

2025

Voice of the Online Learner: Business Edition



Risepoint

Introduction

The Risepoint Voice of the Online Learner report, now in its 14th year*, reflects our commitment to understanding online learners and supporting universities in fulfilling their needs, especially as they evolve over time.

New this year, the business edition of the report explores the priorities and learning preferences of online learners in the field of business, ultimately informing actionable takeaways for universities to design online business programs that return the highest return on investment.

*This report was published by Wiley prior to Wiley University Services joining Risepoint.

Who are online learners in business?

Online learners in business are largely working adults who juggle multiple personal and professional responsibilities and are determined to advance in their careers for themselves and their families.

86%

are working full-
or part-time

43%

have children under
the age of 18

36yrs

average age

“With me being older and having a full-time job, I felt like online was the best thing for me.”

**Kayla, Master of Business Administration
in Management**

What is important to online learners in business?

Modality first and career-focused

Online learners pick modality before institution because it fits the needs of their lives. These learners are pragmatic – they are not learning to learn, but rather to move ahead in their careers and gain industry-specific skills.

84%

would not enroll in a school if the desired program was not offered online

76%

believe advanced degrees are required to improve career prospects

72%

are studying in a field related to their work

90%

said their online degree had a positive impact on their career

91%

of learners pursue a business degree for career outcomes

Learners are still local

While you might expect that online programs would draw students from a broad geographic area, in reality, most learners select an institution in their region. This gives regional universities a distinct advantage over mega online-only universities — if they have the resources to attract and service an expanded audience.



of business students choose a school within 100 miles of where they live



live and/or work in the same state as their school

“I’ve just been settled into my career and I want to be in a director level... having that MBA behind my name looks better when I am ready to be in that position.”

Tiffany, Master of Business Administration in Healthcare Administration

Affordability and flexibility are top of mind

Online programs tend to be more affordable than in-person programs, and affordability is top of mind for online learners. In fact, affordability is the most important decision factor across the entire student journey for online business students.

Top five important factors in choosing a program:

When researching:

Affordability of tuition & fees



School/program accreditation



Time to complete



Program concentrations



Positive interactions with university reps



When enrolling:

Affordability of tuition & fees



Time to complete



School/program accreditation



Program concentrations



Rank/reputation



After affordability, flexibility is essential for working adults, which contributes to their preference for learning online. Over 80% of online business learners complete their programs without interruption, but there is a small group who steps out. When they do, it is primarily due to difficulty balancing work and personal commitments. Learners in business have an even stronger requirement for flexibility in programming to maintain balance.



Emerging findings in 2025

While many motivators, learning preferences, and challenges remained the same, a different set of factors influenced students' experiences in 2025.

Learners know Gen AI will change their jobs — and they need help

Business learners recognize the growth in use of Generative AI and acknowledge that it will impact their careers, though they are split on whether that change will be positive or negative. Students articulate needing guidance on Gen AI to prepare them for using it in the workforce and note that such guidance isn't currently being provided by their universities.

71%

think Gen AI is important to learn and understand to be successful in the workplace in the future

8%

say their program teaches them how to use Gen AI as a tool in the workplace

Increased interest in connection and academic support

Online learners in business express an increased interest in connection and academic support. They are breaking down the traditional walls between online and offline, looking for learning opportunities that meet their immediate needs in the ways they want them to be met, which includes having options for connection with their peers and professors.

Percent of online learners in business who would visit the campus of the program:

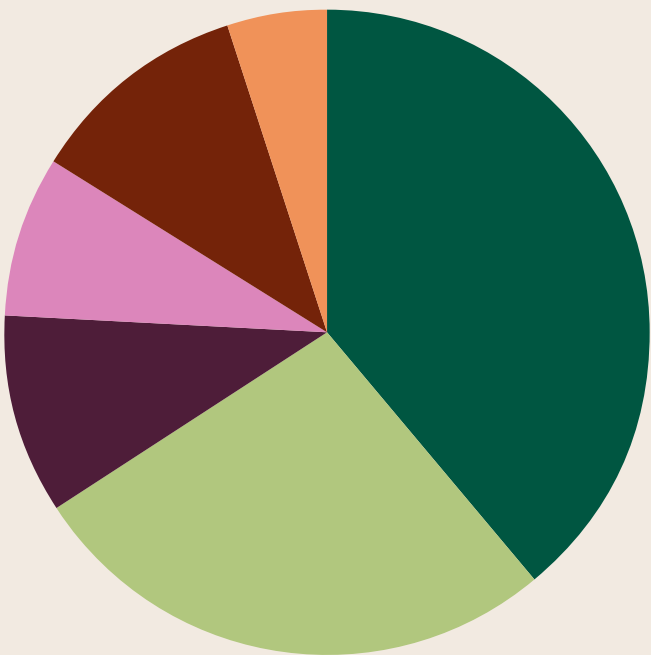
2024:



2025:



When asked how often they would like to visit the campus of the program:



- 39% Special event like graduation
- 27% Never
- 10% Once per course
- 8% Twice per course
- 11% 3-4 times per course
- 5% Weekly per course



Interest but some uncertainty about non-degree programs

While many business students have participated in a nondegree program, they have done so for in-the-moment skill needs or professional and industry-specific certificates. This perceived immediate value makes alternative credentials an effective offering to attract working adults. However, most students don’t understand how these credentials can potentially stack towards an advanced degree, and they remain skeptical as to the value they provide to employers.

76%

say alignment with career or academic goals is the most important factor in deciding to pursue alternative credentials

5%

cited stackability as a key reason for pursuing alternative credentials

Top five important factors in deciding to pursue alternative credentials:

Alignment with career or academic goals

76%

Cost of credential

69%

Time to complete

68%

Credibility and acceptance among employers

68%

Reputation of the issuing platform or institution

61%

“Walking in graduation [was]... important for my partner and my family, especially my grandmother... I wanted her to see at least somebody walk across the stage for a college degree.”

Kayla, Master of Business Administration in Management

Takeaways for business program leaders

01.

Affordability and flexibility are key decision factors for business students. Online programs should be as affordable as possible and should offer schedule flexibility. Consider more opportunities for asynchronous learning to support stronger work-school-life balance and avoid step-outs.

02.

Offer more optional opportunities for students to engage with professors and other classmates, even in-person.

03.

Integrate Gen AI into coursework for career relevance and provide practical instruction around how Gen AI will play a role in the business world.

04.

Highlight pathways for stacking alternative credentials to traditional degree programs and leverage employer relationships to ensure workforce relevance and support with reputation building.

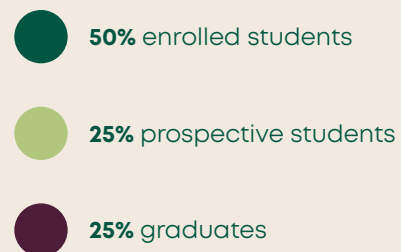
“The flexibility, the fact that the lectures are recorded. One of my professors does her lecture at noon on a Monday. There’s no way I can make a noon on a Monday... When you’re in person, this is your class time.”

Nijahnik, Bachelor of Business Administration in General Business

Methodology

Based on a Risepoint survey of 3,778 online higher education learners across the student lifecycle, conducted in January and February of 2025. Of the learners surveyed, 822 were business students. Half were from Risepoint partners' schools and half from an external panel. 50% enrolled students; 25% prospective students; and 25% graduates.

Note: data was weighted to 60% graduate degree level.



About Risepoint

Risepoint is an education technology company that provides world-class support and trusted expertise to more than 100 universities and colleges. We primarily work with regional universities, helping them to develop and grow their high-ROI, workforce-focused online degree programs in critical areas such as nursing, teaching, business and public service. Risepoint is dedicated to increasing access to affordable education so that more students, especially working adults, can improve their careers and meet employer and community needs. Learn more at risepoint.com.

Over 14 years of research, online learners have told us who they are, what they value, and what they need to succeed. Our analysis of online learners in business specifically helps universities make informed decisions about business programs for continued relevance and impact.

Looking to expand your business programs for online learners?

Let's talk:



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