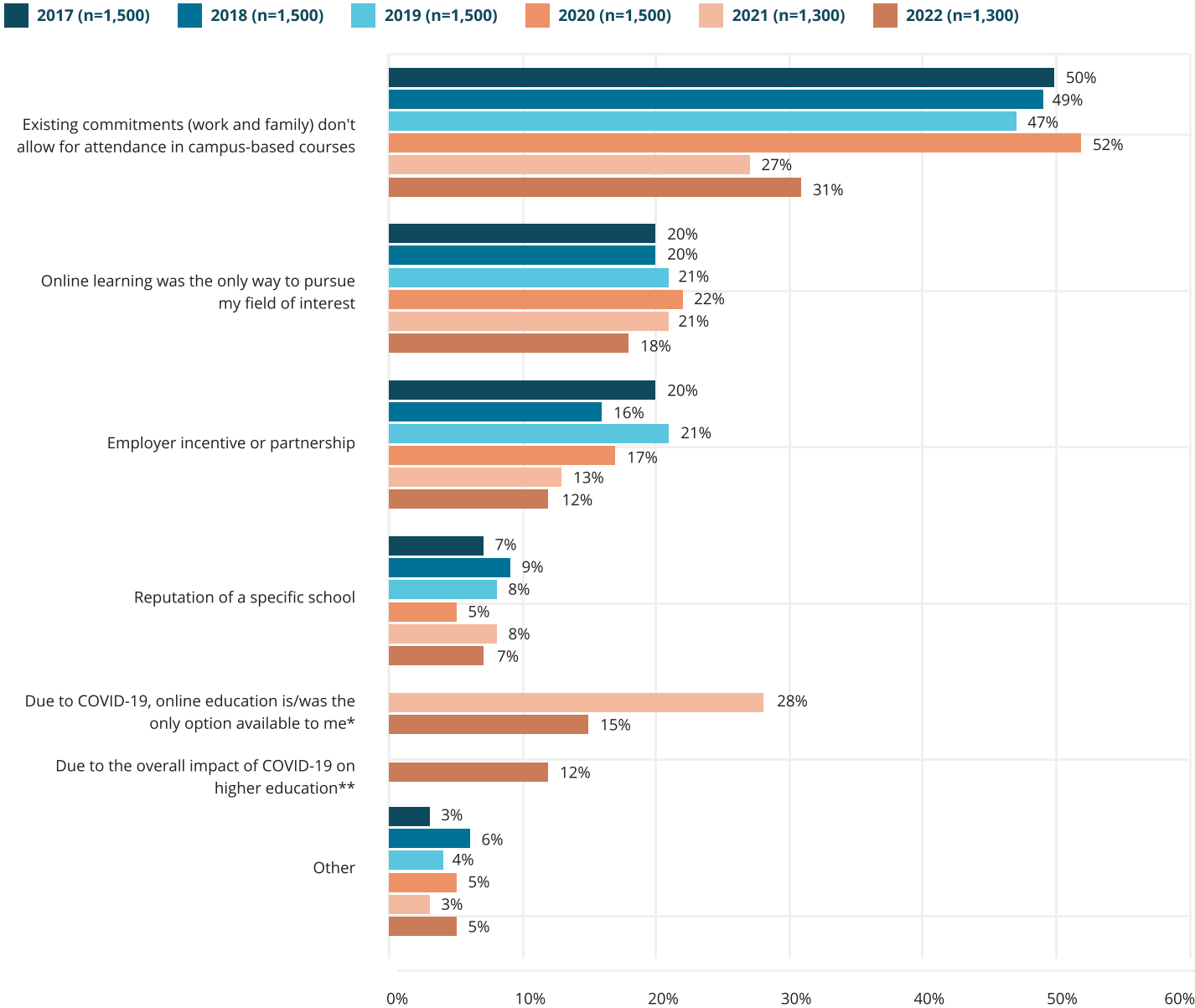
Admissions or enrollment manager or staff member - 13% (n=42)

The Learning Experience

Online vs. On-Campus Programs

This year many students continued to choose online education because of COVID-19. The overall percentage of students enrolling due to COVID-19-related reasons (27%) was similar to the previous year (28%). The convenience of studying around existing work and family commitments was the biggest motivator of online enrollment; this option was selected by almost one-third (31%) of the students surveyed.

Reasons for Choosing Online Over On-Campus Learning Options - By Report Year



*Response option added in 2021. **Response option added in 2022.

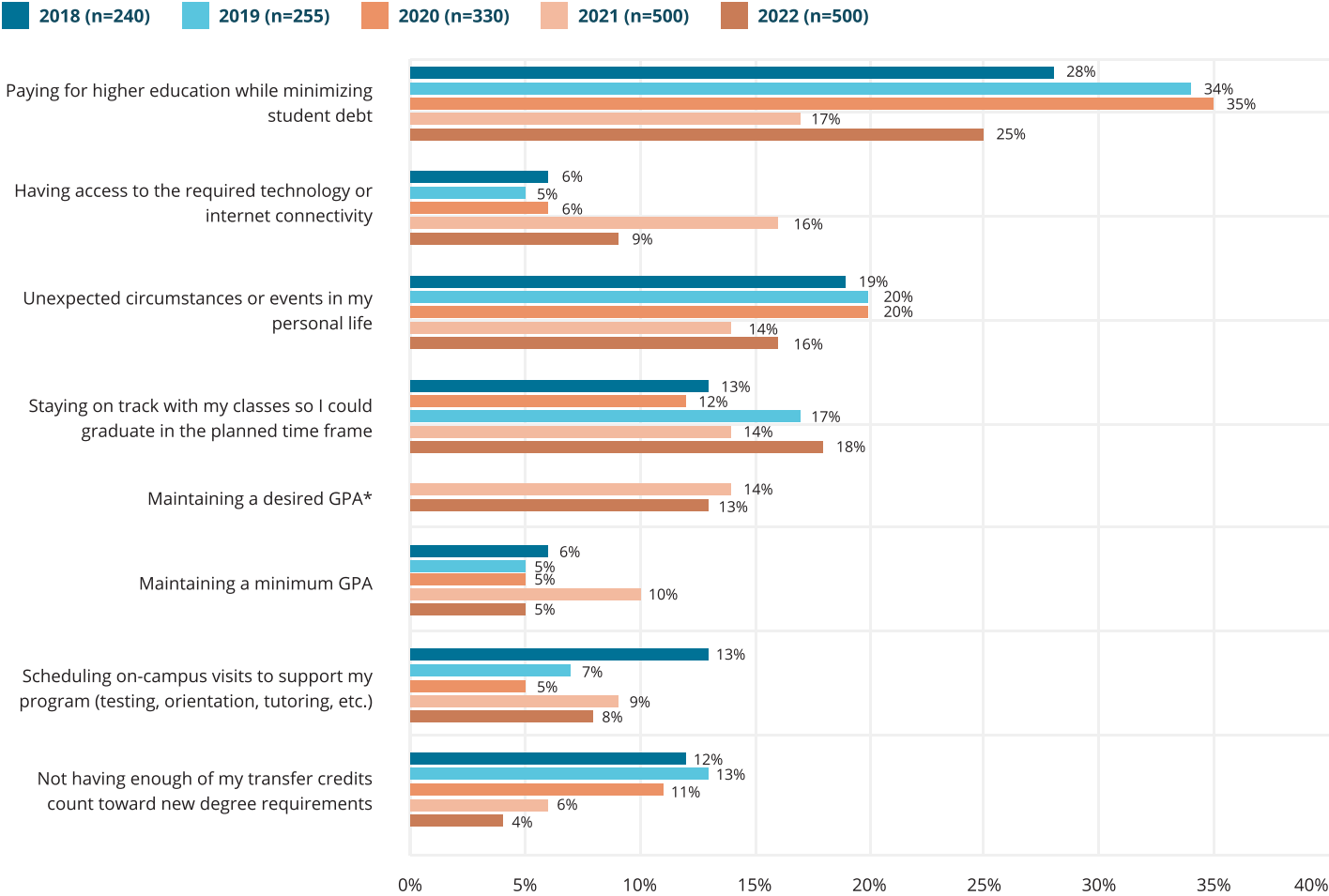
Challenges to Reaching Graduation

This year, 66% of currently enrolled online students were employed either full or part time and 97% had children under the age of 18 living at home. Although online options may be more convenient than campus-based classes, adding college courses to an already busy schedule can lead to challenges in reaching program completion. Each year we ask students who successfully completed online programs what their biggest roadblock to graduation was while they were in their academic programs. We also ask school administrators to share their insights about the roadblocks their online students face.

Student Perspective

This year, the top challenges reported by online graduates were *paying for higher education while minimizing student debt* (25%) and *staying on track with my classes so I could graduate in the planned time frame* (18%). Finance-related challenges continue to be students' primary concern year after year.

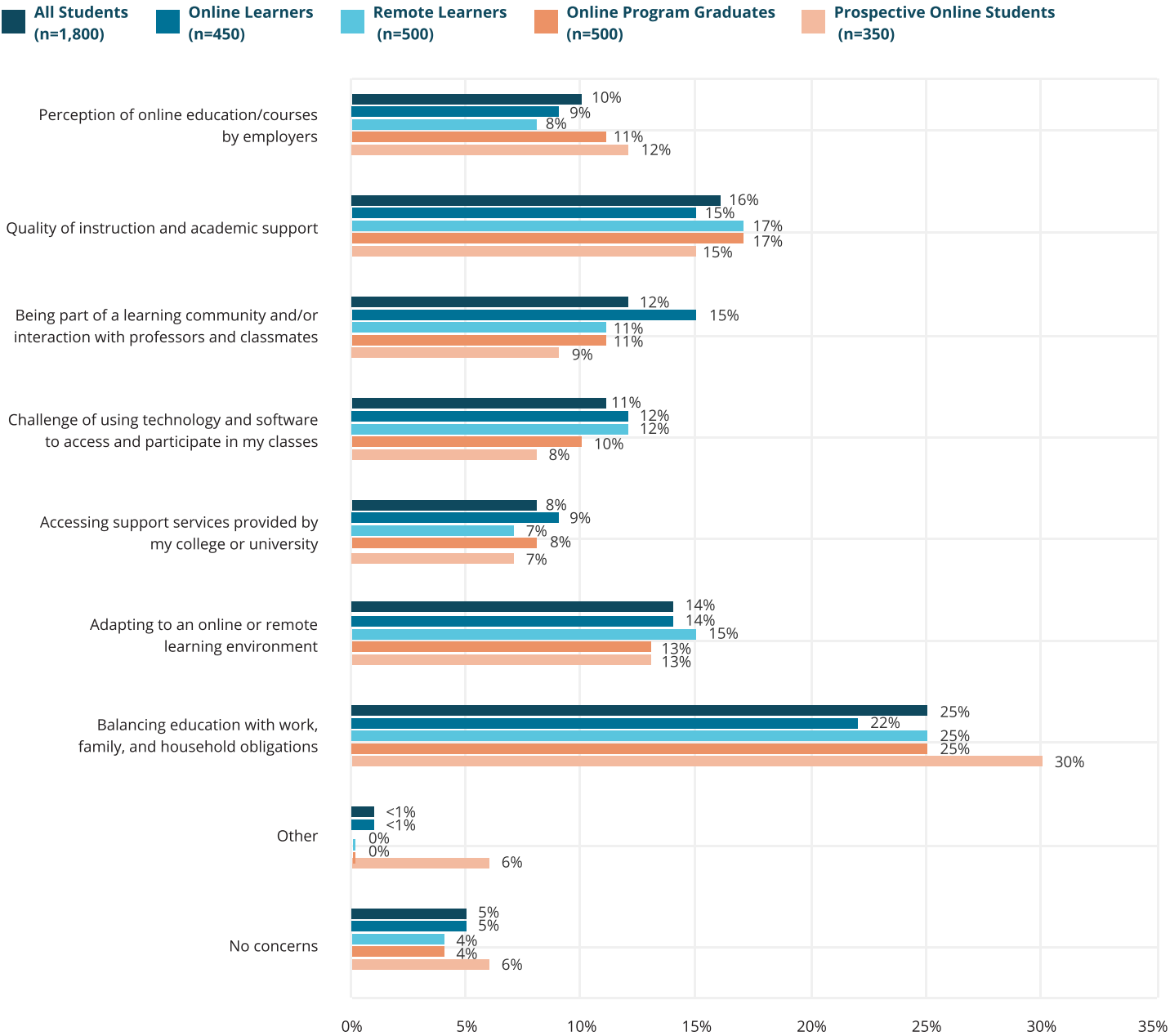
Biggest Challenge to Completing an Online Program (Program Graduate Responses Only)



*Response option added in 2021.

When asked about their biggest concern related to learning in a remote or online environment in 2021, the top response was *balancing education with work, family, and household obligations*. This was the top concern reported by all student categories, including 25% of all students and 30% of prospective online students. Remote and online students seem to struggle with technology in similar numbers, with 12% of each group identifying this as their biggest concern.

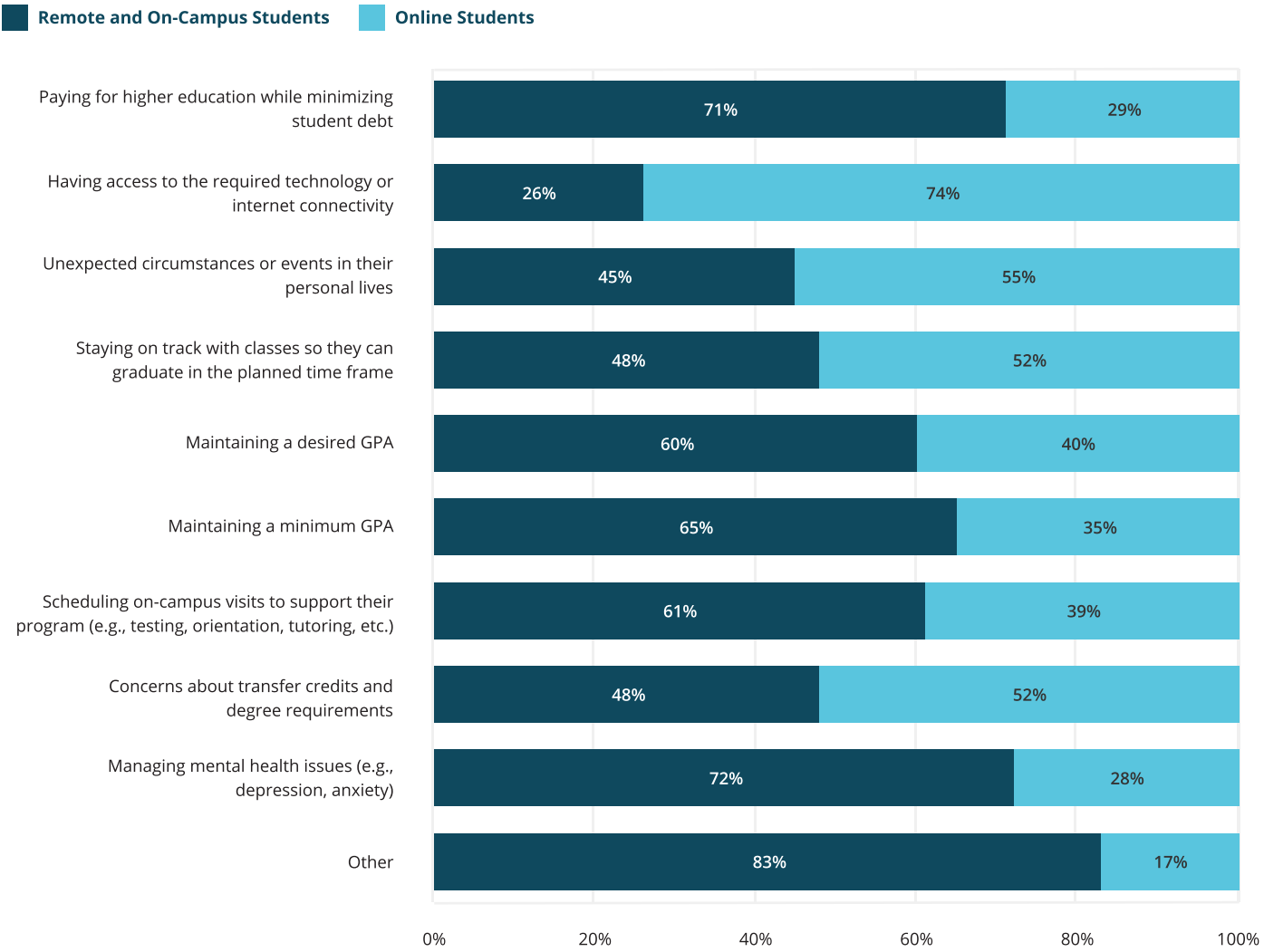
Biggest Concern About the Remote/Online Learning Experience



School Perspective

Again this year, school administrators were asked to share their insights about which challenges students at their institutions are facing. Overall, remote/on-campus students and online students are perceived as having somewhat different challenges. The areas with the most disparity were *having access to the required technology or internet connectivity* (26% remote/on-campus vs. 74% online), *managing mental health issues* (72% remote/on-campus vs. 28% online), and *paying for higher education while minimizing student debt* (71% remote/on-campus vs. 29% online).

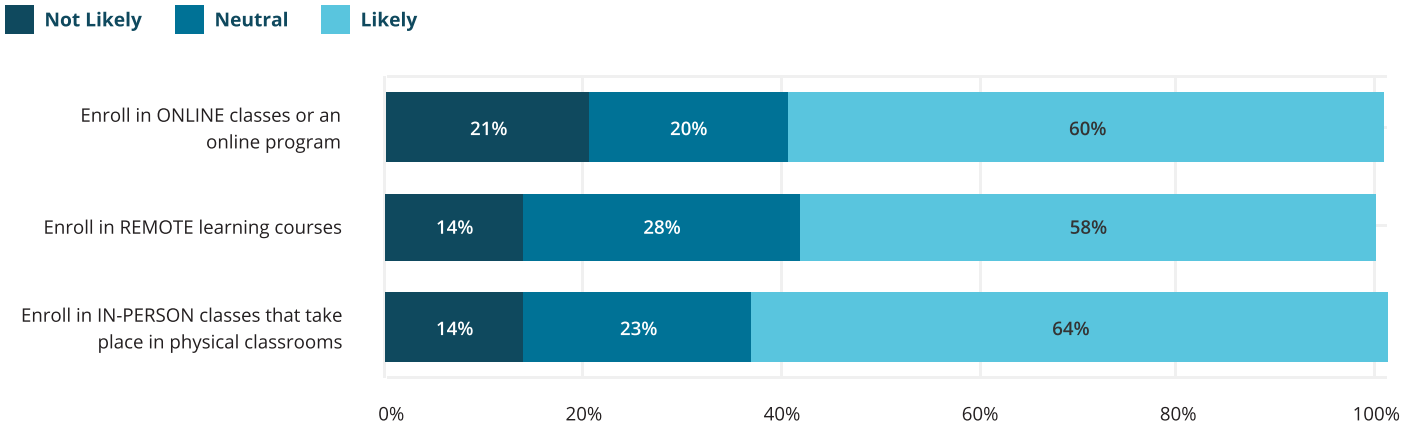
Challenges College Students Face - School Administrator Perceptions



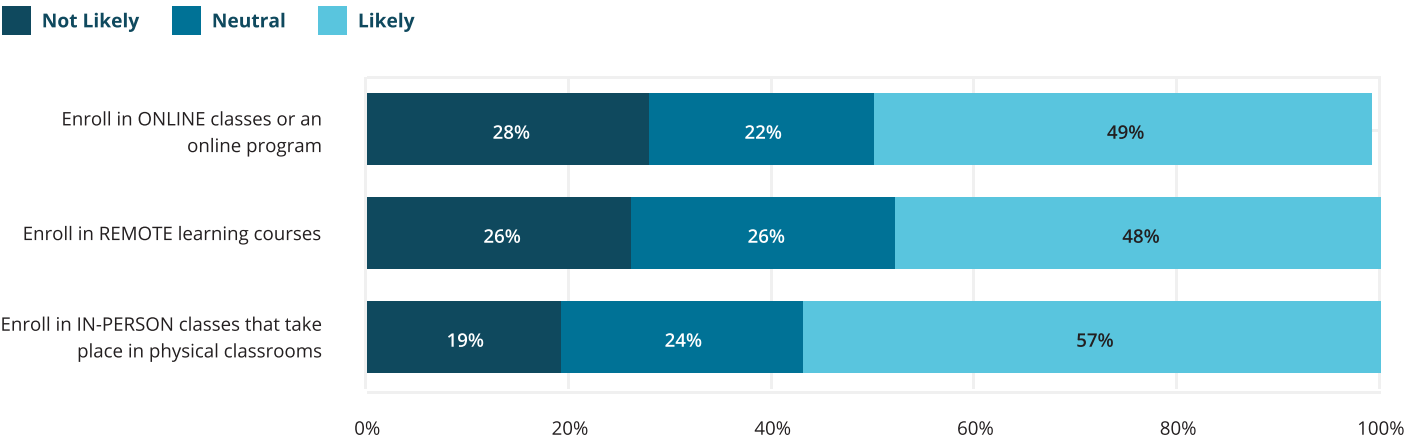
Remote Learners

This was our second year of tracking the perspectives of remote learners (n=500), i.e., those enrolled in on-campus programs but taking classes online due to COVID-19 restrictions in place at their schools. And we found what is perhaps growing acceptance of enrolling in a variety of learning formats simultaneously. Sixty percent of remote learners said they were likely to enroll in fully online classes in the future, which is an increase from 49% the previous year. Similar numbers (64%) said they were likely to enroll in on-campus, in-person classes in the future.

Remote Student Plans for Enrollment - After Campuses Return to Normal Operations (2022) (n=415)



Remote Student Plans for Enrollment - After Campuses Return to Normal Operations (2021) (n=500)





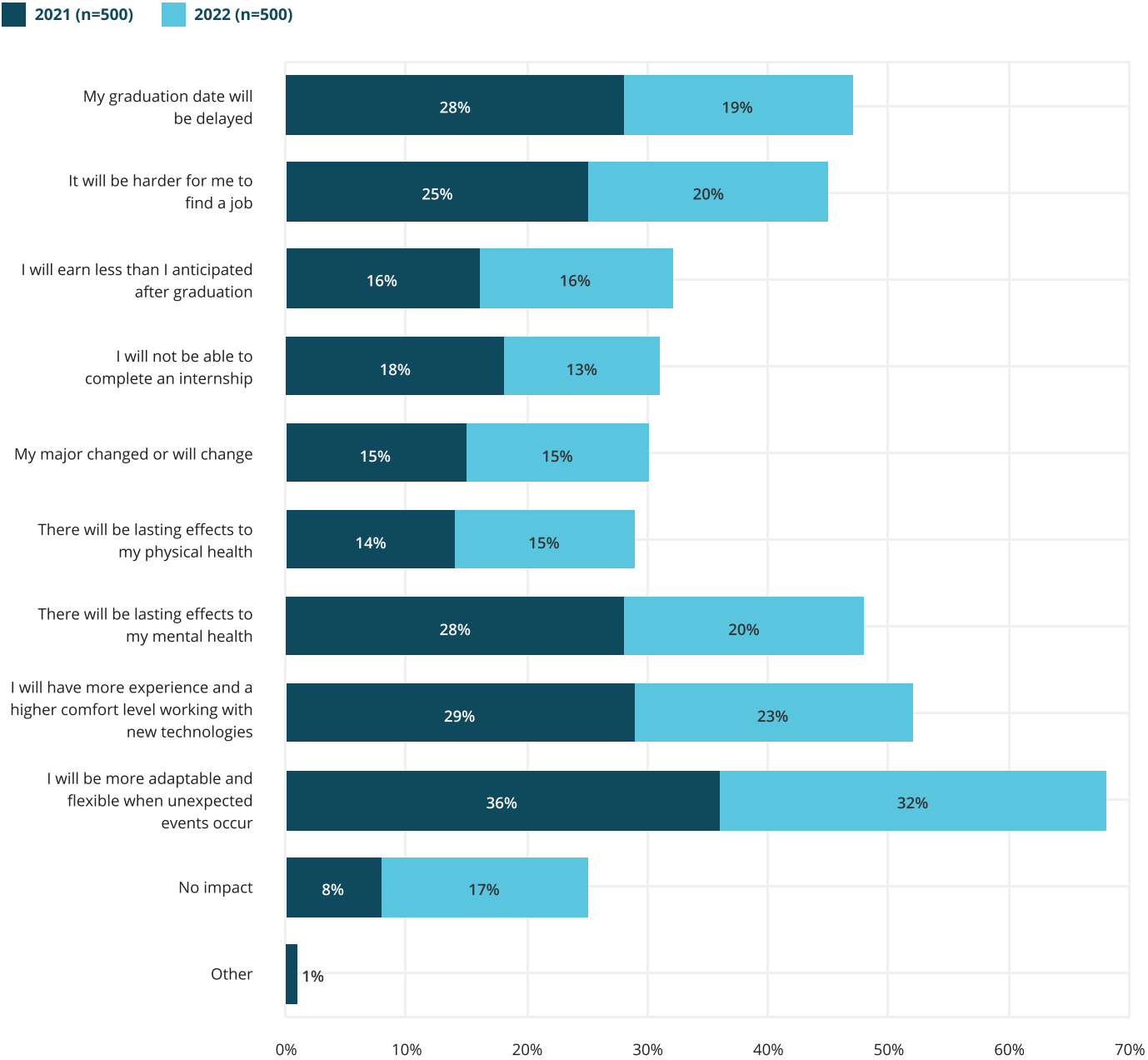
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College Students Welcome a Hybrid Approach to Higher Education

Today's college students have experienced multiple semesters — and for some, multiple years — of disrupted college learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some experienced remote learning after being enrolled in on-campus courses that shifted to virtual environments while others enrolled online, some for the first time. First-hand experience seems to result in greater acceptance of online education as remote learners indicate a willingness to enroll online in the future. We also anticipate a growing acceptance of and even preference for enrolling in a variety of course formats (e.g., online, in person, and hybrid) during an academic term.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect students in 2021 beyond changes in their learning environments. However, the number of students identifying challenges such as a delayed graduation date (19%) and difficulties finding a job (20%) decreased from the previous year. Other challenges related to physical (15%) and mental health (20%) also decreased but persisted.

Impact of COVID-19-Related College Changes on Your Future - Remote Students





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Student Success Requires Support Beyond Academic Services

While the number of remote learners anticipating lasting mental health effects from the changes they experienced in their education due to the pandemic decreased this year, 1 in 5 continue to have concerns. And the percentage of students expecting lasting effects to their physical health (15%) remained constant. Colleges and universities should not only enhance and extend the non-instructional services (e.g., mental health counseling, wellness programming) available to students, but also provide access to these services through different modalities (i.e., in person, online).

Marketing and Recruitment

Student Motivation to Enroll

This initiative uses the work of Ladd, Reynolds, and Selingo (n.d.) to describe student motivation characteristics beyond the age-based labels of "traditional" and "nontraditional." Our focus collapses this work's six student segments into three categories: career-minded students, lifelong learners, and recent high school graduates. We also continued the addition of a remote learner category that began in our 2021 report.

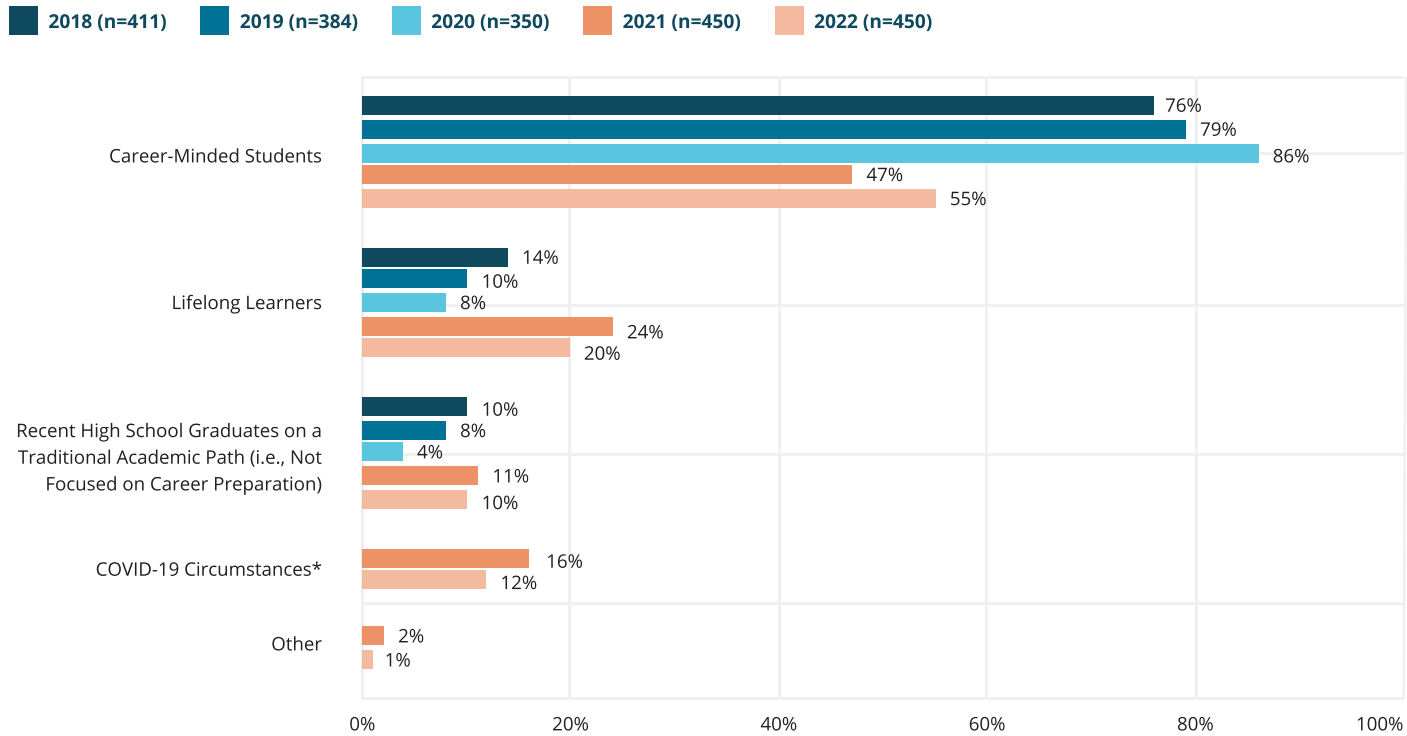
College Student Characteristics and Motivations to Enroll Online

Category	Student Segment	Description
Recent High School Graduates	Aspiring Academics*	18-to-24-year-olds focused on academic studies
	Coming of Age*	18-to-24-year-olds exploring college academics, social offerings, and a variety of activities
Lifelong Learners	Academic Wanderers*	Older students who perceive the advantages of a college degree but are unsure about academic and career goals and how to reach them
Career-Minded Students	Career Starters*	Wide age range interested in college as a path to a specific career
	Career Accelerators*	Older students with some college and job experience interested in college as a way to move forward in their current career field
	Industry Switchers*	Older students with some college and job experience interested in transitioning to a new career field
COVID-19 Circumstances	Remote Learners	Circumstances related to COVID-19 led to enrollment in an online program

*Based on Ladd, Reynolds, and Selingo, n.d.

About half (55%) of current online students are career-minded students. This remains the largest group of learners year over year.

Characteristics and Goals of Current Online Students - By Report Year

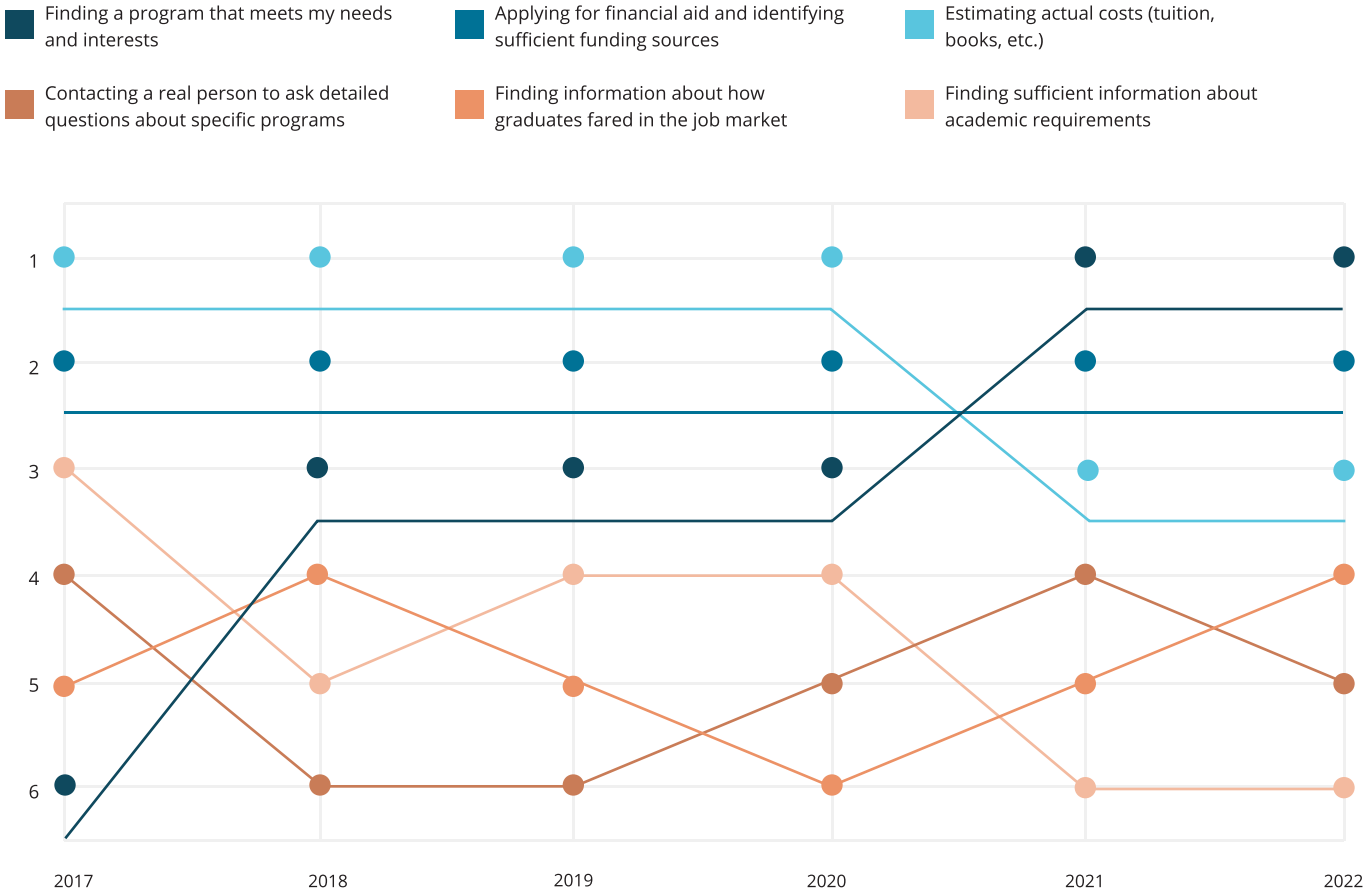


*Response option added in 2021.

Student Research and Decision-Making

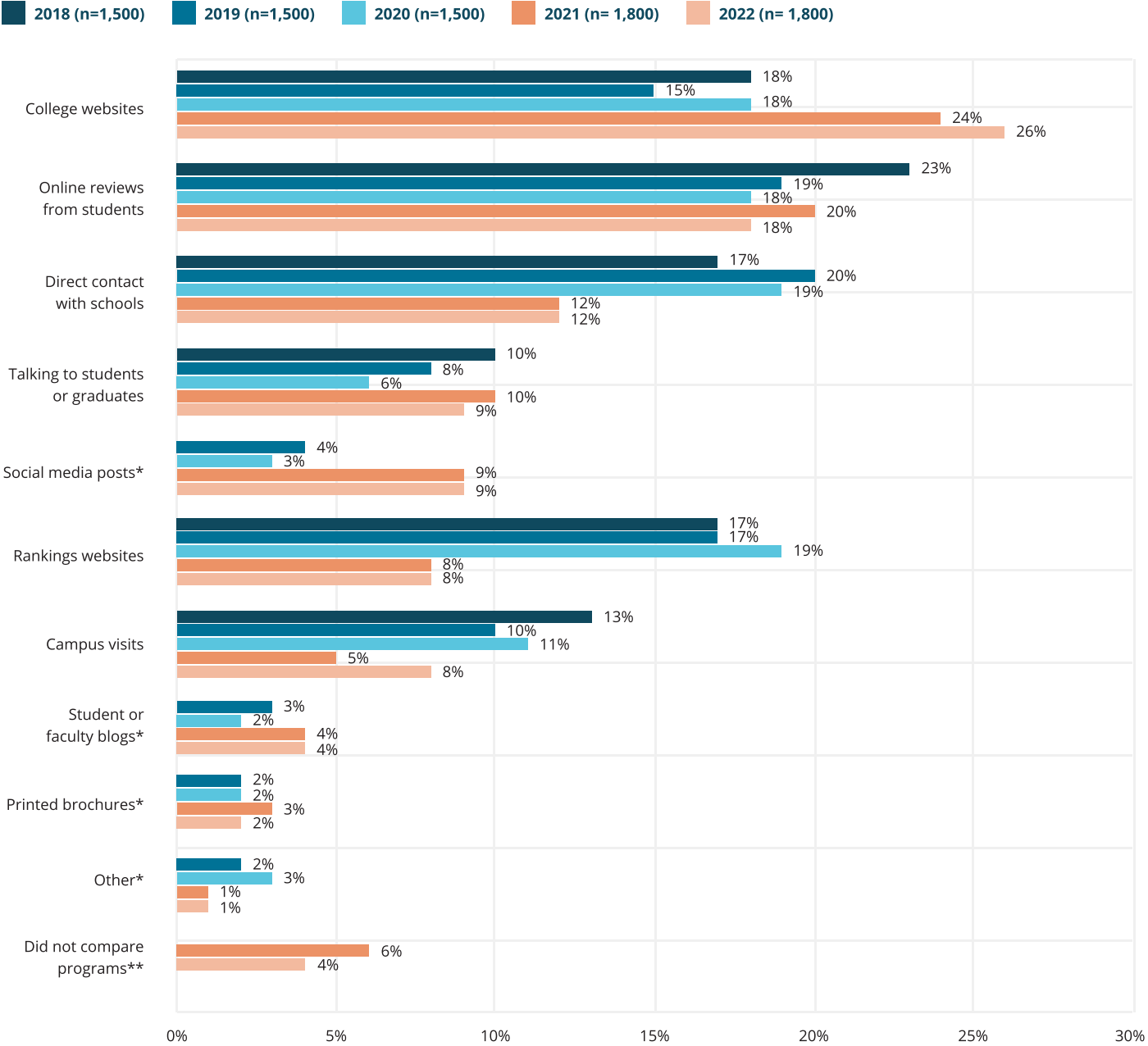
Survey participants shared the challenges they faced or anticipated facing when making the decision to enroll in an online program. The top three challenges have remained steady over the past five years, although the order of these has varied. This year, the top challenges were *finding a program that meets my needs and interests* (20%, n=162), *applying for financial aid and identifying sufficient funding sources* (20%, n=160), and *estimating actual costs* (19%, n=154).

Biggest Challenges Students Face When Choosing an Online Program, Current and Prospective Students - By Report Year



We asked all of the student survey participants about the sources they rely or relied on to research and compare college programs. *College websites* continue to be the most heavily relied upon source of information (26%), followed by *online reviews from students* (18%) and making *direct contact with schools* (12%).

Sources of Student Research and Program Comparison - By Report Year

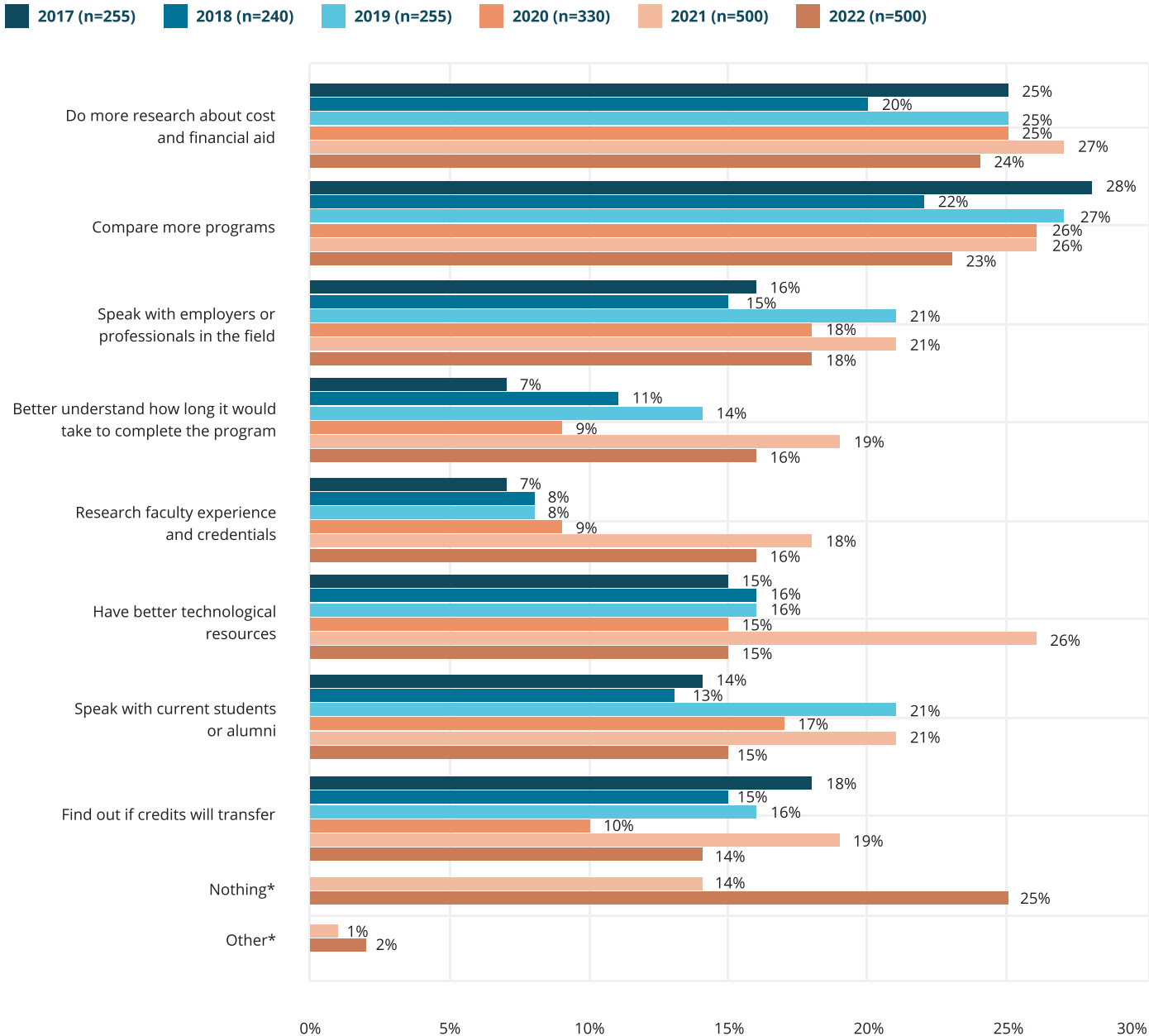


*Response option added in 2019. **Response option added in 2021.

Advice From Online Graduates

While many online program alumni indicated that they would do something differently when choosing their online program if they could go back and do it again, this year one-quarter (25%) said they had no regrets. Those who would change their actions in retrospect would *do more research about cost and financial aid* (24%), *compare more programs* (23%), and *speak with employers or professionals in the field [of study]* (18%).

What Online Graduates Would Do Differently When Choosing an Online Program - By Report Year



*Response option added in 2021.



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Improved College Cost Transparency Would Improve Student Decision-Making

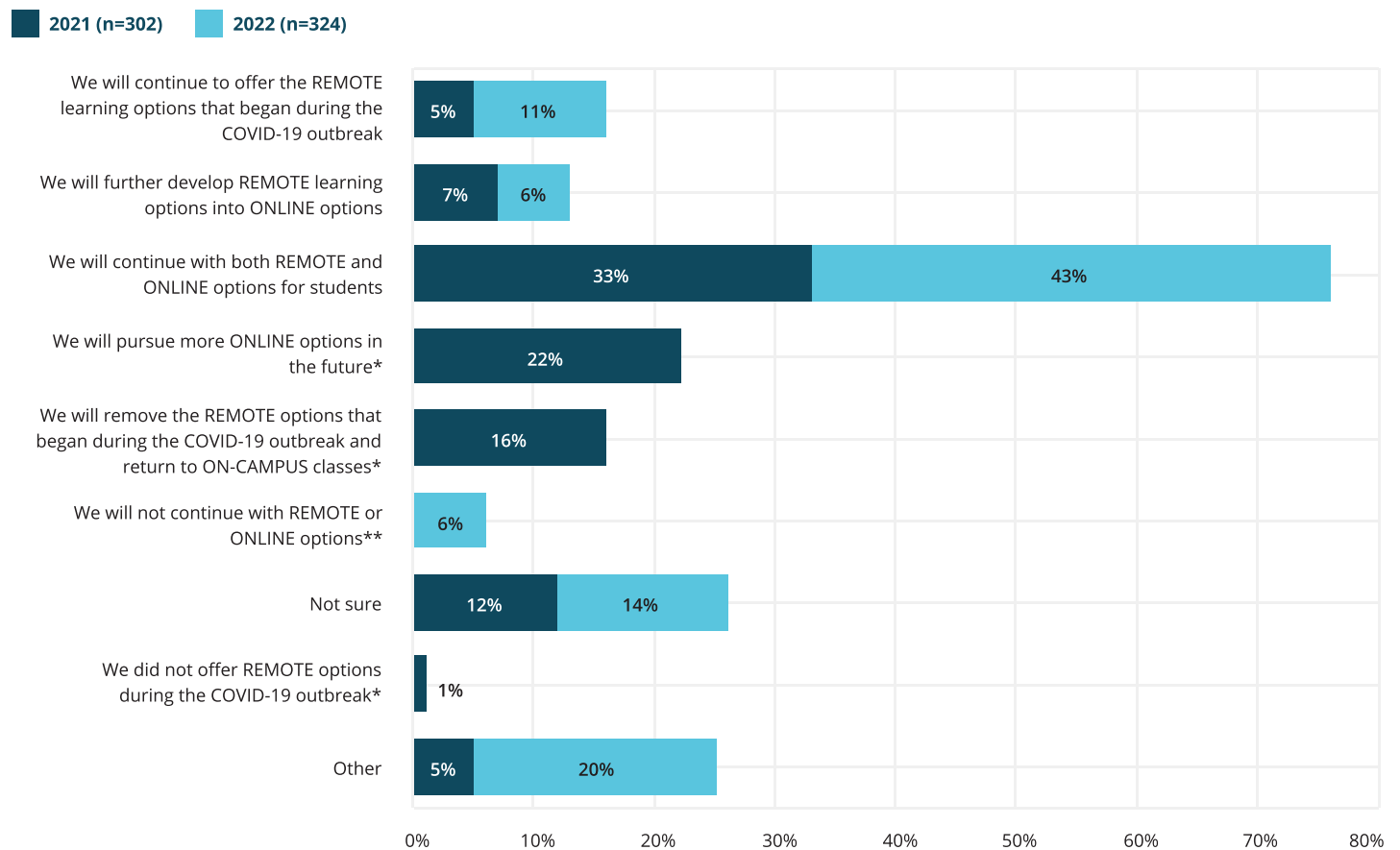
Understanding what it will cost to go to college and how those costs are determined are significant challenges for anyone thinking about higher education. In the eight years of this study, online program graduates have consistently expressed a level of regret related to cost. While some efforts have been made industry-wide to provide more information about what a specific program will cost (e.g., net price calculators), confusion around college costs and financial assistance persists.

Continued Impact of COVID-19

Remote and Online Learning

This year 324 administrators provided feedback about how their schools are planning to offer courses and programs when they return to normal operations in an anticipated post-pandemic timeframe. We saw an increase in the number of respondents indicating that their schools will continue to offer remote learning options — up from 5% in 2021 to 11% in 2022. We also found increased interest in continuing the practice of offering both remote and online course formats once campuses reopen — up from 33% in 2021 to 43% in 2022.

Plans for Remote and Online Learning Formats Upon Return to Normal Operations - By Report Year



*Response option removed in 2022. **Response option added in 2022.

We also asked administrators (n=320) about the potential impact of COVID-19 on the demand for online programs over the next few years. An overwhelming majority (90%) agreed that student enrollment in online education will increase with over half (52%) *strongly* agreeing. It's important to note here that 91% of the school administrators responding to this question (n=349) said that their institutions offered online programs prior to the campus closures caused by COVID-19.



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Remote Learning Emerges as a Course Format

At many institutions remote learning has evolved from an emergency mode to something more robust. These courses maintain a heavy reliance on synchronous communication through the use of live, online meetings, which were the default in the early days of the pandemic. But as faculty and students have gained experience in virtual learning environments, schools have worked to improve the overall quality of remote learning, making the most of technology with purposeful instructional strategies. These courses combine the convenient access of online learning with the schedule-driven format more commonly found in on-campus courses. This delivery style may benefit learners who might otherwise struggle with the asynchronous approach of many online courses.



Flexibility and Adaptability

An open-ended survey item asked administrators to identify *one change related to COVID-19 at [their] institution that will be adopted for longer-term use post-pandemic*. The responses (n=191) revealed a primary theme — flexibility. What does flexibility look like in higher education and what will it take to achieve? Participants provided examples related to course and facility design, support services, and remote work with a goal of flexible options for faculty, staff, and students alike.

Course Design

In their description of changes that their schools would implement after the pandemic, 38% of administrators mentioned course design. In addition, 29% used the term "hybrid" and/or "HyFlex" in their description of changes taking place at their schools. These two terms are often used interchangeably to describe courses that have both in-person and online components. However, HyFlex perhaps offers the most flexibility as its approach offers "each class session and learning activity in-person, synchronously online, and asynchronously online" (Milman et al., 2020).

Selected responses:

- Extended hybrid course arrangements where students can progress online if quarantined or in isolation.
- Having the option to teach REMOTE classes for on-campus students if there is a need to do so due to weather or other local emergency situations.
- We have institutionally defined each type of course modality: in-person, hybrid, remote, online. Although we still have a few remote courses this year, it is unknown whether remote will be an ongoing course modality.
- Virtually all programs will offer both in person and online/distance modalities moving forward.
- We made several on-campus programs hybrid.
- The option of hybrid courses, in person with a remote or online option.

Facility Design

The varied and flexible course delivery options described above will require investments in not only software, but also in hardware. Thirty percent of administrators shared that enhancing access to and use of synchronous videoconferencing tools (e.g., Zoom) will continue to be prevalent at their institutions post-pandemic. While only a small number of respondents (6%) specifically mentioned facility design changes, it's critical to acknowledge the necessity of equipping physical classrooms and campuses with the capabilities needed to support hybrid course delivery.

Selected responses:

- Enhanced use of technology in the classroom and more professional development in online learning.
- Automatic recording of classroom lectures for students unable to attend class.
- Hands-free restrooms, water faucets, toilets, urinals. Class recordings. Some 'reverse remote' where students are in [the] classroom and faculty are home or off campus.
- Equipping all classrooms with the technology to do synchronous delivery to other locations.
- Classrooms ready to Zoom every day for students in isolation or away.

Student Support Options

Making sure students are successful means more than offering multiple class attendance options. It also means providing the support services they need in a variety of formats. Online access to services such as academic advising, career counseling, and financial aid were gaining popularity among campus-based students even before the pandemic (D'Orio, 2019). Online access to these services may now be expected by remote learners when they return to campus (DiMenna, 2021; McAuliffe, 2020). Our survey respondents shared the need for more online support for students, along with the option for learners to participate in a variety of events and administrative processes at a distance.

Selected responses:

- Additional support and wrap-around services (e.g., mental health, mentoring, advising, online and on-campus career services).
- Multimodal student support.
- Online tutoring 24/7 available to all students.
- We hope it pushes the university to update forms and processes for students that were originally designed for on-campus students only.
- Being able to access the student services online/remotely. All of our student services can now be accessed online.
- Aspects of admissions offered online.

Remote Work Options

Our 2020 survey findings (Venable, 2021) included a realization by many higher education professionals that they and their colleagues could accomplish more work remotely than they might have assumed possible prior to the pandemic. This sentiment continued into 2021 as conversations related to remote work and returning to the office continued in higher education workplaces and beyond (Hals, 2021; Jorstad, 2021). Eleven percent of this year's administrator participants shared the lasting impact of remote work at their schools.

Selected responses:

- More flexibility for staff to work remotely.
- Virtual meetings with faculty and staff.
- A work from home schedule will be implemented.
- Flex work policy.
- More faculty and administration will work remotely than before the pandemic.



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Applying the Lessons Learned During the Pandemic Will Lead to More Adaptable Schools, Faculty, and Students

In the spring of 2020, college campuses abruptly closed in reaction to the pandemic. As a result, in-person, on-campus classes were moved to virtual learning environments in what has since been described as emergency remote learning. Through this experience, many administrators discovered a lack of flexibility in their pre-pandemic processes, which is fueling a new drive to embed flexible options in higher education operations to pave a smoother road forward in future emergency situations.

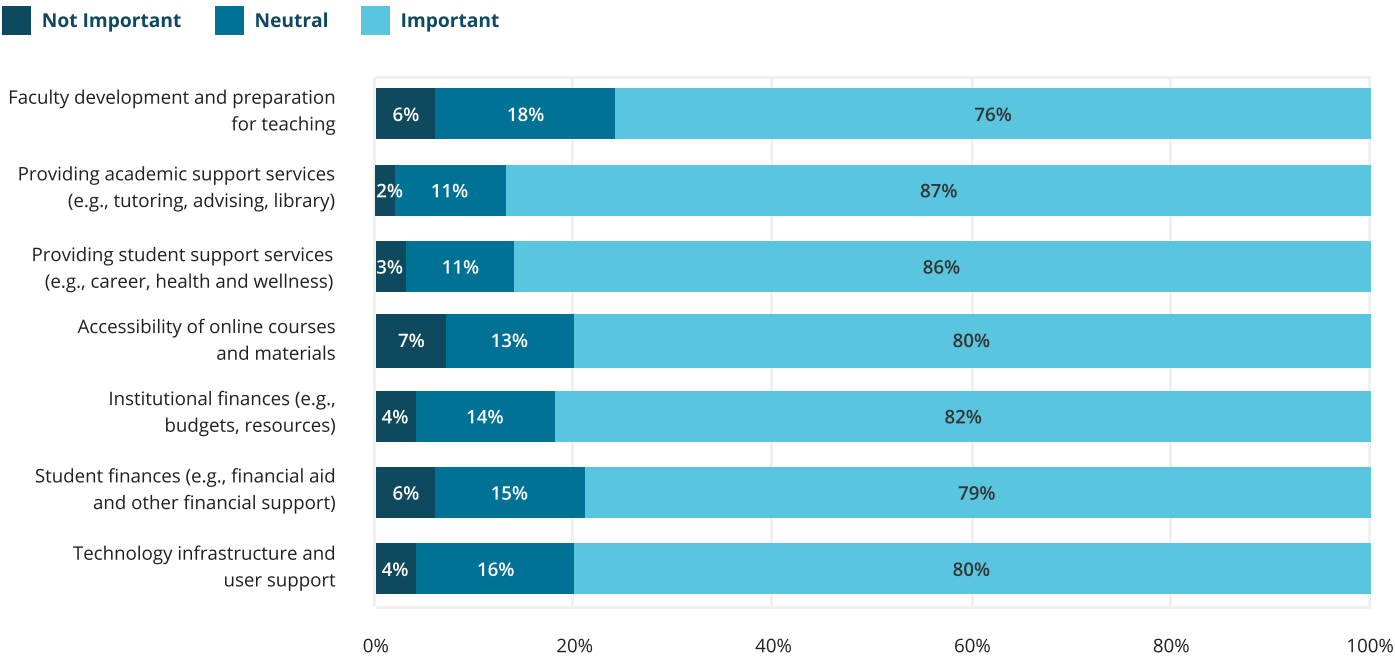


Planning for the Future

When asked about priorities in the fall of 2020, a majority of administrators (identified most of the items we presented as *important* (Venable, 2021). In the fall of 2021, these areas were still rated as important overall. However, a shift in the responses shows an emphasis on more specific areas.

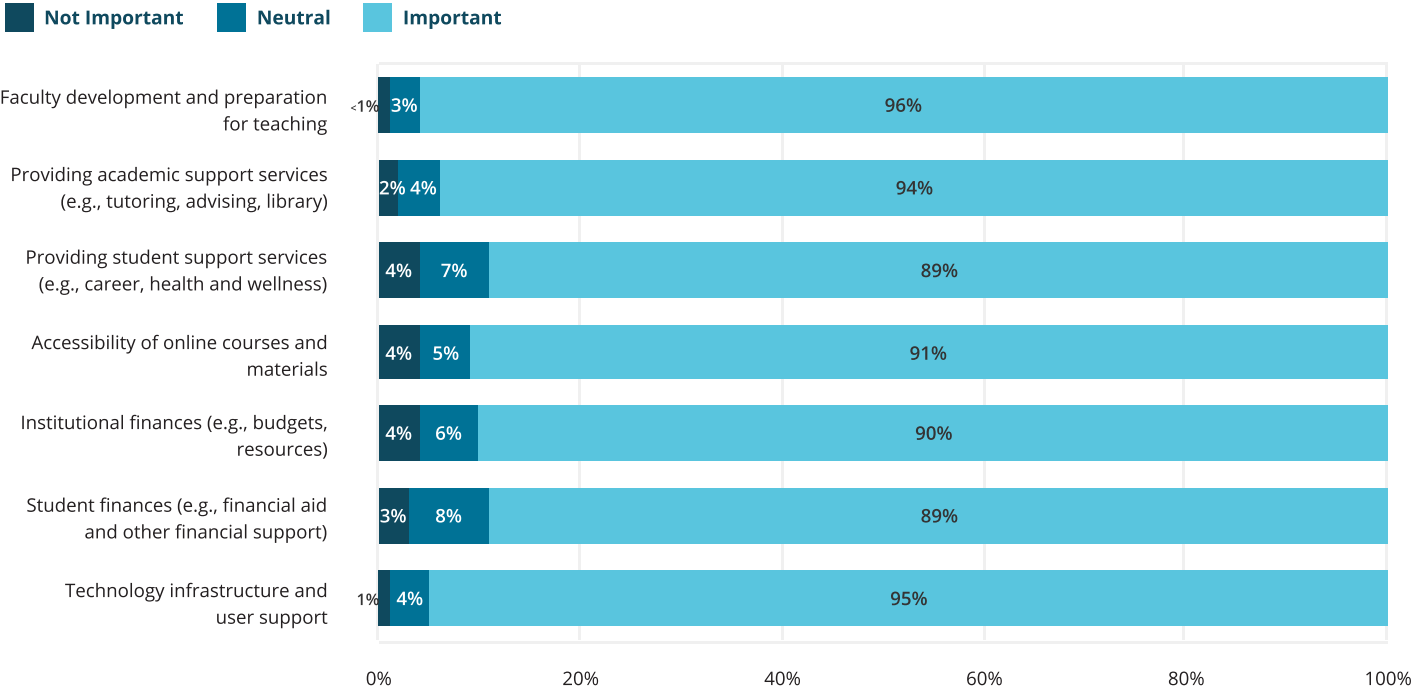
Priorities Preparing for the 2022-2023 Academic Year

(n=317)



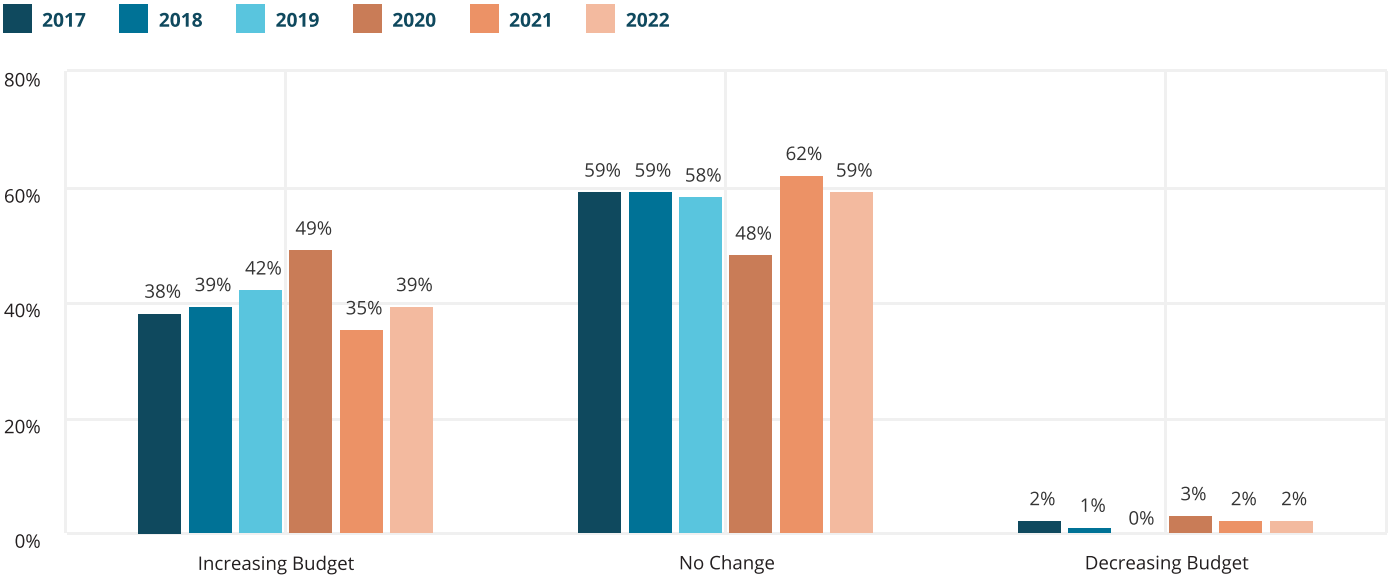
Priorities Preparing for the 2022-2023 Academic Year

(n=208)



Institutional finances continue to be a priority for a majority of institutions. This year we saw a return to the pattern of steadily increasing budgets for online program development that was observed from 2017-2020. However, the percentage of schools increasing their budget in 2022 is still lower than it was in 2019 and 2020.

School Budget Planning for Online Program Development - By Report Year



Demand Predictions

We asked school administrators to select the field of study in which they anticipated the greatest growth in online enrollment over the next five years. The predictions for 2022 to 2027 are similar to those identified in previous years. Although the exact order has changed, the same disciplines continue to occupy the top three spots: *computer and information sciences and support services and other technology fields* (26%); *business, management, marketing, and related services* (24%); and *health professions and related programs*, which includes *nursing* (21%).

Top Fields of Study for Online Growth in the Next Five Years - By Report Year

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
#1	Business (30%)	Health Professions (30%)	Business (20%)	Computer Sciences (25%)	Computer Sciences (26%)
#2	Health Professions (23%)	Business (26%)	Health Professions (20%)	Health Professions (25%)	Business (24%)
#3	Computer Sciences (12%)	Computer Sciences (13%)	Computer Sciences (16%)	Business (20%)	Health Professions (21%)
#4	Faith-Based Topics (12%)	Education (6%)	Faith-Based Topics (8%)	Human Services (Counseling, Psychology, Social Work) (8%)	Human Services (Counseling, Psychology, Social Work) (8%)
#5	General Studies (8%)	Faith-Based Topics (4%)	Human Services (Counseling, Psychology, Social Work) (7%)	Humanities and Liberal Arts (6%)	Education (6%)

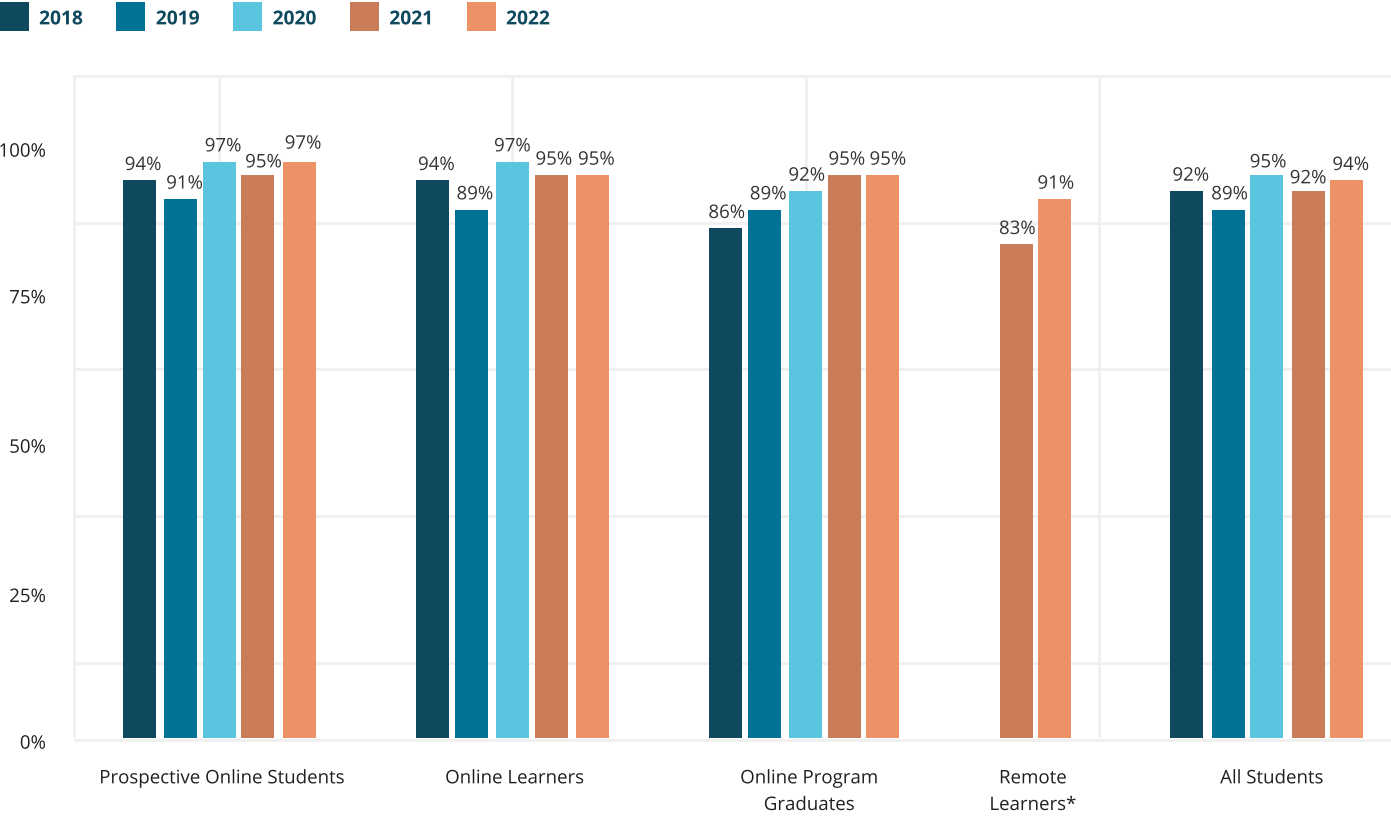
Student Satisfaction

Each year, we explore student satisfaction with online and remote learning through three lenses related to (1) whether or not students would recommend online or remote education to others, (2) their perception of a positive return on their investment in online education, and (3) their overall perception of online education compared to traditional, campus-based education.

Recommending Online Education to Others

The response to the question, *Would you recommend online education to others?* was overwhelmingly positive this year (94%). Remote learners, who did not necessarily choose distance learning when they enrolled, were the least likely to say they would recommend online or remote learning; however, their willingness to recommend this educational format increased to 91% from 83% the previous year.

Students Who Would Recommend Online Education to Others - By Report Year



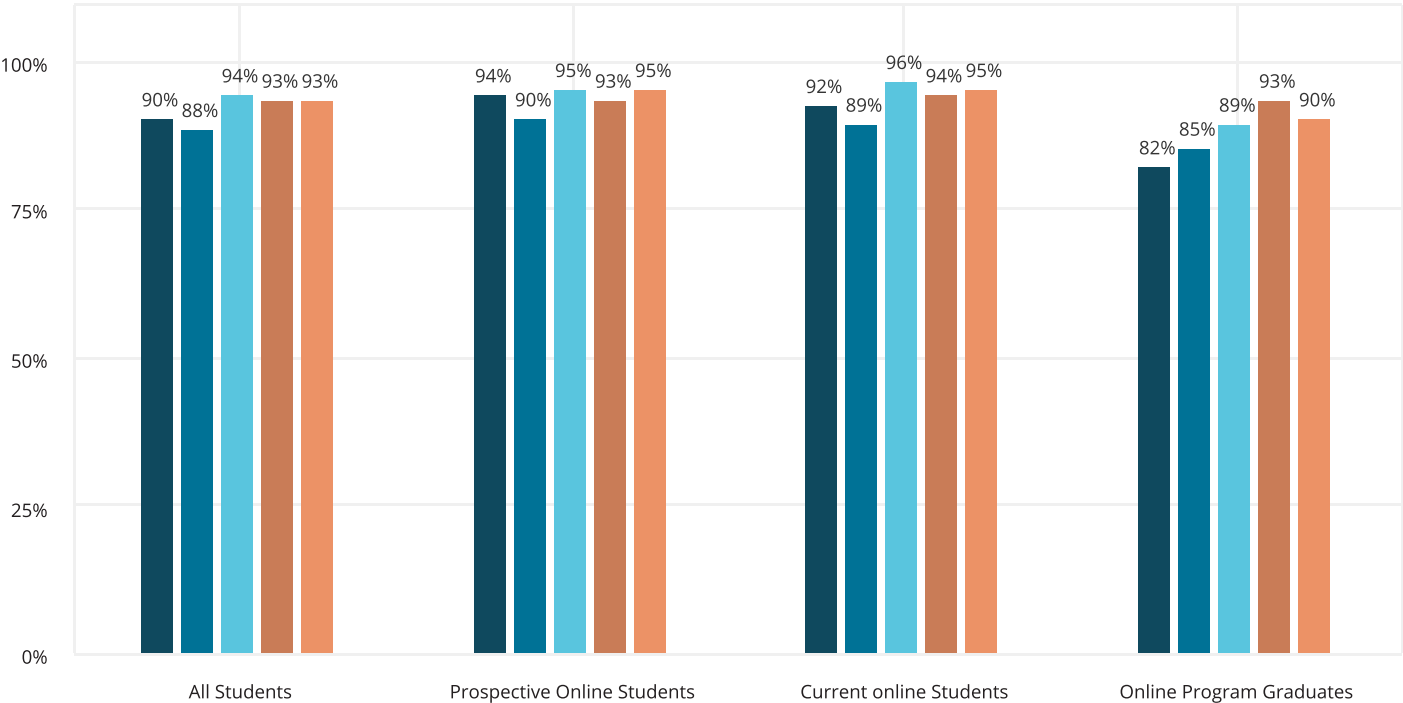
*New student category added in 2021.

Return on Investment

The question of ROI is an ongoing concern for many college students, regardless of whether they are learning online or on campus. Again this year, a majority of students said that their *degree has or will have a positive ROI*. However, while the percentage of prospective and current online students anticipating a positive ROI increased slightly, the percentage of online program graduates reporting a positive return decreased.

My Online Degree Has or Will Have a Positive ROI - By Report Year

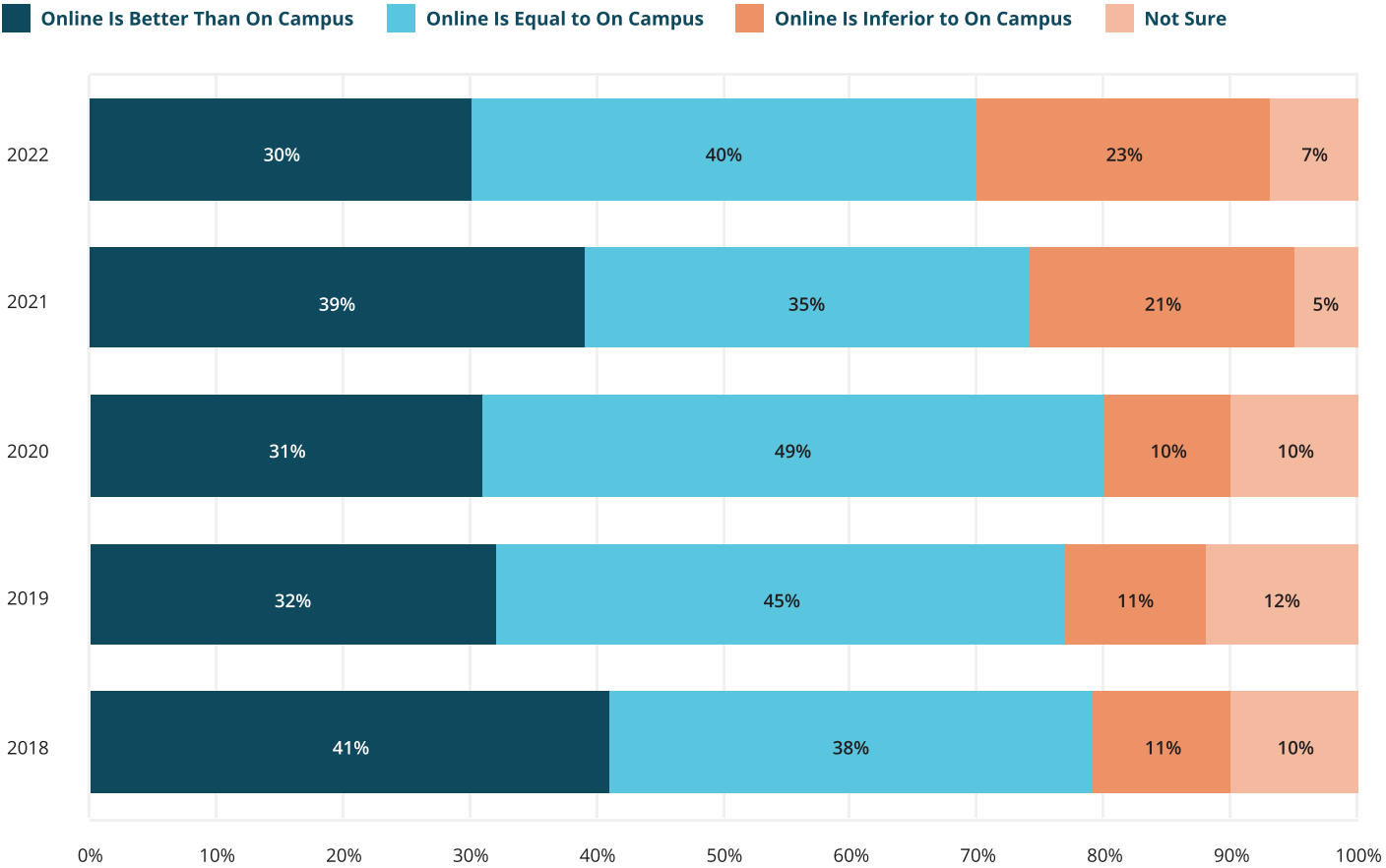
2018 2019 2020 2021 2022



Perception of Online Education

While perceptions of ROI and the willingness to recommend online education remain high, the number of students saying that online education is *better than* or *equal to* on-campus education decreased slightly this year from 74% in 2021 to 70% in 2022. Both years show a decline from 80% in 2020, reported prior to the pandemic.

Perceptions of Online Education, All Student Categories - By Report Year



Students currently enrolled in online programs were the most likely to indicate a positive perception of online education, although this percentage is down from the previous year (from 83% to 78%). Remote students continue to have the least positive perception of online education (64%). The percentage of prospective students with a positive perception increased to 71% from 67% last year; however, this is still a decrease from the 79% reporting a positive perception prior to the pandemic.



BestColleges INSIGHT

First-Hand Experience With Online Learning Is Now Widespread

Most enrolled students during the past two years have experienced remote and/or online learning to some degree, due to campus closures and continued restrictions related to COVID-19. It will be interesting to track this cohort throughout their remaining college programs and future employment to learn more about the effects of this experience on their future decisions related to learning and work.

Conclusion

Online education and higher education may become synonymous on a faster timeline than previously predicted due to the collective experiences of college students, faculty, and staff during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It may be time to drop the distinctions related to delivery, format, and access. If a greater degree of flexibility comes as predicted by this study's participants, the "best of both worlds" promise of blended or hybrid learning may become a reality — integrating the enhanced engagement of in-person interaction with the convenience of online access in ways that meet the needs of different learners. Meeting these needs will require a substantial investment of time and resources with an eye toward providing more transparency to prospective students about what they can expect in terms of both learning experience and expense.

Insights from this year's study provide a starting point for institutional leaders as they plan for the future.

College Students Welcome a Hybrid Approach to Higher Education

Today's college students have experienced multiple semesters — and for some, multiple years — of disrupted college learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some experienced remote learning after being enrolled in on-campus courses that shifted to virtual environments while others enrolled online, some for the first time. First-hand experience seems to result in greater acceptance of online education as remote learners indicate a willingness to enroll online in the future. We also anticipate a growing acceptance of and even preference for enrolling in a variety of course formats (e.g., online, in person, and hybrid) during an academic term.

Student Success Requires Support Beyond Academic Services

While the number of remote learners anticipating lasting mental health effects from the changes they experienced in their education due to the pandemic decreased this year, 1 in 5 continue to have concerns. And the percentage of students expecting lasting effects to their physical health (15%) remained constant. Colleges and universities should not only enhance and extend the non-instructional services (e.g., mental health counseling, wellness programming) available to students, but also provide access to these services through different modalities (i.e., in person, online).

Improved College Cost Transparency Would Improve Student Decision-Making

Understanding what it will cost to go to college and how those costs are determined are significant challenges for anyone thinking about higher education. In the eight years of this study, online program graduates have consistently expressed a level of regret related to cost. While some efforts have been made industry-wide to provide more information about what a specific program will cost (e.g., net price calculators), confusion around college costs and financial assistance persists.

Remote Learning Emerges as a Course Format

At many institutions remote learning has evolved from an emergency mode to something more robust. These courses maintain a heavy reliance on synchronous communication through the use of live, online meetings, which were the default in the early days of the pandemic. But as faculty and students have gained experience in virtual learning environments, schools have worked to improve the overall quality of remote learning, making the most of technology with purposeful instructional strategies. These courses combine the convenient access of online learning with the schedule-driven format more commonly found in on-campus courses. This delivery style may benefit learners who might otherwise struggle with the asynchronous approach of many online courses.

Applying the Lessons Learned During the Pandemic Will Lead to More Adaptable Schools, Faculty, and Students

In the spring of 2020, college campuses abruptly closed in reaction to the pandemic. As a result, in-person, on-campus classes were moved to virtual learning environments in what has since been described as emergency remote learning. Through this experience, many administrators discovered a lack of flexibility in their pre-pandemic processes, which is fueling a new drive to embed flexible options in higher education operations to pave a smoother road forward in future emergency situations.

First-Hand Experience With Online Learning Is Now Widespread

Most enrolled students during the past two years have experienced remote and/or online learning to some degree, due to campus closures and continued restrictions related to COVID-19. It will be interesting to track this cohort throughout their remaining college programs and future employment to learn more about the effects of this experience on their future decisions related to learning and work.

Contributors



About Melissa Venable

Melissa A. Venable, Ph.D., is an online education advisor for BestColleges. In this role, she leads this annual survey research project reporting online education trends found through student and school administrator feedback. Melissa is an adjunct faculty member and online course designer at Saint Leo University and a certified career coach with a background in career development services. She earned her doctorate in instructional technology at the University of South Florida where her research interests focused on distance education and support services for online students.

About BestColleges

BestColleges empowers students to make smarter educational decisions and find schools that best fit their needs through proprietary research, user-friendly guides, and hundreds of unique college rankings. As a trusted education advisor, BestColleges also provides a wide array of college planning, financial aid, and career resources to help students realize life goals and overcome educational challenges as they prepare for careers after college.

Data Notes

1. Percentages reported in this document have been rounded, resulting in some totals adding up to just under or over 100.
2. Several charts and descriptions present results for questions in which survey participants could select more than one response.
3. Findings reported from school administrators are based on the number of participants responding to each question; all questions, except a screening question related to the delivery of online programs, were optional.
4. Data are self-reported.

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APPENDIX

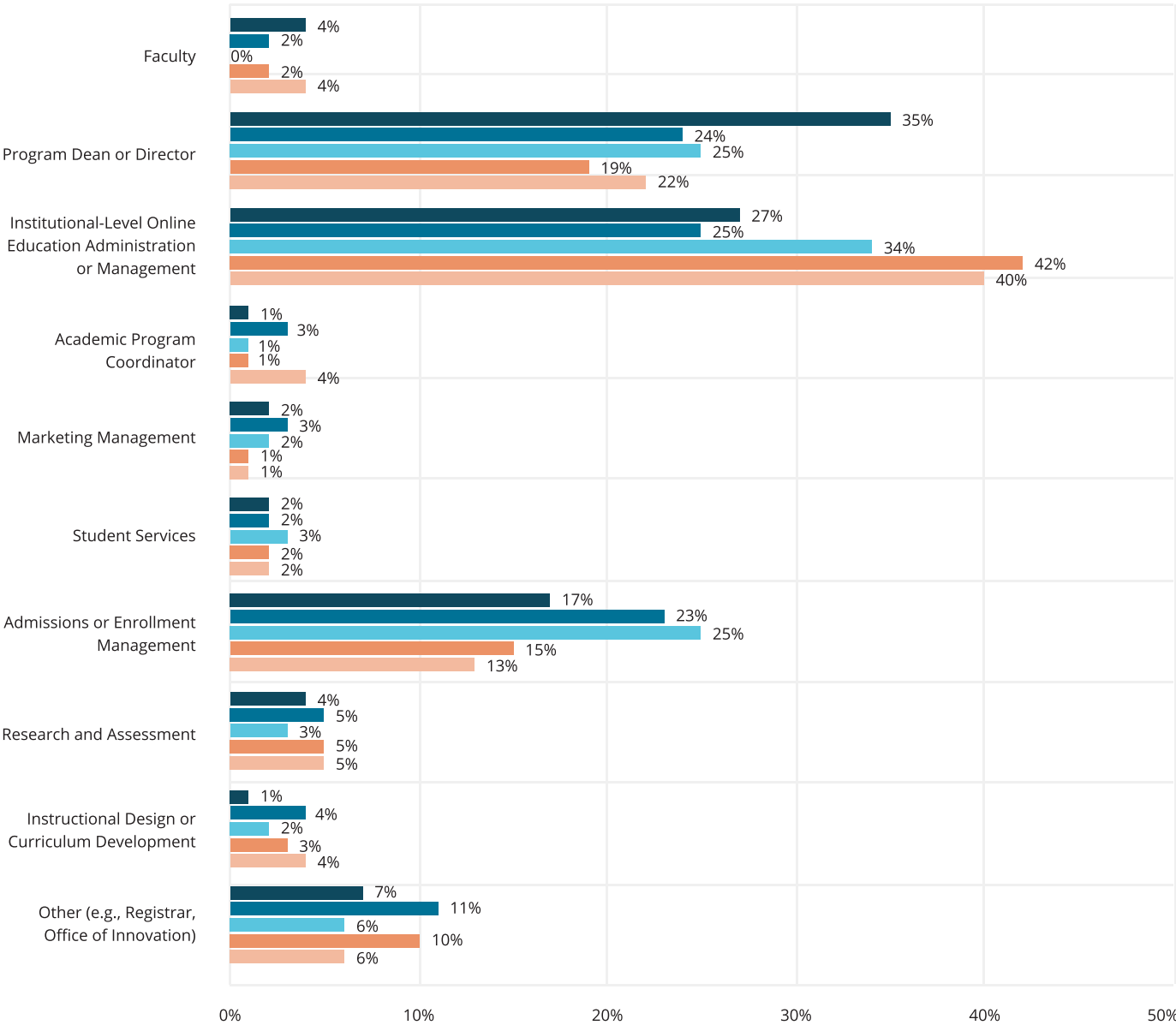
Participant Demographics

School Administrator Participants

Data Collection - Qualtrics

Respondent's Primary Role*

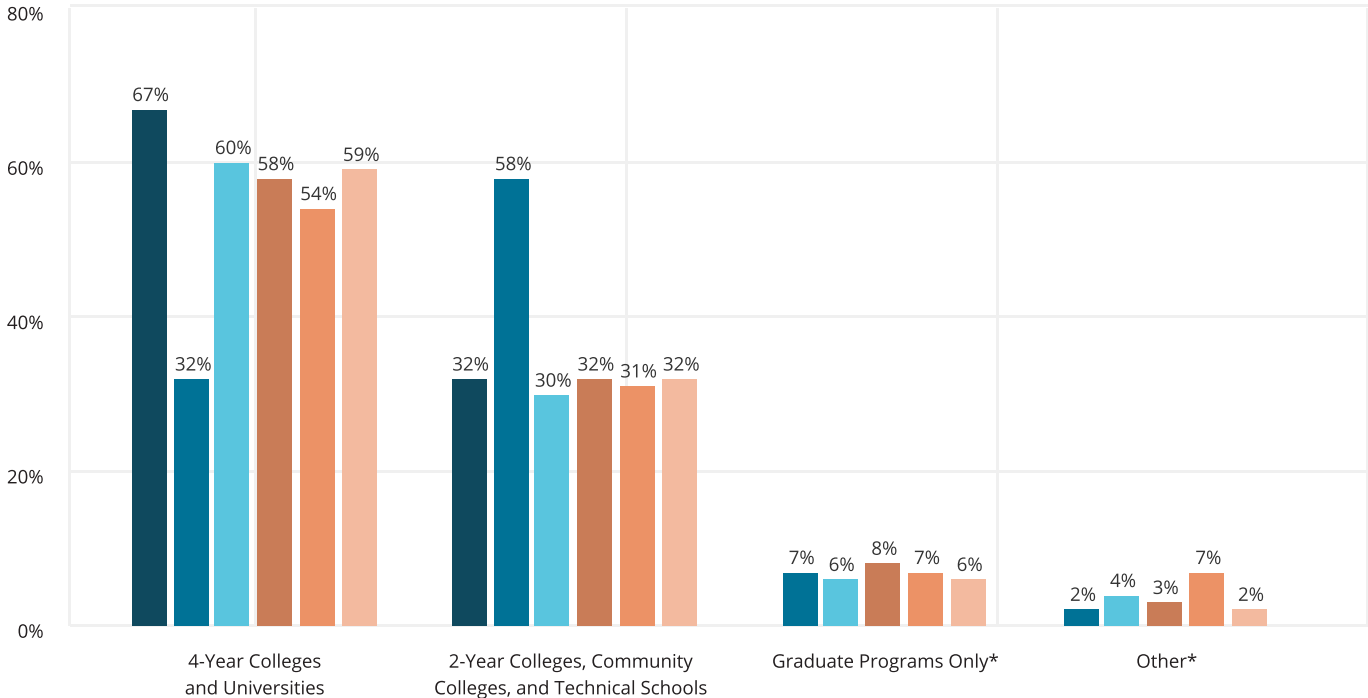
2018 2019 2020 (n=155) 2021 (n=166) 2022 (n=316)



*This data not collected prior to 2018.

Institutional Classification

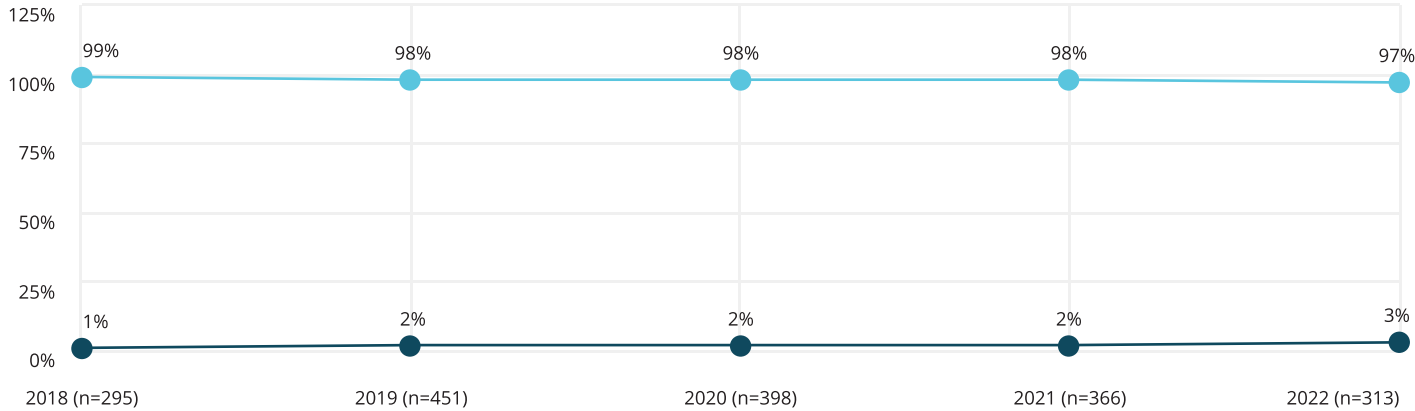
2017 (n=305) 2018 (n=295) 2019 (n=451) 2020 (n=398) 2021 (n=366) 2022 (n=311)



*Response option added in 2018.

Institution Type

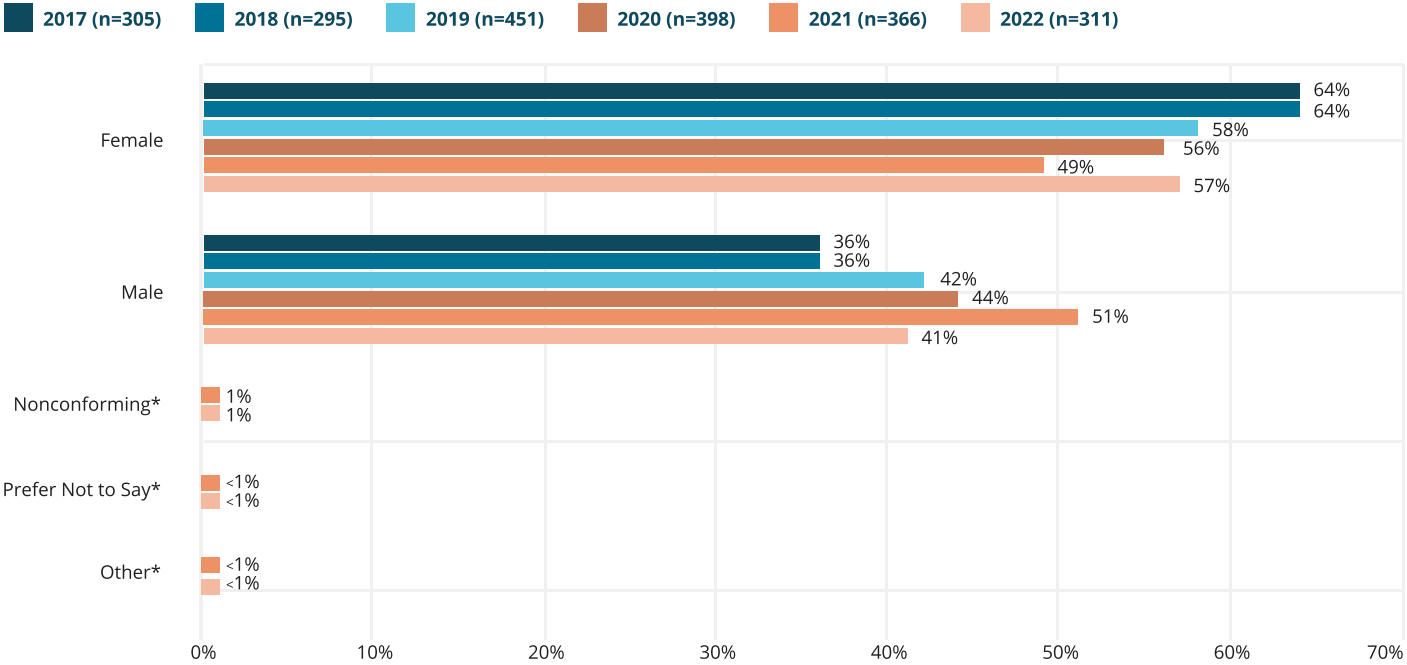
For-Profit Nonprofit



Student Participants

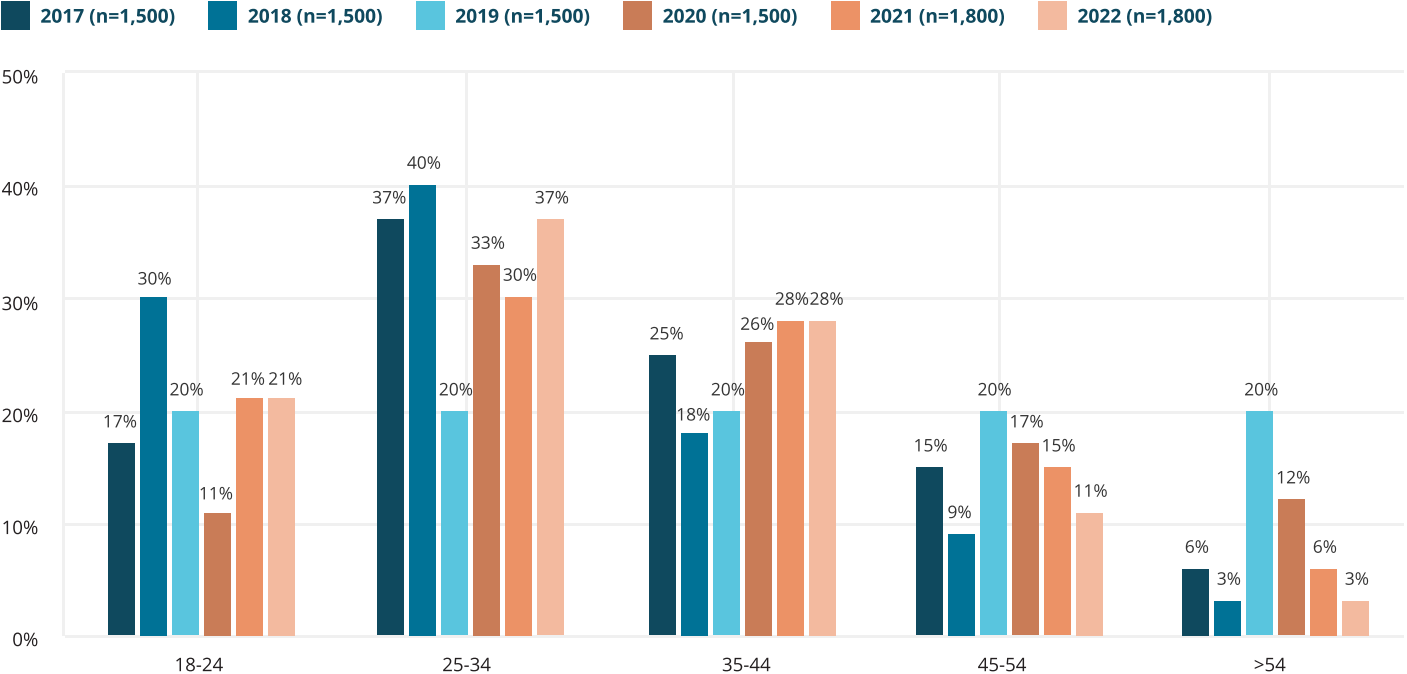
Data Collection - Lucid LLC

Gender

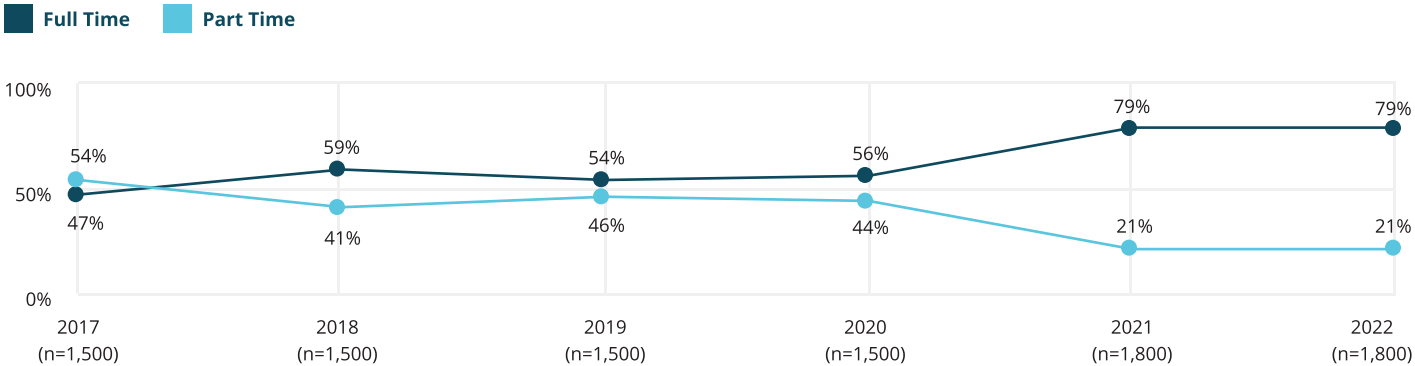


*Response option added in 2021.

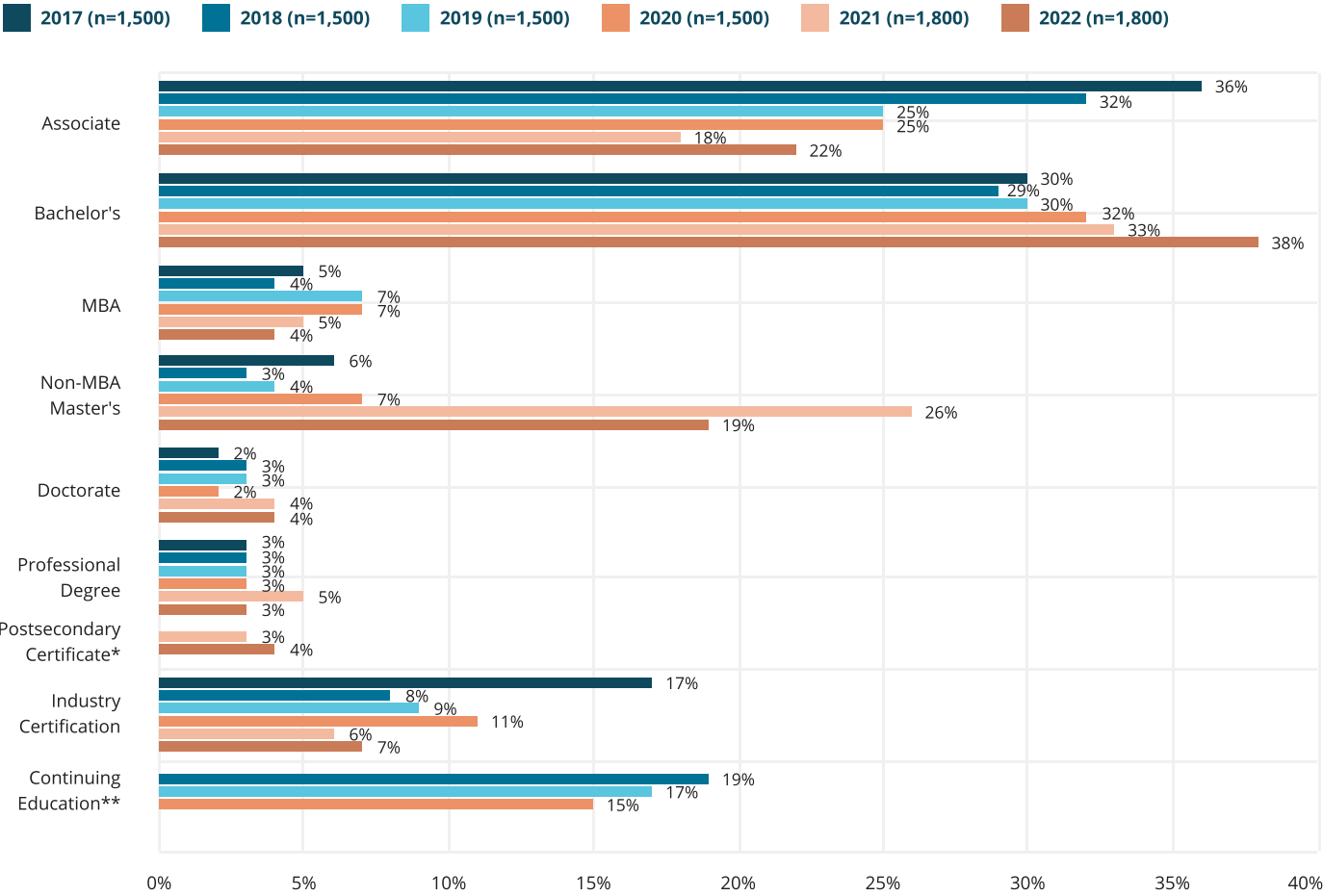
Age



Enrollment Status

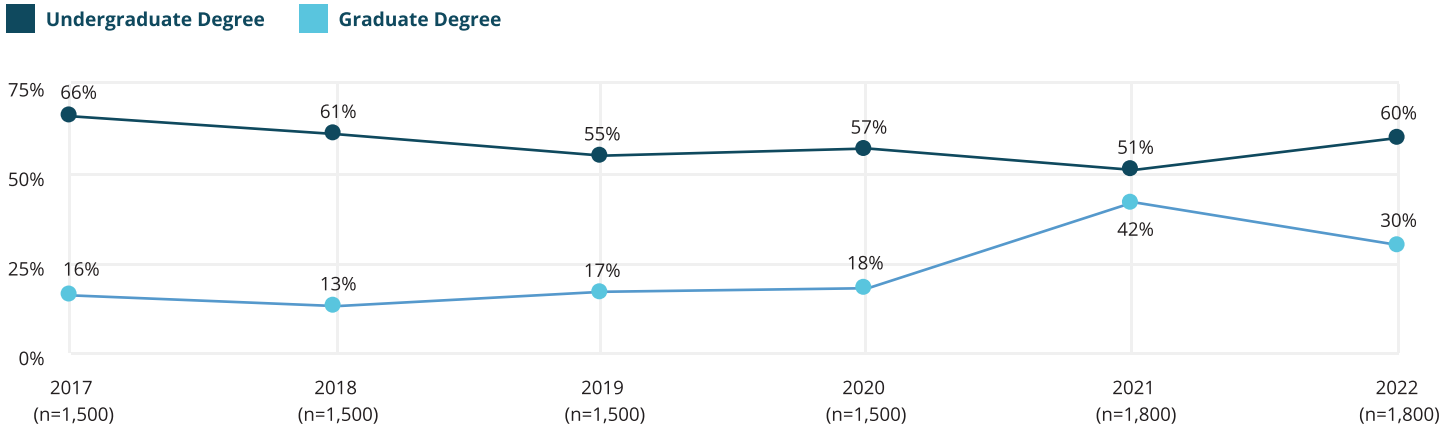


Degree Pursuing

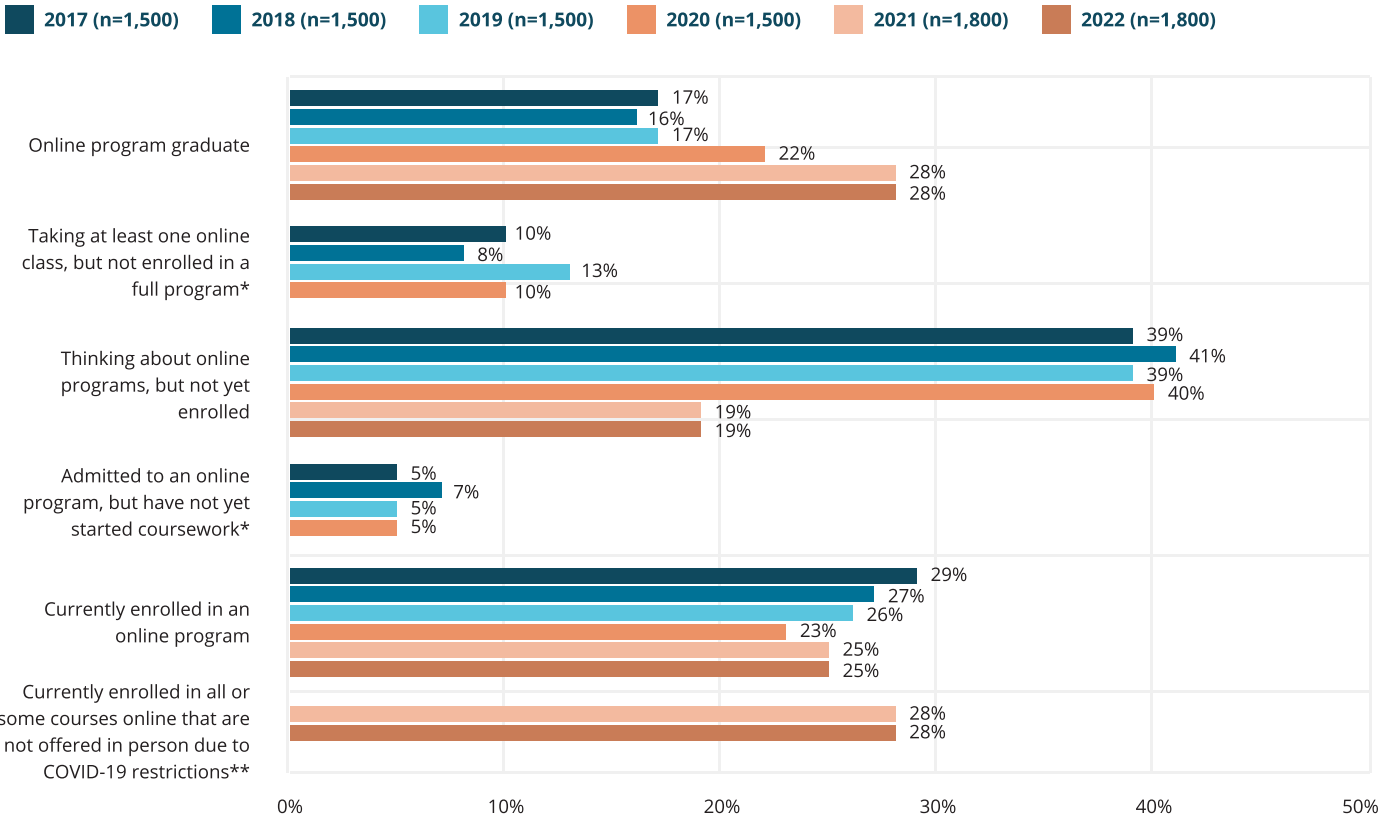


*Response option added in 2021. **Response option added in 2018, removed in 2021.

Enrollment Level



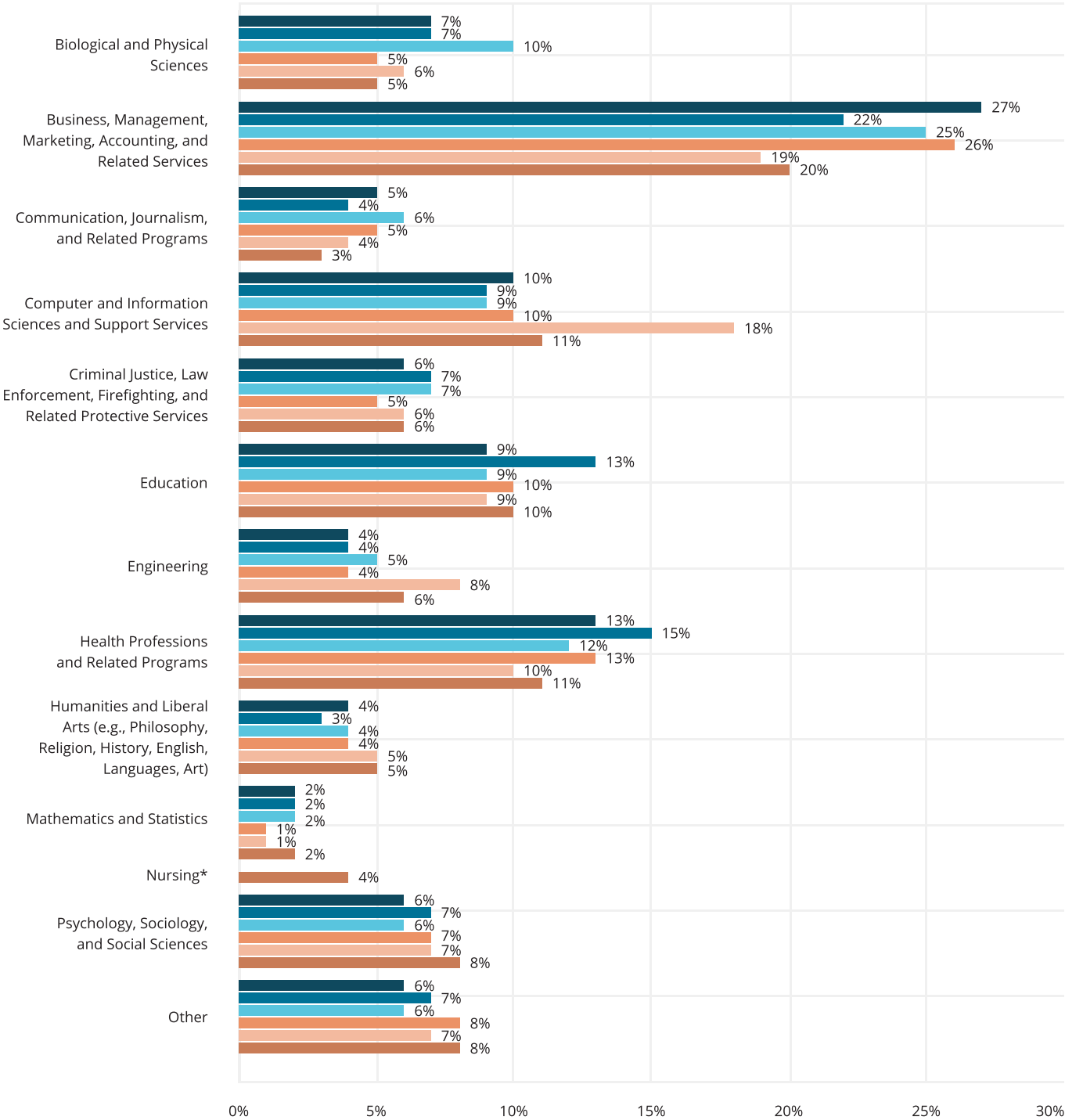
Student Status



*Response option removed in 2021. **Response option added in 2021.

Major/Intended Major

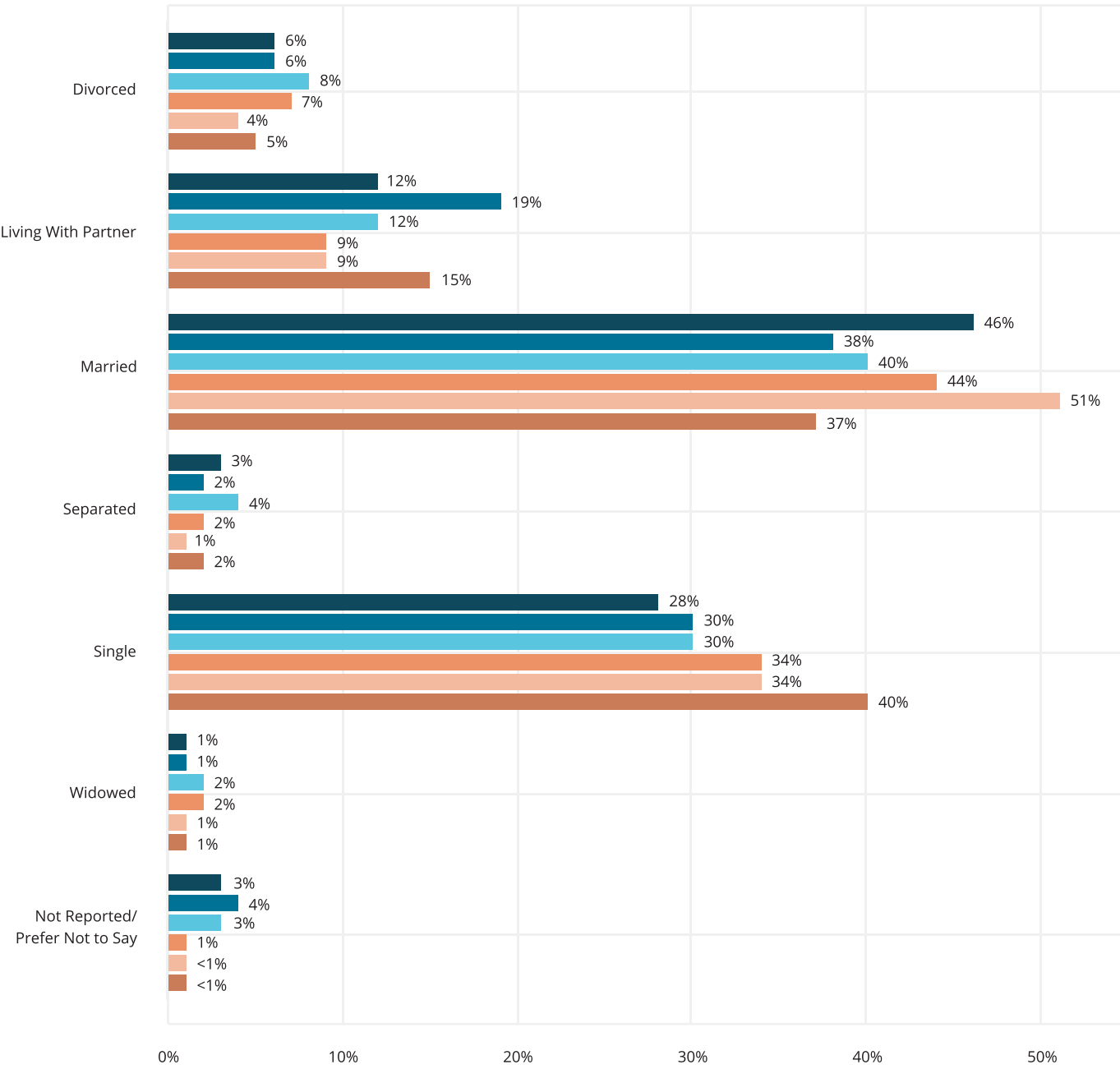
2017 (n=1,500) 2018 (n=1,500) 2019 (n=1,500) 2020 (n=1,500) 2021 (n=1,800) 2022 (n=1,800)



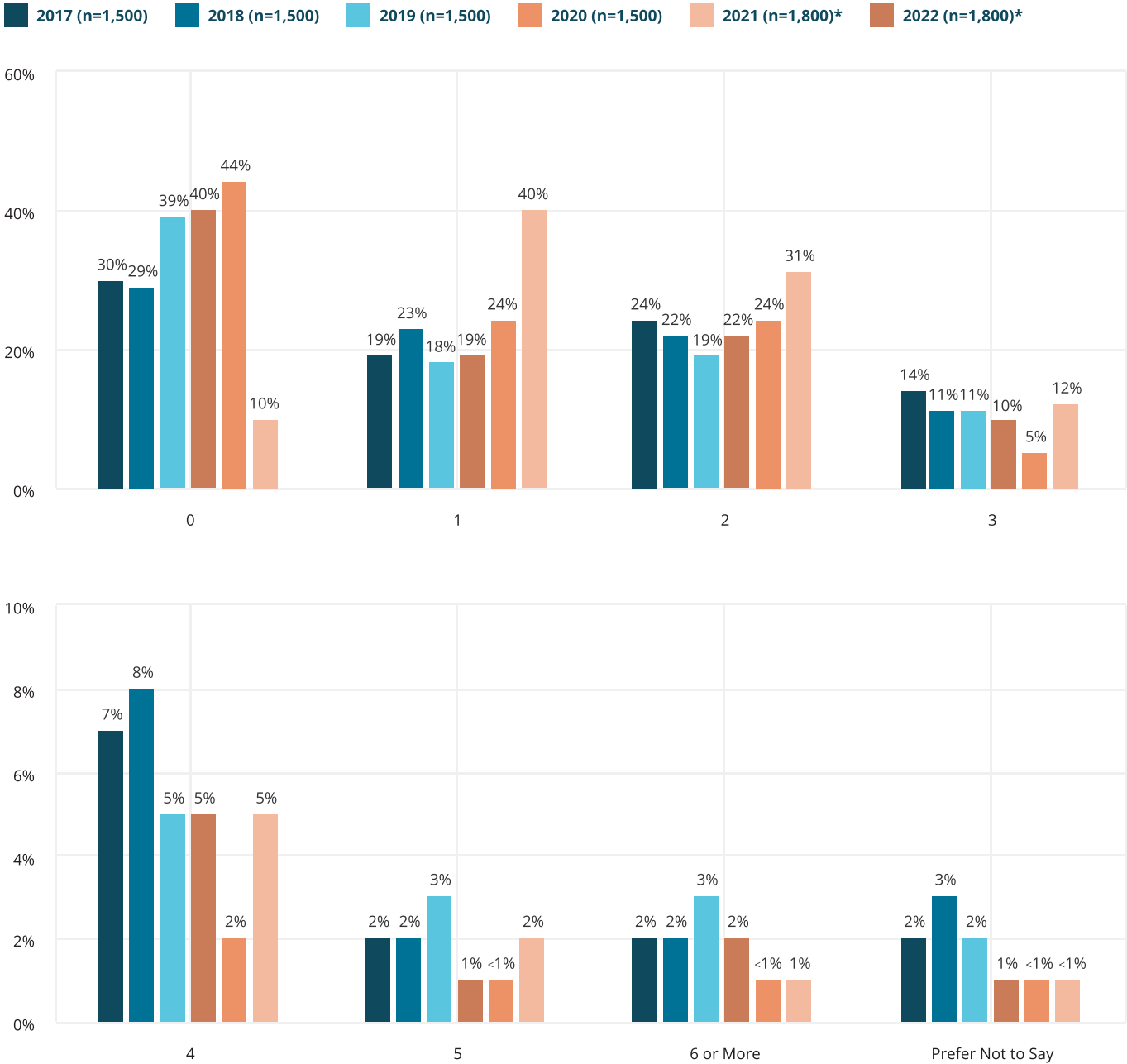
*Response option added in 2022.

Marital Status

2017 (n=1,500) 2018 (n=1,500) 2019 (n=1,500) 2020 (n=1,500) 2021 (n=1,800) 2022 (n=1,800)



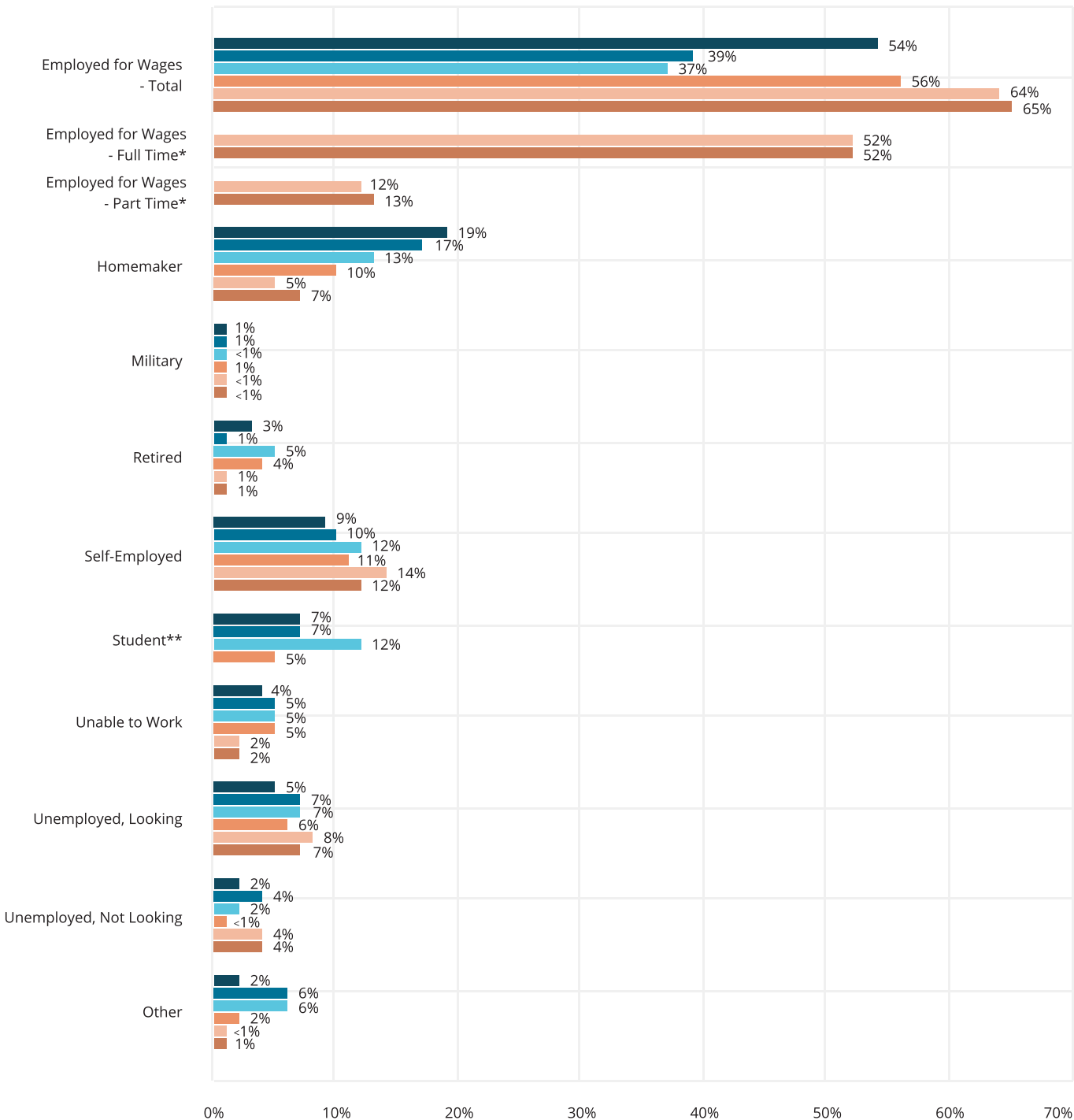
Number of Children



*Item revised in 2021 to reflect number of children under the age of 18 living at home.

Employment Status

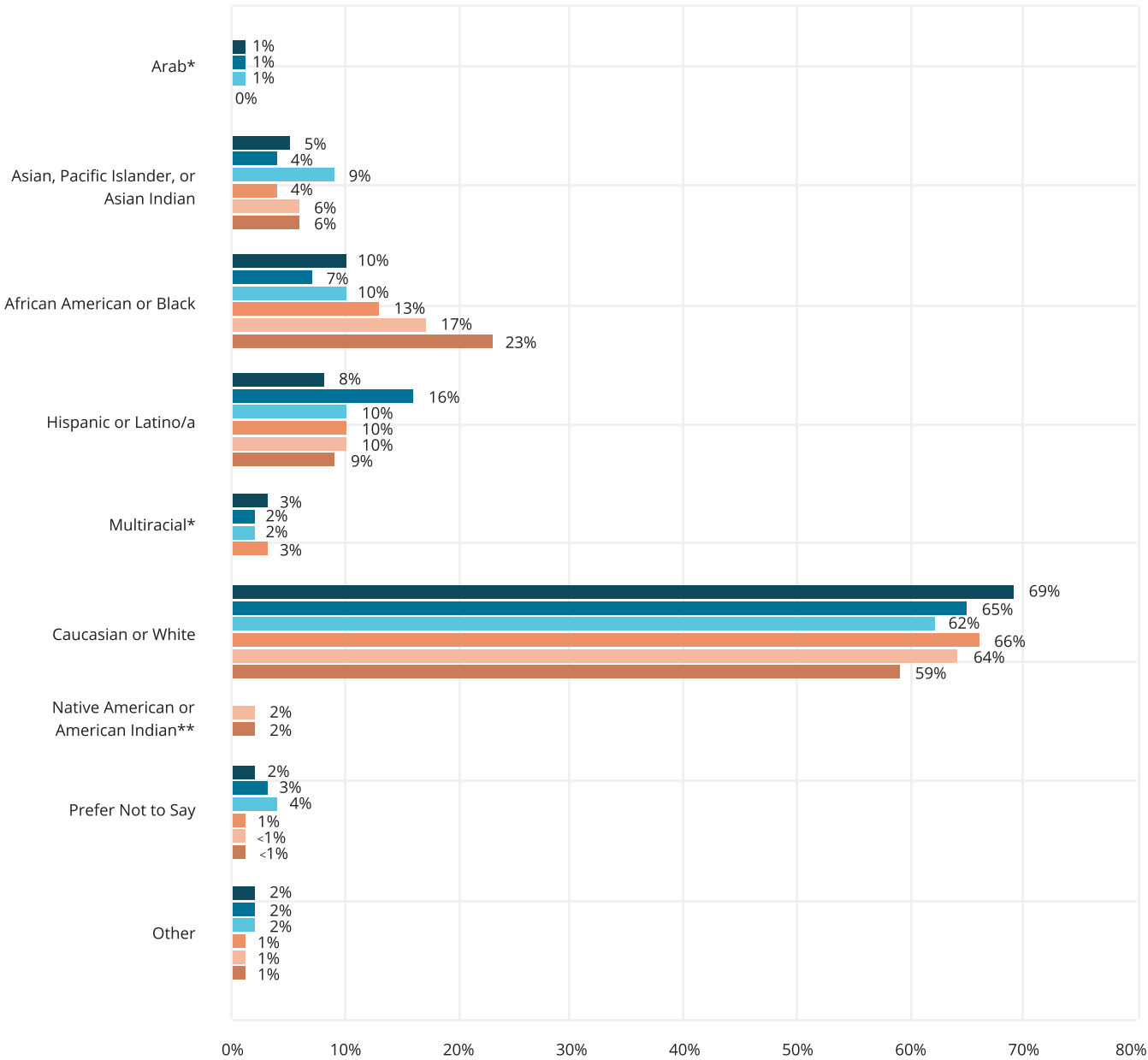
2017 (n=1,500) 2018 (n=1,500) 2019 (n=1,500) 2020 (n=1,500) 2021 (n=1,800) 2022 (n=1,800)



*Response option added in 2021 **Response option removed in 2021.

Race/Ethnicity

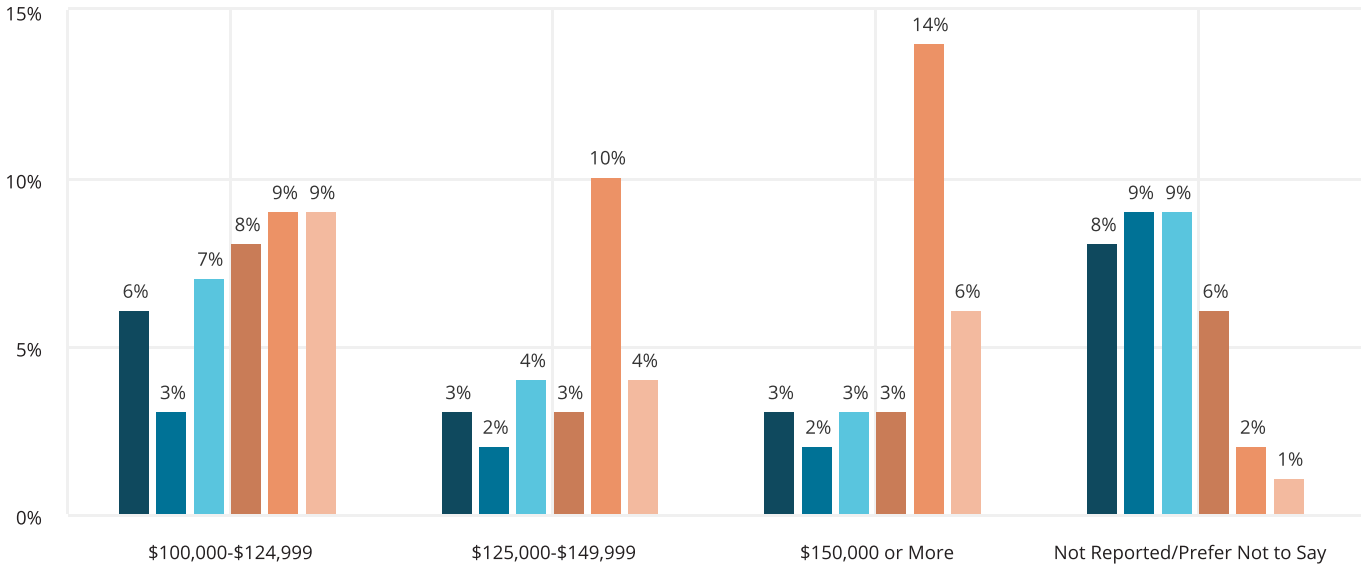
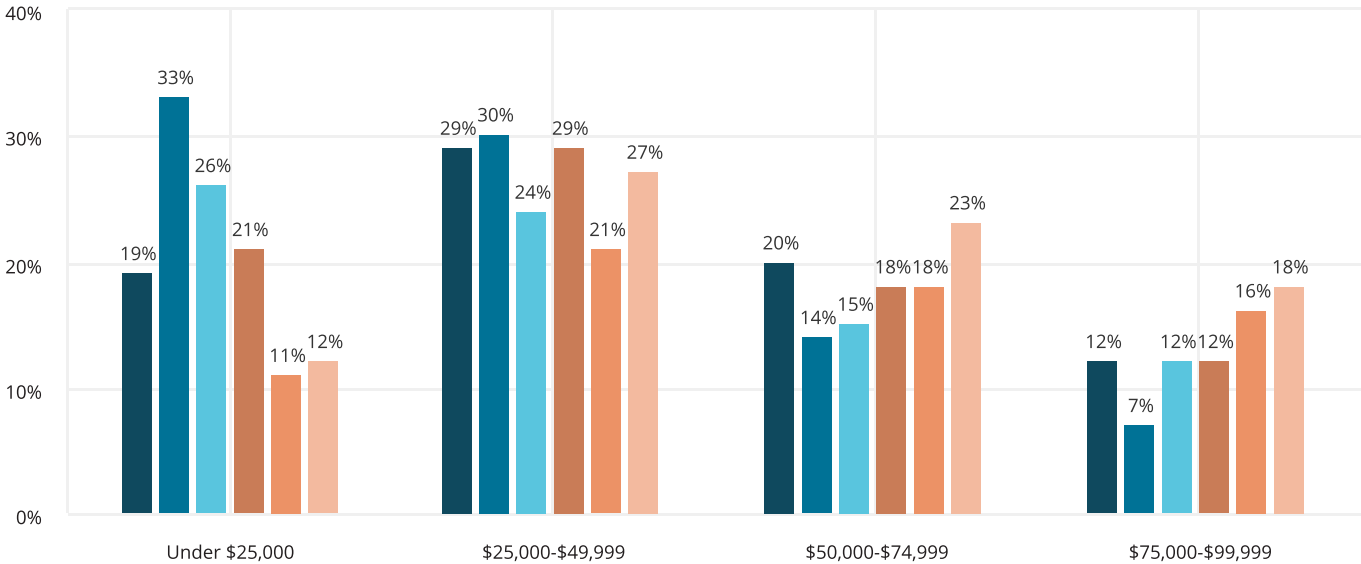
2017 (n=1,500) 2018 (n=1,500) 2019 (n=1,500) 2020 (n=1,500) 2021 (n=1,800) 2022 (n=1,800)

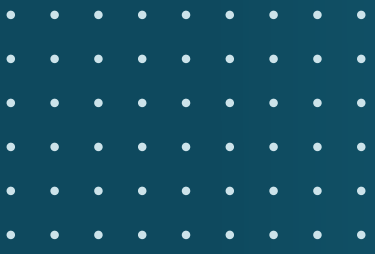


*Response option removed in 2021. **Response option added in 2021.

Annual Household Income





2017 (n=1,500) 2018 (n=1,500) 2019 (n=1,500) 2020 (n=1,500) 2021 (n=1,800) 2022 (n=1,800)





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