



Online Learning at Public Universities

RECRUITING, ORIENTING, AND SUPPORTING ONLINE FACULTY
A Survey of Chief Academic Officers at Public Regional Comprehensive Universities Belonging to AASCU



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Recruiting, Orienting, and Supporting Online Faculty

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A joint project of Learning House, a Wiley brand, and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities

Andrew J. Magda

In 2013, AASCU first collaborated with Learning House to study the growing impact of online learning on AASCU institutions. In this new report, we have taken the opportunity to partner again to address online faculty recruitment, training, and support needs. We are grateful for Learning House's outstanding research, which provides rich insight into these issues of practice. This research will assist AASCU institutions, and others, as they continue to develop and adapt their instructional offerings to meet student needs.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Key Findings.....	6
Section 1: The Role of Faculty Who Teach Online	9
Volume of Online Courses.....	9
Online Faculty Instruction.....	10
Online Course Development.....	13
Policies for Online Instruction	15
Online Faculty Evaluations.....	17
Section 2: Professional Development and Support for Online Faculty	18
Understanding Development Needs.....	18
Support Services for Online Faculty.....	20
Required Faculty Activities to Teach Online	21
Examples of Initial Training	23
Professional Development Opportunities	24

Section 3: The Role of Adjunct Faculty	25
Adjunct Faculty’s Benefit to the Institution	25
Adjunct Faculty Recruitment	26
Adjunct Faculty Hiring Process	27
Courses Taught by Adjunct Faculty	29
Recommendations	31
Methodology	35
Appendix A: The Online College Student	36
Staying Local	36
Fields of Study	37
Student Demographics.....	40
References	43



Introduction

In 2013, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and Learning House, a Wiley brand (Learning House) partnered on a survey of AASCU members' chief academic officers (CAOs) to document the landscape of online learning at their institutions. The survey found that nearly 90 percent of responding AASCU schools with online programs experienced barriers around faculty acceptance of online learning and the greater effort faculty must put in to develop online courses (Aldridge, S.C., et al, 2013). CAOs reported that the leading challenge to serving online students was “training and recruiting faculty to teach online” (61%).

Those trends prompted AASCU and Learning House to partner again in the summer of 2018 to further explore the development and support of faculty who teach online. Note that this current report also elaborates upon findings and recommendations from a 2015 study between WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET) and Learning House that focused on best practices for adjunct faculty who teach online. You can visit research.learninghouse.com to access those reports.

Online learning continues to flourish, despite difficult circumstances. There is an unprecedented state of decline in higher education enrollments overall. According to the most recent estimates from National Student Clearinghouse, there was a 1-plus percent decrease in term-to-term enrollments in the spring of 2018. Still, Eduventures forecasts that the online market will increase by 1 percent, reaching 4 million students in 2019 (Eduventures, 2016). This shows an increasing number of online students coming to colleges and universities across the country. As a result, there is greater demand not

only for online courses, but also for the faculty members needed to teach them. After all, finding and equipping faculty members to teach online courses is, based on our past research, one of the greatest problems facing higher education institutions.

This report can help institutions understand how AASCU faculty members are provided with development opportunities to teach online courses. It also examines which of these opportunities may be required of them to teach online and how adjunct faculty members are recruited to teach online. The report surveyed 95 AASCU CAOs, a 25 percent response rate, along with follow-up interviews of 10 survey respondents to learn more about training and professional development programs for their online faculty.

AASCU and Learning House hope that online education leaders will find the following information useful in developing high-quality, engaging online courses that increase the completion rates of graduates. Recommendations for online programs based on survey findings and our collective experiences are presented in **bold, highlighted text** at the end of selected sections as well as at the end of this report. As mentioned, we conducted in-depth phone interviews with 10 of the responding institutions to find out more about their faculty development efforts. Findings from these interviews are included in the report in separate sub-sections titled **PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVES**.

KEY FINDINGS

Below is a summary of the key findings within the report.

1. Online and blended learning is significant at AASCU institutions

It's difficult to overstate the magnitude of online and blended learning at AASCU institutions. Close to 40 percent of courses offered at those responding institutions are online or blended, and the implications carry over directly to core faculty members. There may be an assumption that full-time faculty will teach online, as 67 percent of online and blended courses are taught by full-time faculty. While online course development is often incentivized (62%), instruction is not (65%). Nearly all full-time faculty members are expected to teach online courses as part of their regular workload (98%).

2. Training and development of faculty who teach online is not consistently mandated

Faculty autonomy and contracts can sometimes prevent the mandating of training and development opportunities for faculty so that they can be aware of the evolving best practices for instructing online. As such, it appears that most training focuses more on LMS/technology use (97% of AASCU members provide this training). For mandated training, just over one-third (37%) of AASCU institutions require a faculty-led pedagogical training compared to 45 percent requiring LMS training. Overall, even with faculty contracts, these percentages around offered and required development opportunities appear low given how abundant online learning courses have become at AASCU institutions.

3. Evaluation of faculty who teach online is not universal

Student feedback is standard for online courses (90% at least once per term). However, other types of feedback to faculty who teach online are much less frequent, if they occur at all. Seventy percent of supervisors evaluate faculty who teach online once a year, and 18 percent do so once a term. Peer faculty evaluations are rare, with 60 percent of surveyed institutions noting that they never happen. Regular evaluations offer a practical, beneficial way for faculty to improve their skills and could be especially helpful for those new to online instruction.

4. Faculty engagement with online learners is often not defined by a set policy

AASCU institutions lack written policies for faculty members' interactions with online students. More than 60 percent do not have a policy for how often a faculty member must post on the message boards (74%). Sixty-three percent do not mandate how quickly a faculty member must respond to a student's post. At 71 percent of responding institutions, there is no policy on how quickly student assignments need to be graded. This lack of formal documented policy can undermine online learning, as these interactions are vital for students learning in this medium.

5. Concerns surrounding the hiring of adjunct faculty

Nearly one-third of online courses utilize adjunct faculty members, mostly as instructors for online undergraduate general education courses (55%), which makes them a significant source of instructors for online learning. However, the majority of respondents report a decentralized hiring process controlled by individual colleges and departments (88%). Most jobs are solicited through postings on the institution's website (82%) or by word-of-mouth (68%), demonstrating how straightforward it can be to find adjunct faculty. The hiring process is relatively standard, with references checked (81%), degrees verified (78%), and background checks performed (74%). Less common is the request for practical examples of their work such as teaching samples (26%) or writing samples (8%).

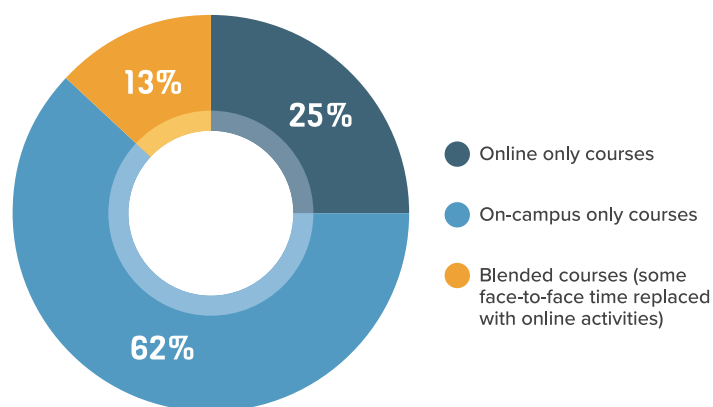
SECTION 1

The Role of Faculty Who Teach Online

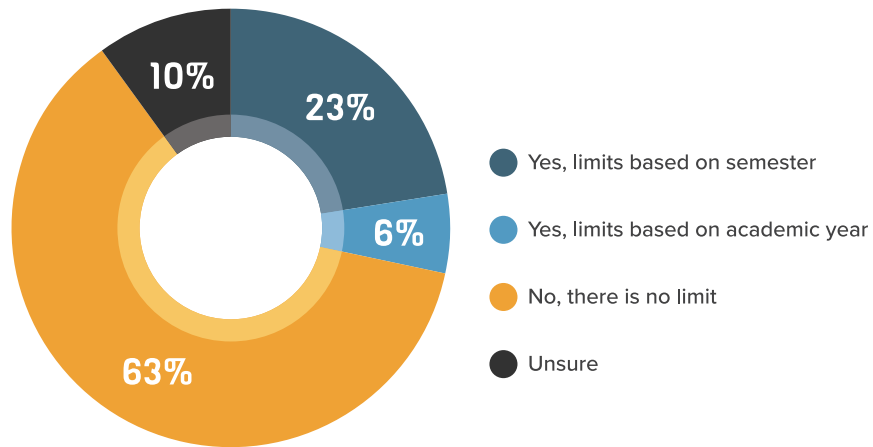
VOLUME OF ONLINE COURSES

Online and hybrid courses comprise 38 percent of courses offered at responding AASCU institutions. Most institutions (63%) note that there are no restrictions placed on the number of online courses a faculty member can teach during a specific term or academic year.

Thinking of the courses that your institution offered over the last 12 months, what is your best estimate of the percentage of courses that were:



Do you have a limit on the number of courses or percentage of FTE* that an individual faculty member can teach online?

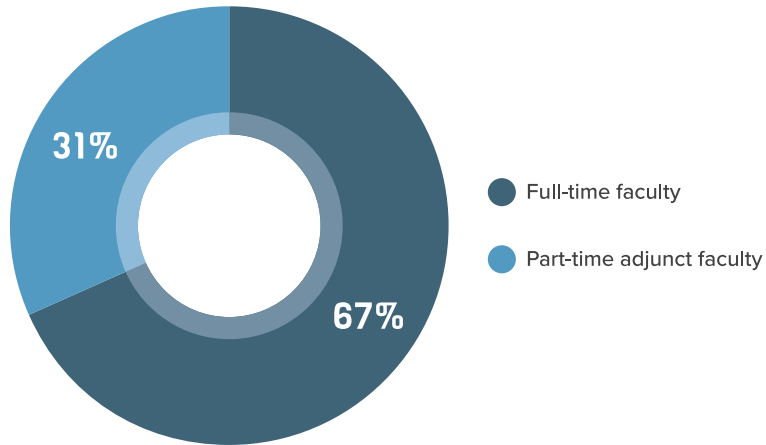


*full time equivalent

ONLINE FACULTY INSTRUCTION

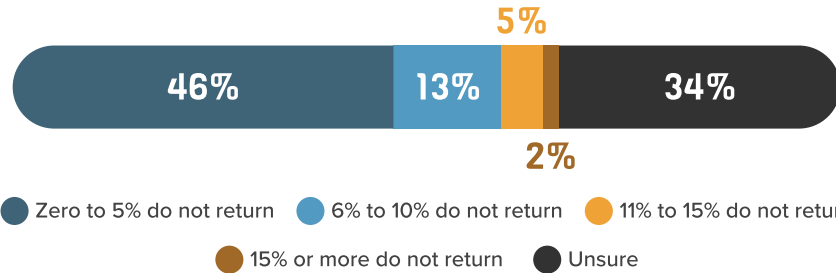
Instruction at those AASCU institutions surveyed is split, on average, two-thirds to one-third in favor of full-time faculty. Full-time faculty members are expected to teach online at nearly all AASCU institutions, and adjuncts are not far behind, commanding a sizeable share of online courses. Overall, online faculty turnover appears low, with nearly half (46%) of AASCU institutions reporting turnover between 0 and 5 percent. However, one-third (34%) were unsure of the rate.

Thinking of the online courses that your institution offered over the last 12 months, what is your best estimate of the percentage of courses that were taught by:



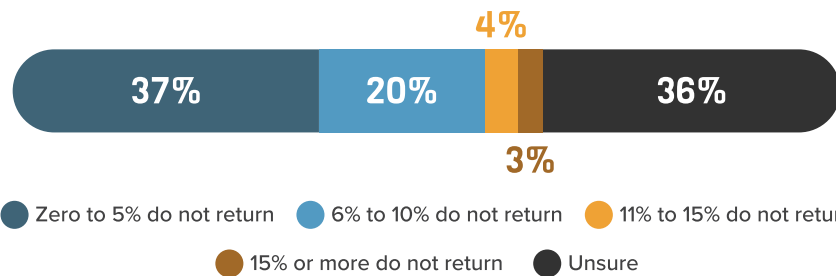
Online classes are taught by:	Multiple Response
Full-time faculty as part of regular load	98%
Full-time faculty as overload	72%
Full-time adjunct faculty who teach only online	40%
Part-time adjunct faculty who teach only online	82%
Part-time adjunct faculty who teach both online and on-ground	85%

What is your best estimate for the turnover of faculty that teach online over the past academic year?



Note: "Turnover" is defined as those who taught online last year who are no longer teaching online for you this year, regardless of reason.

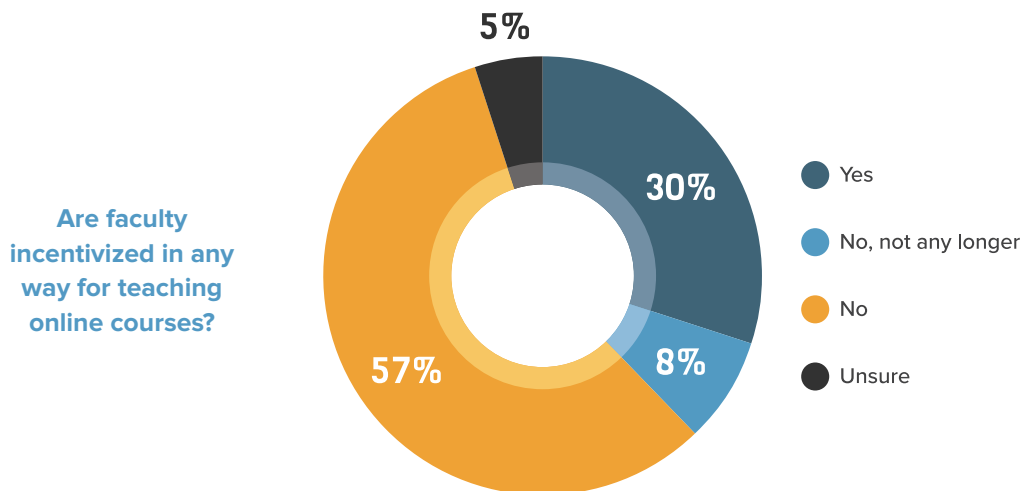
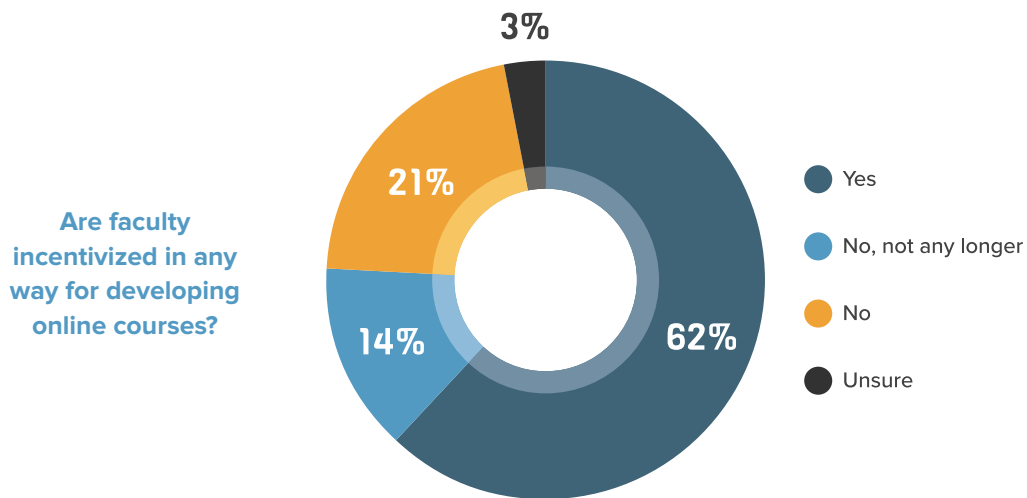
What is your best estimate the year-to-year turnover of online adjunct faculty you employ?



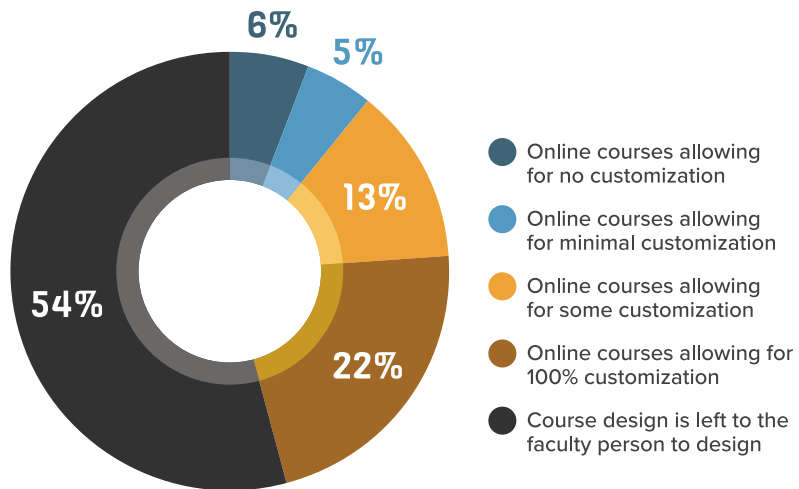
Note: "Turnover" is defined as those who taught online last year who are no longer teaching online for you this year, regardless of reason.

ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Most faculty members are incentivized for developing online courses (62%), but a larger percentage are not incentivized for teaching online courses. Fifty-four percent of responding AASCU member institutions leave online course development up to the faculty member, while 22 percent allow for full customization of provided online courses. This indicates that many institutions lack a master course philosophy, a practice where one version of a course is developed, and subsequent faculty all teach that same version of the course with little to no customization. Please see the “Recommendations” section of this report for more information.



Thinking of online courses your institution offered over the last 12 months, what percentage were:



Note: "Customization" is focused on course content and defined as the ability to alter or add content, outcomes, assignments, case studies, quizzes, assessments, and other learning resources.

RECOMMENDATION

Online learners need a standard experience. Often, they're going from one eight-week course to the next throughout their academic program. If students have to adapt to what each instructor thinks an online course should look and feel like, as well as how it will function, the resulting experience can result in unnecessary stress and may undermine the learning experience.

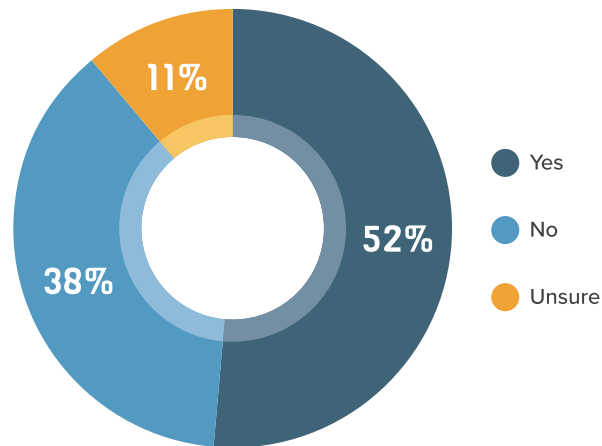
POLICIES FOR ONLINE INSTRUCTION

How faculty members engage and communicate with students in online courses is not often guided by a policy. In the survey, four different scenarios surrounding faculty members' interactions with students were explored. Responding to a student's email is the most common situation in which there is a written policy outlining interaction (39%); twenty-four percent are expected to respond within 48 hours. More than 60 percent of AASCU institutions lack policies for how quickly faculty members should post topics on a message board, grade assignments, or respond to student.

Just over half (52%) of AASCU institutions surveyed have a written policy about holding office hours for online students.

What is your written policy for faculty who teach online in regard to them:	Within 24 hours	Within 48 hours	Within 72 hours	Within a week	There is no set policy	Other
Posting a topic on a message board	4%	13%	0%	2%	74%	7%
Grading assignments	2%	2%	14%	3%	71%	8%
Responding to student posts on a message board	4%	22%	0%	3%	63%	8%
Responding to a student email or inquiry	14%	24%	0%	1%	54%	7%

Is there a written policy for faculty who teach online to hold office hours?



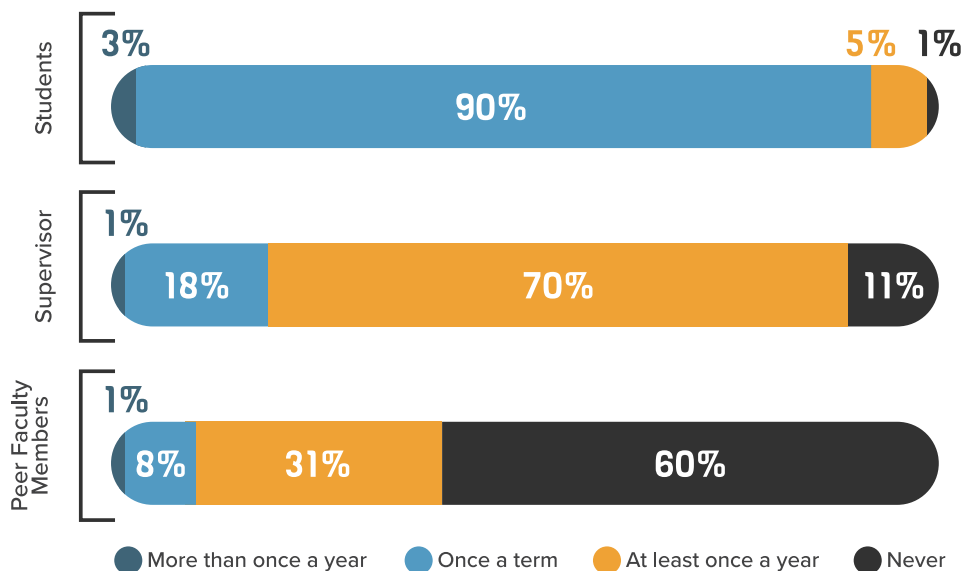
PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVES

In interviews with 10 AASCU CAOs, interviewees noted that written policies for many of these areas do not exist due to the belief they would impede academic freedom. Instead, faculty members are informed of best practices in these areas if they go through training or work with instructional designers to build their course. As an example, it would be recommended to them to respond to students within 24 to 48 hours after inquiry.

ONLINE FACULTY EVALUATIONS

Faculty evaluations occur at AASCU institutions, but frequency varies by source. Students typically evaluate faculty once a term (90%), likely through an end-of-term survey. Supervisors typically evaluate faculty once a year (70%), but a sizable minority (18%) evaluate faculty once a term. Peer faculty evaluations are less common, as just over one-third (31%) of faculty are evaluated by peers at least once a year.

How often do the following individuals formally evaluate your online faculty?



RECOMMENDATION

Establishing a feedback cycle can help instructors continually improve and incorporate new techniques into their pedagogy in the online environment. In most cases, feedback is not consistently given and typically from a single source. Having multiple sources of and opportunities for receiving feedback can help drive a process of continual evolution and improvement. Such a process can also ensure stated procedures are being universally applied.

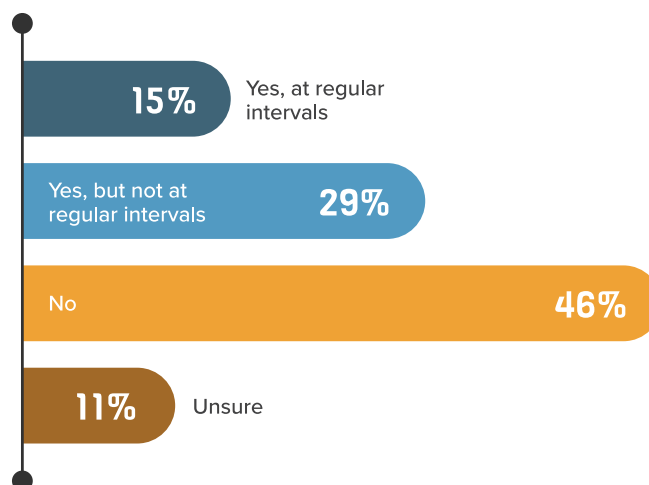
SECTION 2

Professional Development and Support for Online Faculty

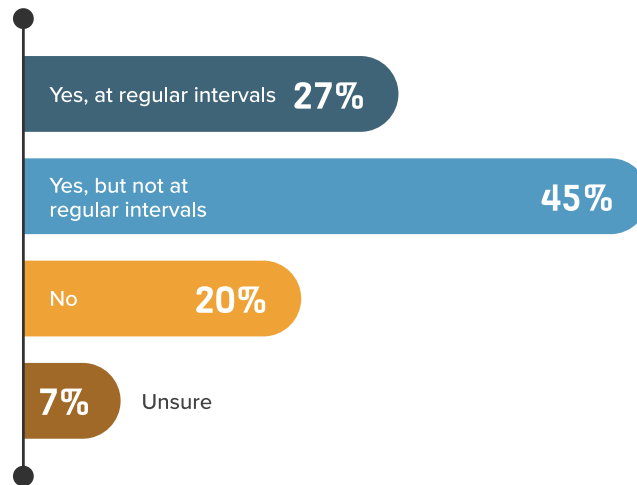
UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

At nearly three-quarters (72%) of responding AASCU member institutions, faculty who teach online are surveyed about their professional development needs. However, surveys asking their overall satisfaction are less common (44%).

Do you survey your faculty who teach online for their overall satisfaction at your institution?



Do you survey your faculty who teach online on their training and development needs?



PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVES

Interviews revealed that surveys occur at institutions that have formal faculty development processes for online courses. That is a helpful way to engage with faculty and receive their ideas for future training. However, the frequency of interviews can vary, and all of them asked questions that focused on development needs, failing to ask about their satisfaction with online learning or what input they had to improve the process. Interviewees stressed that surveys can be included in newsletters to faculty or as their own separate communication. Either way, it is an important component to establishing two-way communication for online training and development needs.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR ONLINE FACULTY

Faculty who teach online require training to ensure they deliver a quality learning experience. Nearly all surveyed AASCU members provide faculty with training on the learning management system (LMS) that is used to support the online course (97%) as well as instructional design support (94%). Pedagogical training is also a staple at 90% of AASCU institutions surveyed, but it appears that members are less likely to provide this support “fully” (56%) as compared to “a version” of the support (34%). Note that a “fully” provided service is a formal or standardized training, which is often required, instead of “a version” of the service being optional or unstandardized training. A 24/7 faculty help desk is offered fully by 31 percent of AASCU institutions and an additional 31 percent offer a version of this.

For each of the following, please indicate the degree to which your institution offers the service independently to faculty that teach online:	We provide this fully	We provide a version of this	We do not currently provide this	Unsure
Instructional/training on LMS usage	78%	19%	1%	2%
Instructional design	66%	28%	3%	2%
Instruction/training on pedagogy	56%	34%	8%	2%
24/7 faculty help desk	31%	31%	37%	2%

RECOMMENDATION

Help desks are relatively uncommon support services for online faculty, but they can be helpful, even vital, for instructors new to online education. In this learning format, faculty can have a fear of the unknown, causing them to resist teaching online. Along with various training and professional development opportunities, a robust 24/7 help desk can help assure instructors that the institution is there to support them. Sometimes a 24/7 help desk is not realistic; in that case, providing some off-hours support should be considered.

REQUIRED FACULTY ACTIVITIES TO TEACH ONLINE

Surprisingly, a significant minority of AASCU member institutions do not require any of the activities listed below to be accomplished by faculty before they teach online (23%). Forty-five percent require a self-paced LMS training and 37% require an instructor-led LMS training. Just behind those figures is orientation to the support services offered for online students (44%). Just over one-third (37%) require an instructor-led training on online teaching methods. Even fewer AASCU institutions require faculty to go through an instructor-led (30%) or self-paced online course design training (29%).




Which of the following describe the activities that you require of online faculty prior to teaching their first online class for your institution?	Multiple Response
Self-paced training on the institution's technologies (LMS, web resources) used in online courses	45%
Orientation to the institution's support services (technology support, tutoring, etc.) for online students	44%
Instructor-led class on the institution's technologies (LMS, web resources) used in online courses	37%
Instructor-led training on effective online teaching methods	37%
Orientation to the institution's academic and student policies for online students	34%
Instructor-led training on online course design	30%
Self-paced training on effective online teaching methods	29%
Self-paced training on online course design	29%
Other (please specify)	18%
None	23%

PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVES

AASCU members interviewed noted different degrees of initial trainings that occur. Differences are around mandatory versus optional, length, and outcomes. However, the topics covered appeared somewhat similar as they focus more on pedagogy and less on technology. Those with long-standing training programs even noted a shift over time from technology to pedagogy. Knowledge of the LMS is usually required (separate training offered) or a very introductory-level training can be built in. From there, topics covered include how to direct students to services, best practices around course development, how to make courses engaging, and the different technologies available to them at the university. Trainings can last as long as six to 12-weeks or as short as a few days. Some have faculty start to build their first course and thus have a practical workshop angle.

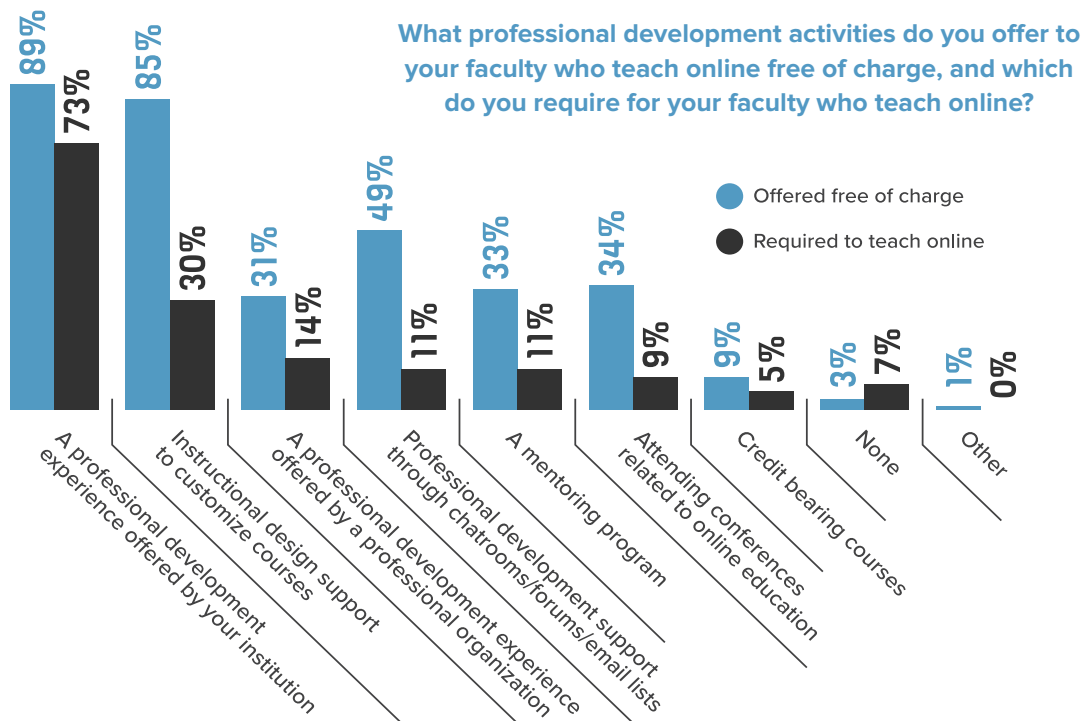
EXAMPLES OF INITIAL TRAINING

Based on the follow-up interviews conducted, respondents provided details on specific initial courses or trainings for faculty to teach online for the first time. Here are three examples.

Title	 <p>iTech Program</p> <p>University of Washington Tacoma</p>	 <p>Online Course Development, Online Course Facilitation courses</p> <p>University of West Florida</p>	 <p>IDL6543</p> <p>University of Central Florida</p>
Length	One-day face-to-face workshop	Two online six-week courses	One hybrid 80-hour course
Incentive	Yes	Yes	No
Goals/Outcomes	Ensure faculty know how to make their courses engaging and understand the Quality Matters rubric and how to apply its principles	For faculty to work with an instructional designer and develop an online course, as well as learn best practices for instructing online and about university policies and services	To prioritize design and delivery of an online course and faculty work to design their first online course
Topics Covered	Introduce faculty resource center, providing an engaging student experience, what makes a good online course, introduce the Quality Matters rubric	Instructional design, LMS, best practices for pedagogy, the university support ticketing system, Quality Matters	What is good course design, how to follow the Quality Matters rubric, accessibility. LMS not covered as that is pre-req to the course

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Of the professional development opportunities for faculty who teach online at responding institutions, the most common type is in-house training, such as workshops (89% offer, 73% require for those who teach online). Instructional design support is offered by a large majority of respondents (85%), but it is required by less than one-third (30%). Less common are professional development opportunities offered by outside professional organizations (31%) and online education conferences (34%).



RECOMMENDATION

Cost can be a factor with professional development, and in follow-up interviews, few institutions noted providing funds for faculty to go outside the institution for development needs. As important as initial training is, long-term professional development is equally as important given how quickly strategies and technology can change. Internal trainings and development of bi-annual workshops, along with a series of less formal training opportunities, can help engage faculty and ensure they are updating their online teaching skillsets.

SECTION 3

The Role of Adjunct Faculty

ADJUNCT FACULTY'S BENEFIT TO THE INSTITUTION

We asked AASCU CAOs why they turned to adjunct faculty for online courses. Several benefits were noted, including employing practitioner faculty actively working in the field (54%), cost-effectiveness (58%), and to fill temporary faculty vacancies (61%). The most common reason given is the flexibility it allows for addressing variations that occur in enrollment term-to-term (73%).

Why do you hire adjunct faculty for your online courses?	Multiple Response
For flexibility in addressing variations in enrollment from term to term	73%
To fill temporary faculty vacancies	61%
It is a cost-effective option	58%
We improve the quality of education by employing practitioners who are working in the field of study	54%
We are unable to fill full-time faculty positions	34%
Other	8%

What is the primary reason you hire adjunct faculty for your online courses?	All Respondents
For flexibility in addressing variations in enrollment from term to term	37%
It is a cost-effective option	19%
To fill temporary faculty vacancies	13%
We are unable to fill full-time faculty positions	11%
We improve the quality of education by employing practitioners who are working in the field of study	11%
Other	10%

ADJUNCT FACULTY RECRUITMENT

Recruiting adjunct faculty for online courses does not appear difficult. The primary methods for advertising these positions are institutional websites (82%) and word of mouth or informal channels (68%), which are both low-cost methods of recruiting.

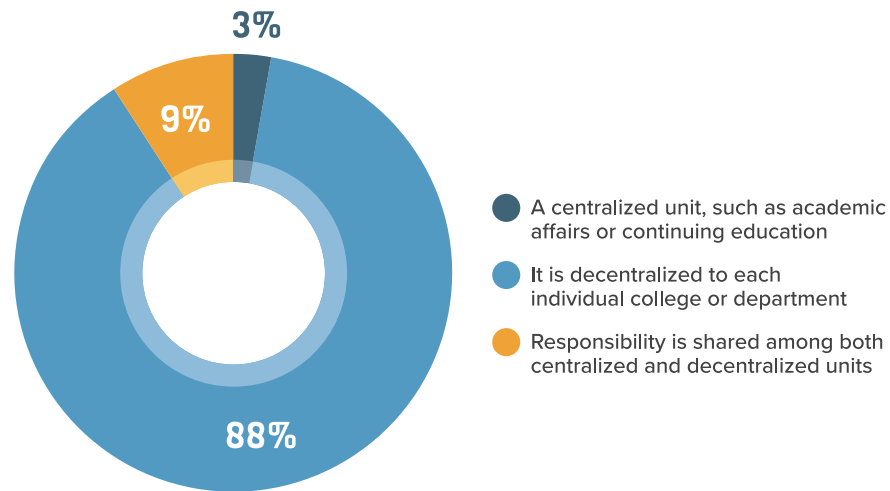
How do you advertise available online adjunct faculty positions?	Multiple Response
Institutional website, newsletter, or mailings	82%
Word of mouth or informal channels	68%
National publications (Inside Higher Ed, Chronicle of Higher Education)	41%
Adjunct matching services	2%
Other	5%

ADJUNCT FACULTY HIRING PROCESS

The screening and hiring of adjuncts follow a standard process, which includes calling applicants' references (81%), verifying highest degree (78%), and conducting a background check (74%). Also, some form of an interview takes place by phone (72%), in-person (67%), or via video (42%). It is less common for the process to begin through a central administrative department (37%), such as human resources (HR), and for practical work samples to be submitted and reviewed. The lack of review of teaching (26%) and writing (8%) samples is interesting, as nearly all AASCU member institutions surveyed report a decentralized hiring process controlled by individual departments (88%). If these departments had access to those types of samples, they could better understand the knowledge and skills of the applicant.

What process do you use to screen applicants?	Multiple Response
Call references	81%
Verification of highest degree from degree granting institution	78%
Background check	74%
Telephone interview	72%
In-person interview	67%
Video interview	42%
Central human resources or other administrative office screen applicants first	37%
Standard set of written questions	32%
Teaching sample	26%
Writing sample	8%
Assignment as teaching assistant with a veteran instructor	6%
Other	14%

Who is chiefly responsible for hiring online adjunct faculty?



PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVE

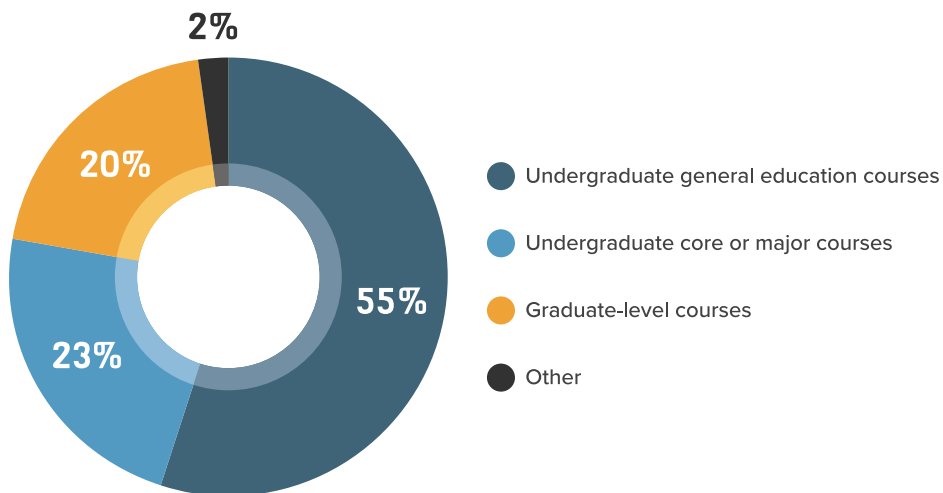
All AASCU interview respondents noted that it was the domain of the departments to hire adjunct faculty for their courses.

COURSES TAUGHT BY ADJUNCT FACULTY

Adjunct faculty are utilized by responding institutions for online instruction of undergraduate general education courses (55%), followed by undergraduate major courses (23%) and graduate-level courses (20%). When asked to rank the top subject areas of course content for online adjunct faculty members, top responses mirrored findings in Learning House and Aslanian Market Research's *Online College Students* survey with business, education, and healthcare at the top of the undergraduate and graduate rankings. Given the use of online adjunct faculty members for undergraduate general education courses, it is unsurprising to see areas such as English and liberal arts in the top five of the AASCU survey, as well.

There are several subject course areas that lacked the designation of being a number one topic for using adjuncts online. They span subjects like philosophy and the visual arts, as well as areas that are difficult to teach due to accreditation standards, like engineering and law.

What is your best estimate for the types of courses that most utilize online adjunct faculty?



From the following list, what is your best estimate for the top three subject areas of courses that most utilize online adjunct faculty?		% ranked # 1	% ranked as top 3
Top 5 subject areas	Business, Management, Marketing and Related Support Services	22%	46%
	Education	18%	35%
	English Language and Literature/Letters	12%	24%
	Health Professions and Related Programs	9%	31%
	Liberal Arts and Sciences, General Studies and Humanities	8%	19%
Bottom 5 subject areas	Library Science	1%	4%
	Physical Sciences	1%	1%
	Architecture and Related Services	0%	4%
	Mathematics and Statistics	0%	7%
	Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies	0%	3%

Note: The areas of Engineering, Legal Professions and Studies, Parks, Recreation, Leisure and Fitness Studies, Philosophy, and Visual and Performing Arts saw one percent or less of being ranked in the top 3 programs that utilize online adjunct faculty.



Recommendations

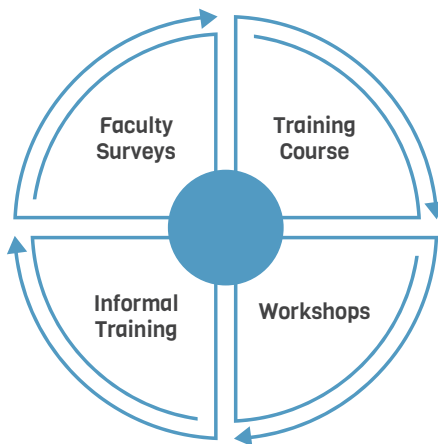
Based on survey responses and follow-up interviews and Learning House’s own internal expertise on supporting successful, high quality, online programs, the following recommendations are presented. Note that they are not “one size fits all” solutions; each institution has their own unique set of challenges and circumstances. Yet, adopting a version these recommendations can help faculty feel continually supported in their roles. They can also help online students receive a high-quality, uniform learning experience online.

1. Mandatory or incentivized training for faculty who have not taught online

Online instructors — whether they are new to this format of learning or new to the institution — should receive mandatory training. Content should cover LMS basics, how to direct students to available services, details on faculty support services, and best practices in online pedagogy. Training should also emphasize how faculty members can start developing their first course (see the fourth recommendation below). An incentive should be attached to this training given how comprehensive it can be, but also to encourage faculty participation. If it’s not possible to mandate the training, it could be positioned as highly recommended. Discussions with departments could also help in instances of strong faculty opposition to mandatory training as the case can be made that this training is about achieving better learning outcomes for students and not to inhibit faculty autonomy.

2. Regular feedback cycle for continuous professional development

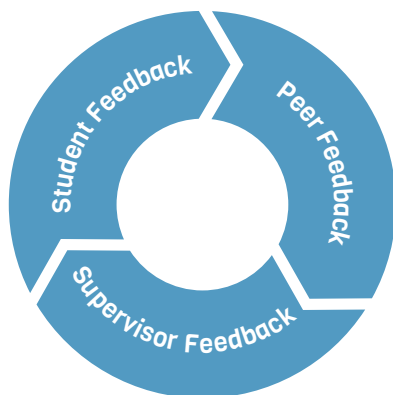
A strong professional development cycle can help ensure that faculty and the institution are staying up to date on best practices for online learning. That starts with the training course, which should be updated as new information is adopted by the institution.



As new technology and best practices are discovered and tested, they can be shared with faculty once or twice a year during formal workshops. That would provide time to not only demonstrate what is being implemented, but it gives faculty members the opportunity to ask questions and discuss ideas. In addition to workshops, informal training sessions can occur throughout the year to discuss new features, insights or any helpful experiences they may have. Finally, institutions can also look at their internal

data around student retention and grades, as well as their course evaluations. Such investigating can target specific courses or areas of courses that may need updated training to assist those faculty in how to best administer that course, use a tool, or apply their materials in an online environment.

3. Regular feedback cycle of instructor evaluation



To ensure a quality online learning experience, new and even experienced faculty members need to receive feedback from multiple sources. Currently, faculty members typically receive student feedback and, in some cases, an annual supervisor review. Feedback needs to be expanded and formalized as part of a personalized professional development process. One key addition is peer feedback from fellow faculty members who have

RECOMMENDATIONS

previously taught online. Those faculty members can also act as mentors for those who are newer to this format, which can result in faculty members who are better adapted to the online classroom and a more engaging experience for the online learner.

4. Uniform learning experience for standard components of an online course

In most cases, faculty members develop their own online courses. The result is that students must familiarize themselves with courses that are formatted differently every semester, which can have an unnecessarily negative impact on students. However, this experience can be greatly improved by instituting standards as to what an online course should be and how it should be set up. Institutions should consider a basic course shell that can save development time for faculty members. Another idea, to take a step further, is to use the master course philosophy. The institution would develop one version of a course, and each subsequent offering will use that same course, with limited to no customization by faculty members. As a result, faculty members save time and a standard learning experience with clear outcomes for students is achieved.

Policies should be put in place to encourage faculty to interact with students regularly. Fewer than half of AASCU institutions have such policies in place, yet, student-faculty engagement in online courses is an important key to student success and retention. If faculty members take multiple days to respond to a student's email, the student could be slow to complete the assignments due to not understanding the content or requirements. Lack of communication could ultimately cause the student to feel the faculty member or institution is uninvested in his or her success, which could lead to poor retention. A similar issue could arise when faculty members don't grade assignments in a timely manner. Basic rules about engagement and response should be put in writing and not be open to interpretation due to the importance of fostering interaction in the virtual environment.

5. Adjunct faculty are included in all the above

All the recommendations and takeaways in this report should be applied to both full-time and adjunct faculty. If adjunct faculty are asked to maintain the same standards as full-time faculty, then they should be treated equally in terms of the training and resources that are made available to them. Those steps can enhance the quality of online programs and students' experiences. As a bonus, adjunct faculty participation can help them feel more invested in the community, which can lead to better retention with the institution.



Methodology

In the summer of 2018, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and Learning House, a Wiley brand (Learning House) partnered to collaborate on a study of AASCU members about the role, support, and use of faculty members at AASCU institutions to teach online courses. A 25-question survey was developed and distributed online by AASCU to 375-member chief academic officers (CAOs). Ninety-five CAOs completed the survey for a 25 percent response rate.

After the survey, follow-up interviews were conducted with CAOs from 10 institutions to better understand the professional development opportunities for faculty who teach online. Those findings are highlighted throughout the report.

Participating institutions for the interviews include:

- Framingham State University
- Middle Tennessee State University
- Nicholls State University
- Northern Kentucky University
- The College at Brockport, State University of New York
- University of Central Florida
- University of Southern Indiana
- University of Washington Tacoma
- University of West Florida
- University of Wisconsin – Parkside

For more information regarding the methodology of *Online College Students*, please download the report at learninghouse.com/OCS2018



APPENDIX A

The Online College Student

For AASCU members, and others, interested in expanding their online program offerings, there may be questions surrounding online learning and the students interested in the format. Since 2012, Learning House has partnered with Aslanian Market Research each year to survey online college students and learn their preferences in online programs, their learning preferences, and how to market these programs, among other topics. This study, which remains the most comprehensive, publicly available assessment of online student preferences, has been downloaded more than 7,000 times and is cited in leading publications like *U.S. News and World Report*, *Forbes*, and *University Business*. It can be downloaded here: learninghouse.com/OCS2018

The sections below contain some key data points from the 2018 study.

STAYING LOCAL

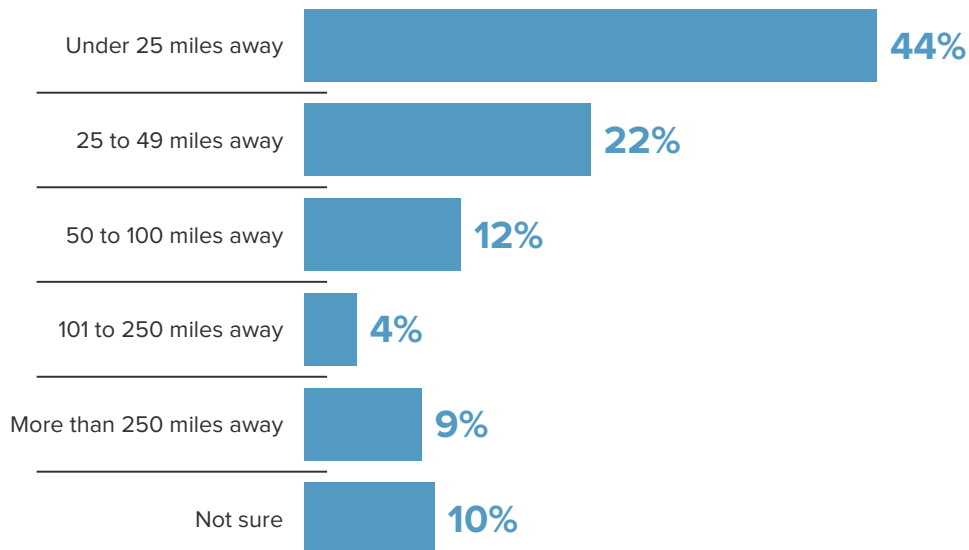
Although online learning allows a student to study anywhere there is an internet connection, the overwhelming majority of online college students are local to their school. This finding has been consistent since the *Online College Students* report was first published in 2012.

Over three-quarters of students enroll at an institution within 100 miles of their home. Part of the reasoning may be that students and their employers are familiar with and value these schools. However, some online students want to visit the physical campus, with a

portion doing so regularly. Seventy-six percent visit their campus at least once a year, and 45 percent do so three or more times per year.

Why are online students visiting campus? Common reasons include meeting with their instructor (40%), making a payment (31%), meeting a study group (29%), and using the library or lab (29%).

On the other hand, a small portion of students (13%) choose schools more than 100 miles away from them. There are three main reasons for this: the program was not offered closer to them (29%); the school had a strong reputation (28%); or the program was at a lower cost (28%). Graduate students are more likely than undergraduates to seek out a school with a better reputation, even if it is farther than 100 miles away (32% versus 24%).



FIELDS OF STUDY

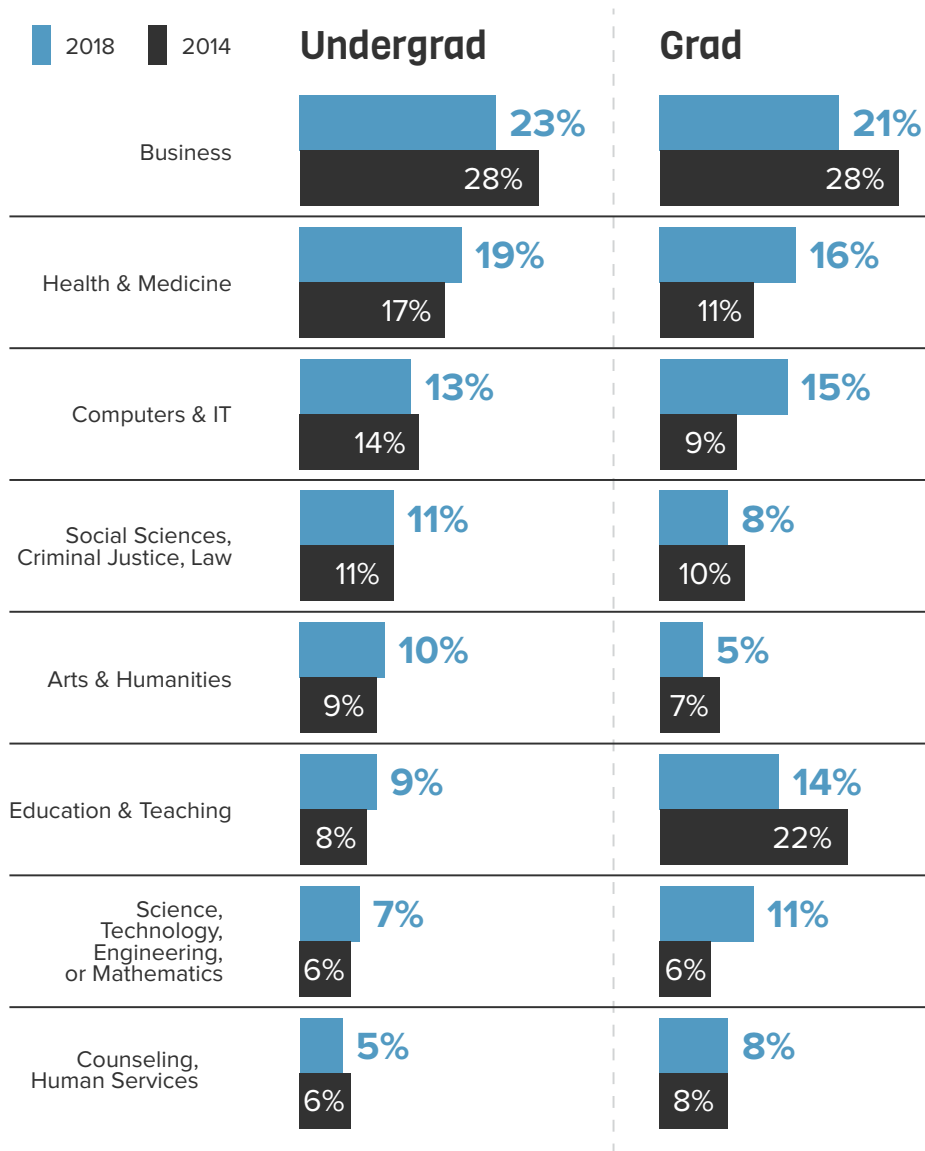
Business continues to be the most popular field sought by online college students. However, business is losing market share to other fields of study at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Education at the graduate level continues to lose a significant share of online students — dropping from 22 percent in 2014 to 14 percent in 2018. An important factor in this change is that as the online education market has matured and increased

in popularity, the number and types of programs have grown as well. On the other hand, online education has always been dominated by practical, career-focused offerings like business and education, which have been strong-performing programs.

Growing fields in online education include computers and IT at the graduate level (up from 9% in 2014 to 15% in 2018), STEM fields at the graduate level (6% in 2014 to 11% in 2018), and health and medicine at the graduate level (11% in 2014 to 16% in 2018). The undergraduate level has seen less dramatic shifts, with health and medicine, STEM, and arts and humanities growing just 1 or 2 percentage points each in four years.

Specific fields of study underpinning these larger umbrellas has helped cause some of these shifts. Since 2014, we have seen the business administration degree lose share at both the undergraduate and graduate levels to program areas such as computer science. General psychology at the undergraduate level has also shrunk, with the more specialized field of child psychology gaining market share. At the graduate level, a similar trend is seen in nursing, with the more general MSN ceding market share to nurse practitioner and family nurse practitioner programs. Education programs such as elementary education and curriculum and instruction appear to be giving way to the growing momentum seen in social work and IT programs.

Undergraduate Field of Study	Movement 2014 to 2018	Graduate Field of Study	Movement 2014 to 2018
Business Administration	▼	Business Administration	▼
Psychology	▼	Nursing	▼
Computer Science	▲	Elementary Education	▼
Child Psychology	▲	Curriculum & Instruction	▼
		Computer Science	▲
		Social Work	▲
		Information Technology	▲
		Nurse Practitioner	▲



STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

What is your gender?	Undergraduate	Graduate
Male	25%	32%
Female	74%	68%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%

What is your annual household income?	Undergraduate	Graduate
Under \$25,000	29%	23%
\$25,000-39,999	23%	18%
\$40,000-54,999	15%	15%
\$55,000-69,999	13%	14%
\$70,000-84,999	8%	9%
\$85,000-99,999	4%	6%
\$100,000-114,999	4%	8%
\$115,000-129,999	1%	2%
\$130,000-149,999	2%	2%
\$150,000 or more	2%	5%

What is your employment status?	Undergraduate	Graduate
Employed full time	47%	64%
Employed part time	25%	17%
Not employed	25%	18%
Retired	1%	0%
Prefer not to say	2%	1%

Level of Study	All Students	Undergraduate	Graduate
Associate degree	20%	33%	-
Bachelor's degree	27%	45%	-
Master's degree	22%	-	54%
Doctorate	4%	-	10%
Certificate program	23%	19%	30%
Licensure program	4%	3%	6%

What is your marital status?	Undergraduate	Graduate
Married/partnered	36%	45%
Single	63%	54%
Prefer not to say	2%	2%

How many children under age 18 do you have?	Undergraduate	Graduate
None	57%	49%
One	19%	23%
Two	15%	18%
Three or more	9%	9%
Prefer not to say	0%	1%

What is your race or ethnicity?	Undergraduate	Graduate
African-American	17%	20%
Asian or Pacific Islander	6%	8%
Hispanic	13%	10%
Native American	1%	1%
White	62%	59%
From another background	1%	1%
Prefer not to say	2%	1%



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TECHNICAL NOTES

All percentages in this report have been rounded; therefore, the total percent figure in a table may not add up to exactly 100. Further, if the total percentage is substantially more than 100, it is because the question allowed respondents to choose more than one option.

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Online Learning at Public Universities: Recruiting, Orienting, and Supporting Online Faculty

page | 44