2026 ROI STUDY

Research among Recent Graduates of Risepoint-Supported Programs



Report of Findings

October 2026

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Background

Risepoint is an education technology company that partners with regional universities to develop, launch, and grow their online programs in nursing, teaching, business, and other high-demand sectors. Amidst the important national conversation about the cost and value of higher education, the company commissioned Ipsos to measure the experience and return on investment for graduates of Risepoint-supported programs.

Field period

May 4 - June 7, 2026

Sample & Mode

The survey was conducted online, leveraging a sample of graduates spanning 61 Risepoint university partners

Qualifications

Sample of n=8,565 survey responses among respondents who were working full- or part-time before starting their degree program and are currently working full- or part-time, including those in key programs:

- Business (n=2,075)
- Education (n=3,156)
- Nursing (n=1,651)

Note: the sample consists of those who were employed before starting their program and are employed now, though not necessarily continuously.

Executive Summary

Graduates of Risepoint-supported programs averaged an 18% first-year salary increase, enabling them to pay back tuition in under 2 years, on average.

Recent graduates* achieved sizeable salary growth in the year following their degree completion (+18%), translating to just over $12,000 and a payback period of 1.8 years, on average. Those who graduated three years ago** saw even larger salary jumps, 33% on average.

A majority fund their degrees without loans.

Slightly more than half (52%) of graduates of Risepoint-supported programs did not take out *any* student loans. On average, loans make up just 40% of degree program funding.

Graduates endorse their degrees – and their universities.

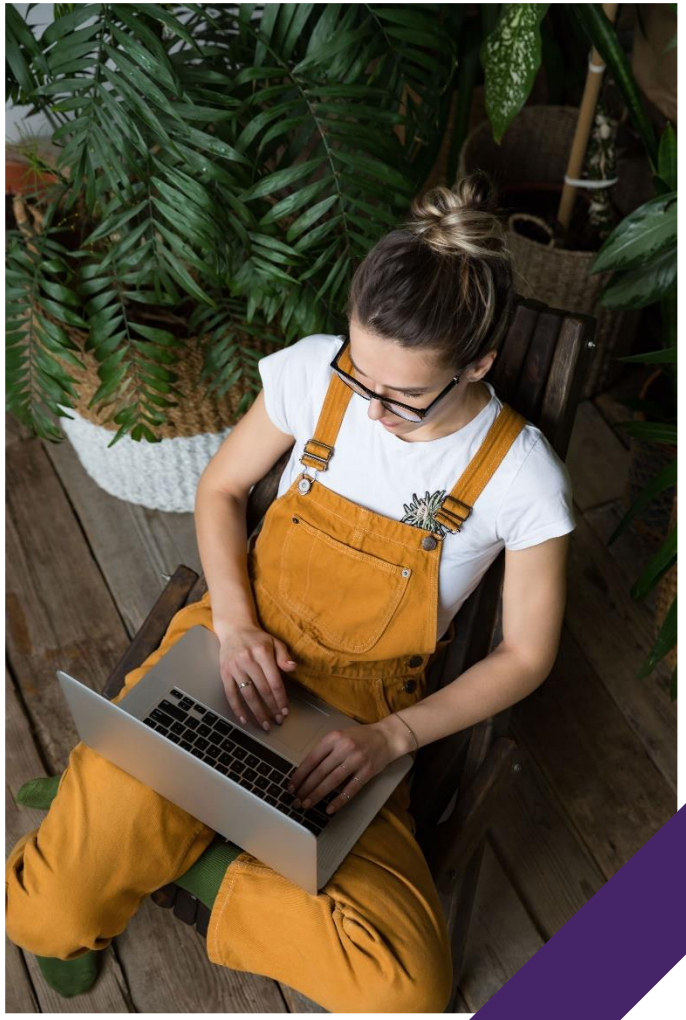
An overwhelming majority of graduates (85%) see their degrees as worth the investment. Nine in 10 (91%) view their university as a trusted institution, and eight in 10 (78%) would recommend their program to a friend or colleague.

Most credit their degree with career gains.

Three in four (74%) graduates of Risepoint-supported programs feel their degree delivered on the promise of career advancement – crucially important, as this was graduates' chief motivation for pursuing their chosen program (58%).

Learners sought programs that fit their lives – and programs delivered.

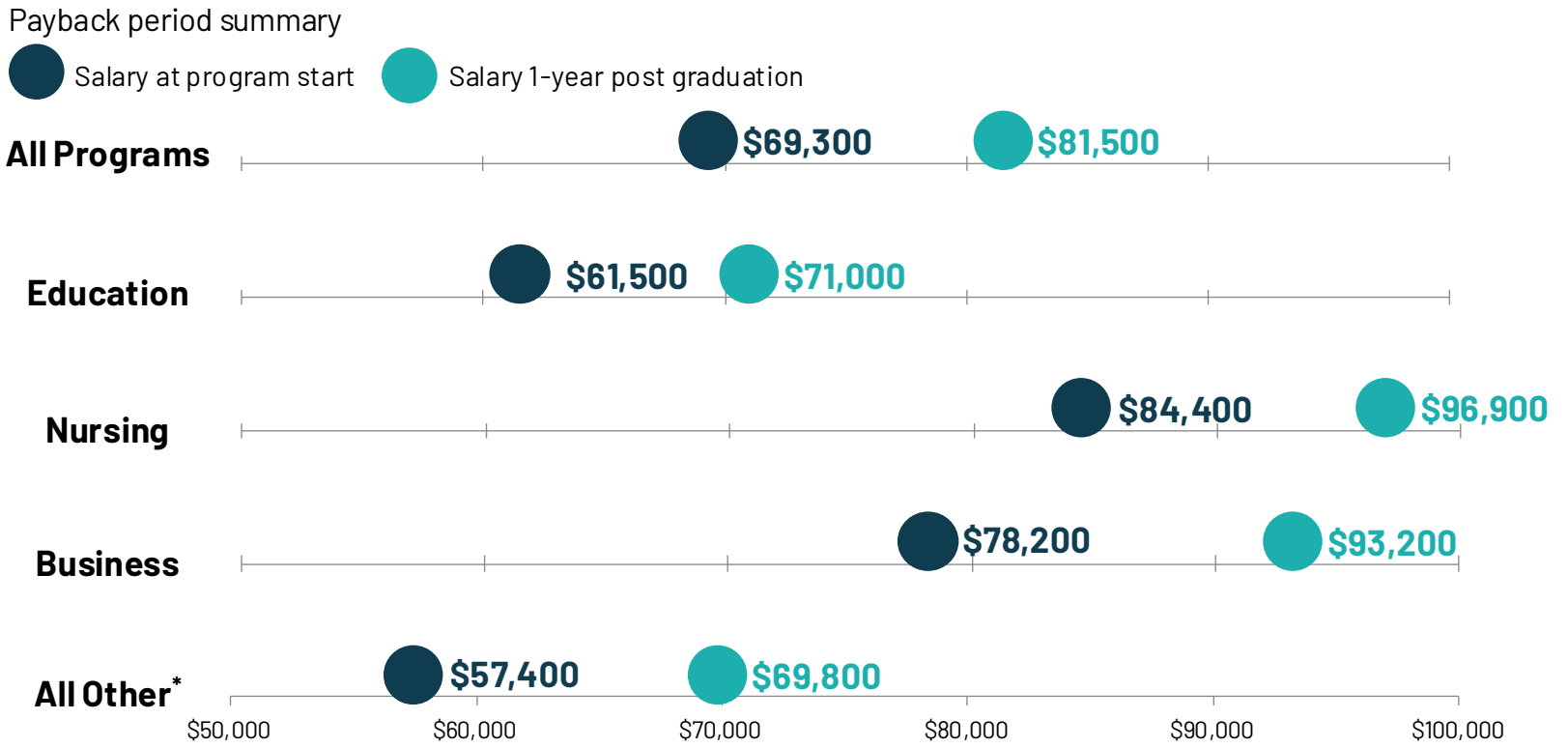
A majority (59%) of graduates sought out their chosen program because it would allow them to work while earning their degree. Another 19% did so because it allowed them to have a flexible schedule. Nine in 10 (89%) say they were able to continue living and working in their local community because of their online degree – and two-thirds (65%) felt they had a positive impact on their community as a result.



*1-year graduates who earned their degrees in the last 9-23 months
**3-year graduates who earned their degrees between 33 and 47 months ago

Average payback period is 1.8 years

Affordable program tuition ($22k) plus salary gains equal a short payback period



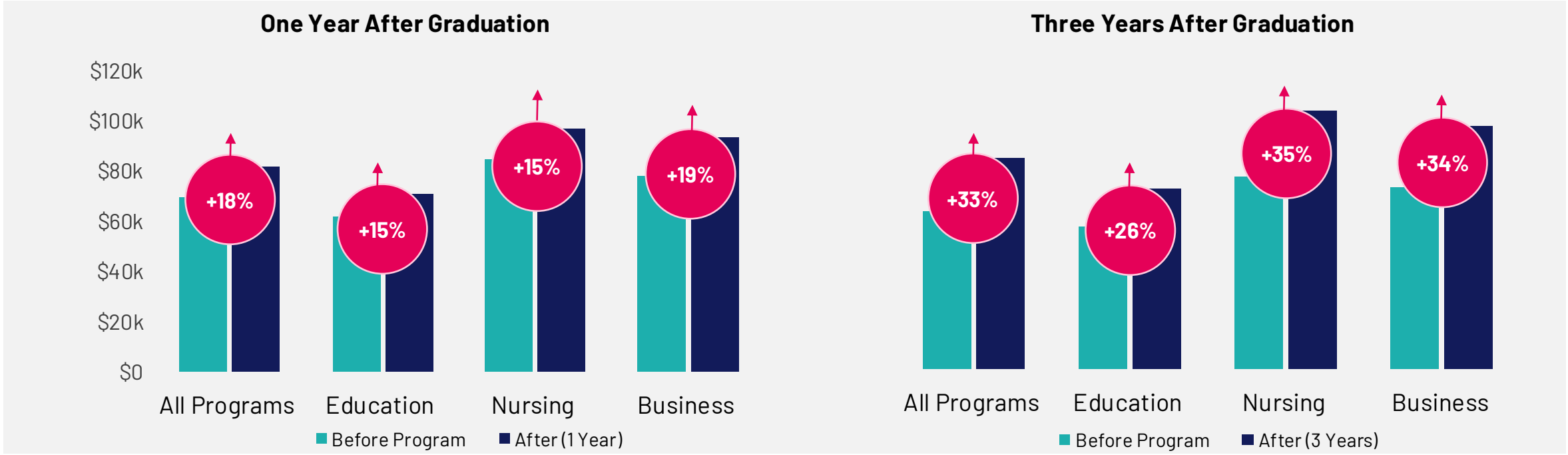
	Tuition Cost	Payback Period	Calculation
All Programs	$22,000	1.80 years	$22,000 / $12,200
Education	$17,500	1.84 years	$17,500 / $9,500
Nursing	$23,700	1.90 years	$23,700 / $12,500
Business	$20,400	1.36 years	$20,400 / $15,000
All Other*	$29,000	2.34 years	$29,000 / $12,400

The 2026 Student ROI Survey confirms that the average payback period remains consistent with previous years, with graduates recouping their educational investment in under two years on average

Payback Formula: $\frac{\text{Total Tuition \& Fees}}{\text{(Salary Post Grad – Salary before program)}}$ = Years to pay back

Q10/Q10a/b. What was your annual salary (before taxes) prior to starting the degree program?
Q12/Q12a/b. What is your current annual salary (before taxes)?
Q7. How much did the total tuition (including fees) cost for all courses in your online degree program to be completed?
Base: Graduates who were working full/part-time before and after their program; reflects graduates who have completed their program in the last 9-23 months [Total (n=2044), Education (n=668), Nursing (n=389), Business (n=536), All other (n=451)]
*Other includes fields of study such as Undergrad, Social Work, Healthcare (non-nursing), Criminal Justice, Cybersecurity, Technology, etc.

Graduates averaged an 18% salary increase one year after degree completion, 33% after three years



Average salary gains are consistent with 2025 ROI study:

	1 Year	3 Year
Total	19%	34%
Education	15%	28%
Nursing	21%	30%
Business	20%	37%

Q10/Q10a/b What was your annual salary (before taxes) prior to starting the degree program?
Q12/Q12a/b. What is your current annual salary (before taxes)?
Base: Graduates who were working full/part-time before and after their program
1 year: graduates who have completed their program in the last 9-23 months: Total (n=2,044), Education (n=668), Nursing (n=389), Business (n=536)
3 years: graduates who have completed their program between 33 and 47 months ago: Total (n=1,758), Education (n=650), Nursing (n=278), Business (n=491)

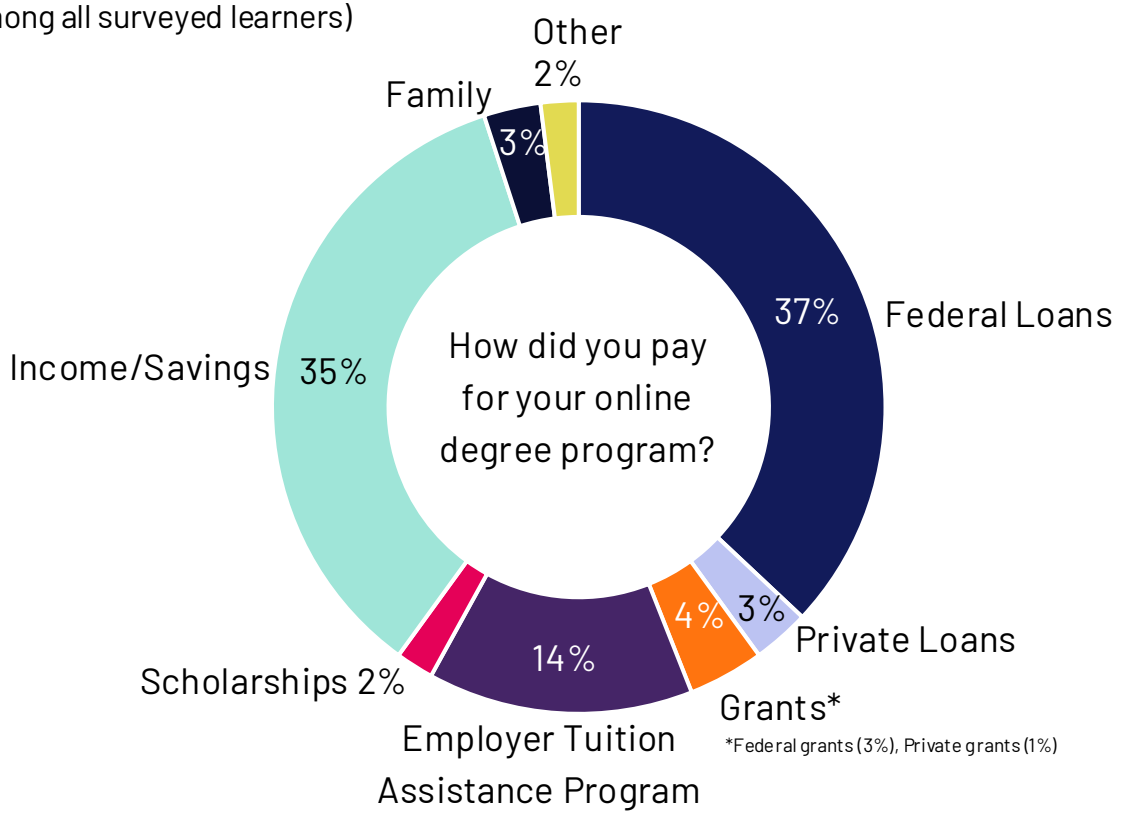
A majority fund their degrees without loans

52%

Graduated without taking <u>any</u> student loans

Program Funding Methods

(among all surveyed learners)

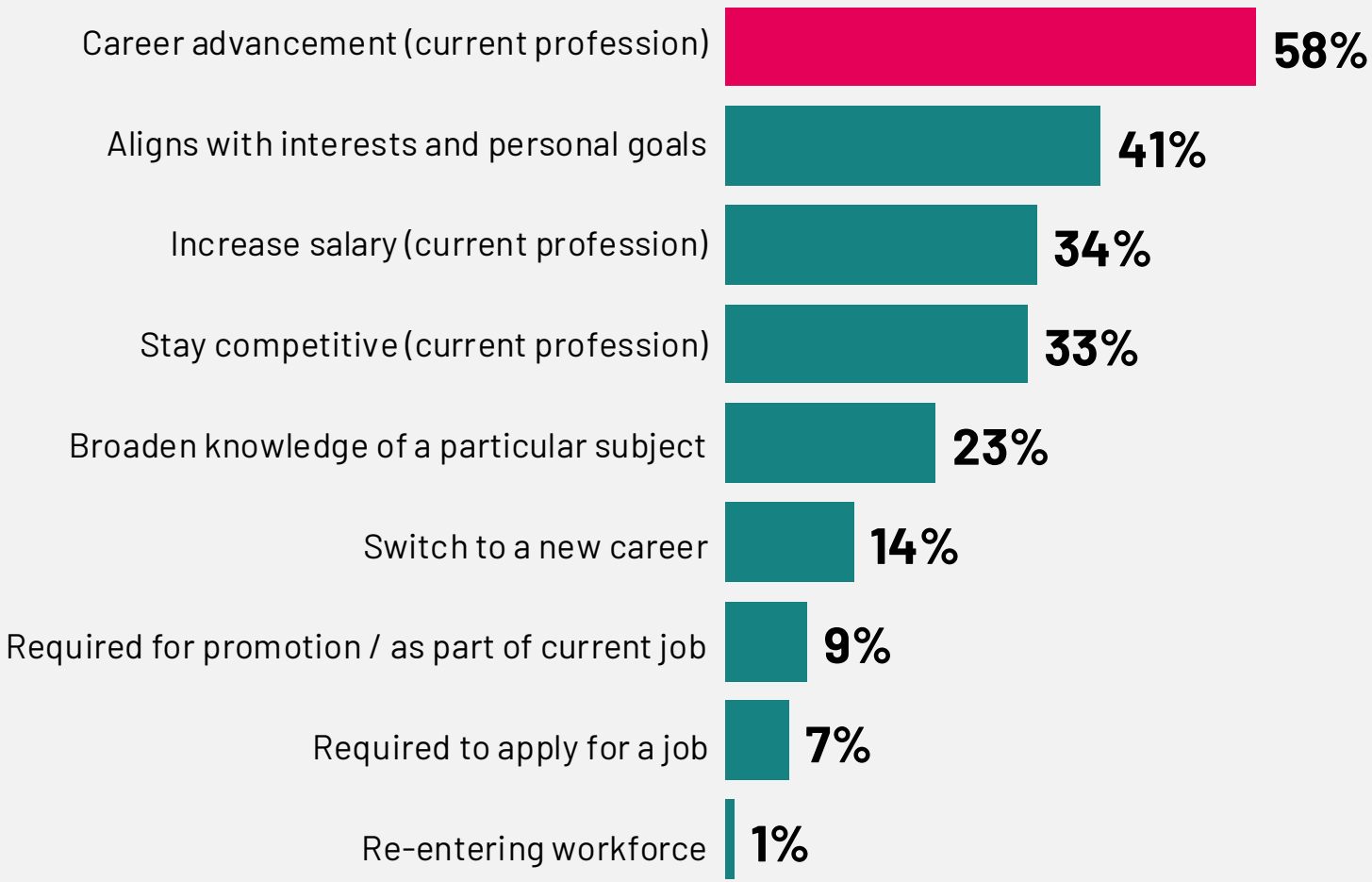


Note: graph does not sum to 100% due to rounding

Q6. How did you pay for your online degree program?
Q7. How much did the total tuition (including fees) cost for all courses in your online degree program to be completed?
Base: Graduates who were working full/part-time before and after their program. All programs (n=8,565)

Career advancement tops the list of reasons for pursuing a degree

Why did you choose to pursue your online degree program?
(select top 3 reasons)

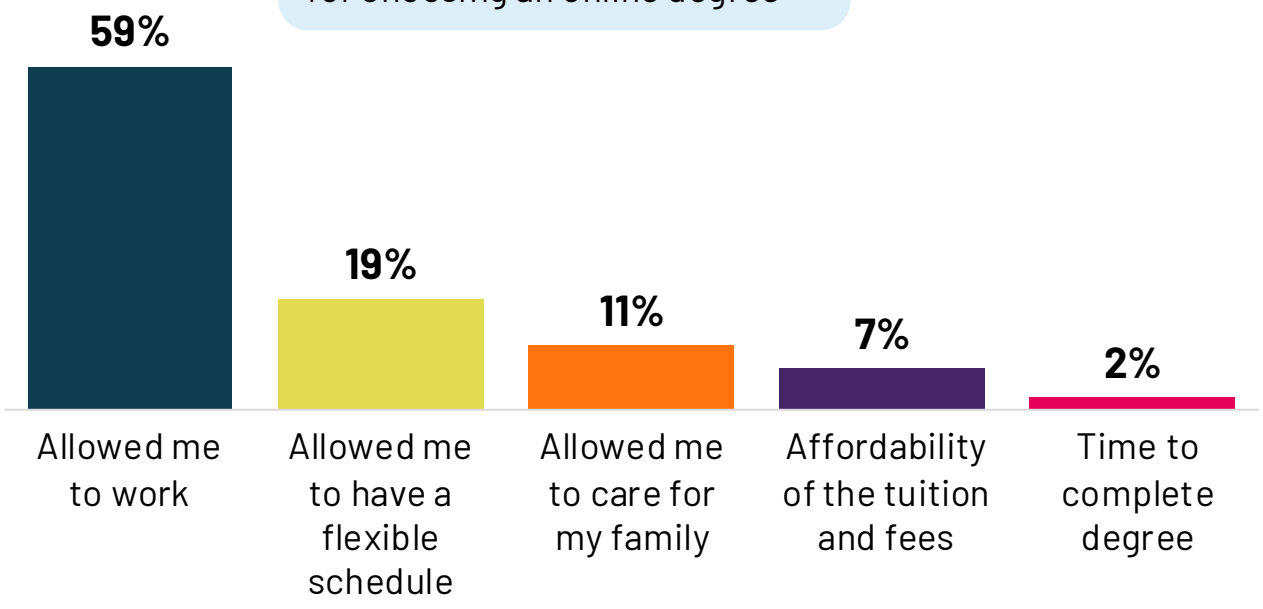


Q3. Why did you choose to pursue your online degree program?
Base: Graduates who were working full/part-time before and after their program n=8,565

The ability to continue working was the strongest driver for choosing online versus on-campus

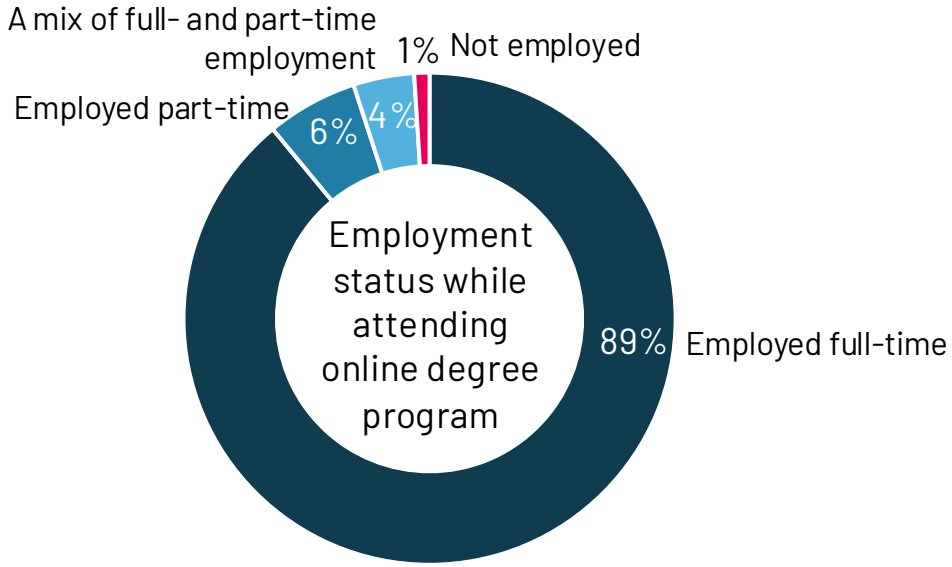
Why did you choose an online degree program?

Work, followed by **flexibility**, and **family** needs were top reasons for choosing an online degree



Virtually ALL did so

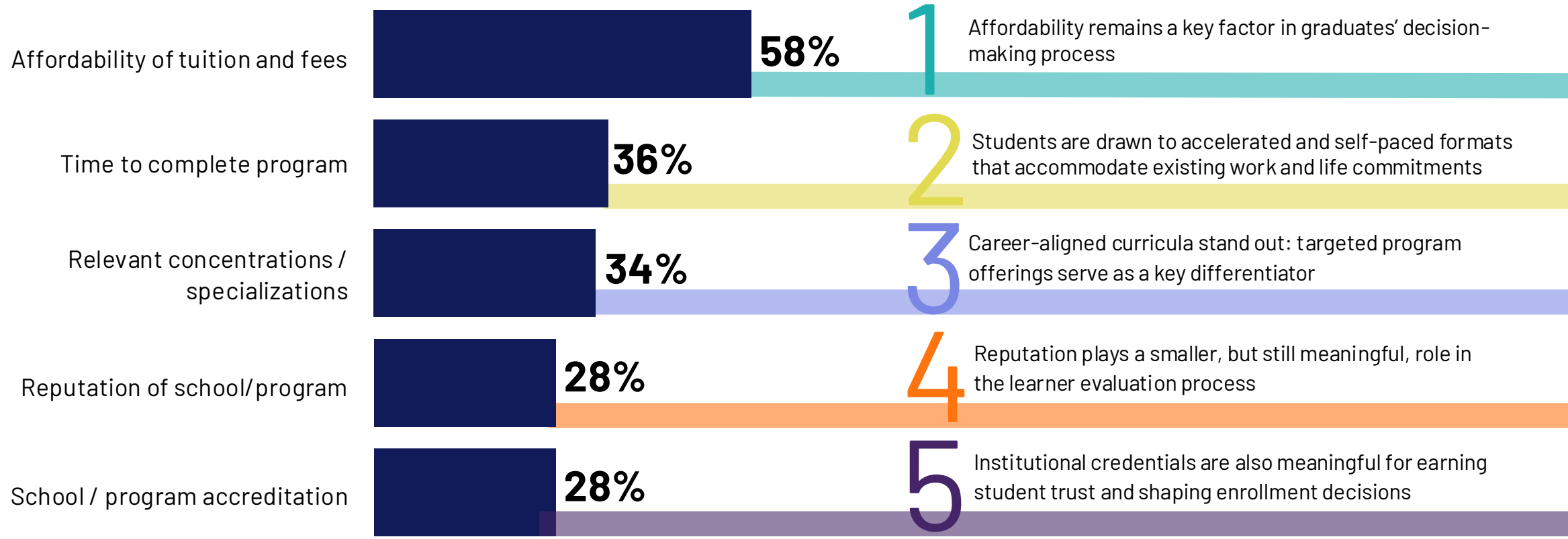
99% of graduates report working full or part-time while completing their degree



Q4. What is the main reason you chose an online degree program vs. an on-campus or hybrid (has both online and on-campus courses program?
Q10j. Which of the following best describes your status while you were attending your online degree program?
Base: Graduates who were working full/part-time before and after their program n=8,565

Affordability remains the top decision factor in university choice

Why did you choose your university?
(select top 3 reasons)

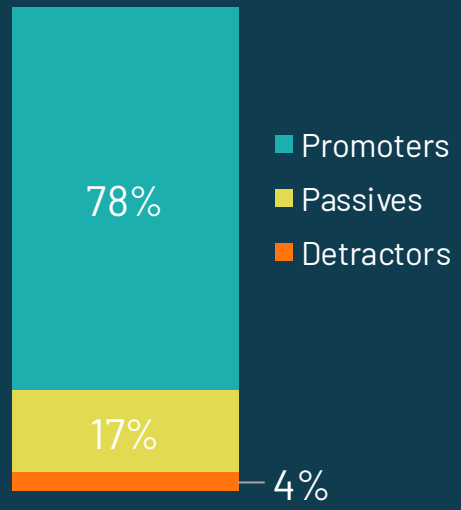


Q5. Why did you choose the university you earned your online degree from? (Select top 3 reasons.)
Base: Graduates who were working full/part-time before and after their program n=8,565

78%

Would recommend their program

53% are "extremely" likely to recommend





Q16. How likely are you to recommend your online degree program to a friend or colleague? Ratings on a 0-10 point scale, where 0 = not at all likely and 10 = extremely likely. Note: Promoters considered those who gave 8-10 rating, Passives a 5-7 rating, and Detractors 0-4 rating. Extremely likely to recommend gave a 10. Base: Graduates who were working full/part-time before and after their program n=8,565

In their own words: why graduates recommend their programs

I **loved my experience** with Arkansas State University. The flexibility was great; but I appreciated the rigor and high expectations from the faculty. Online does not mean less valuable nor [does] it mean less educational. It provides the flexibility that [I] needed to maintain balance.

— Education program graduate, Arkansas State University

I am extremely thankful for Eastern Washington University. Without this institution and its extraordinary History MA program, my life would be far less full and rewarding. I consider enrolling in EWU and completing my degree **one of the best decisions I ever made in my life**.

— Humanities, Arts & Sciences program graduate, Eastern Washington University

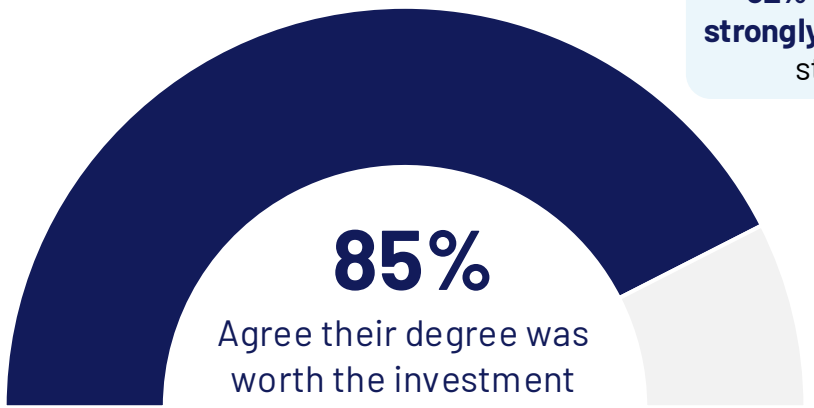
The BSN UTA nursing program is the **best professional experience** I've ever been a part of and I'm so thankful for their help and opportunity to be a nurse.

— Prelicensure Nursing program graduate, University of Texas at Arlington

My experience while completing my online degree was **truly gratifying**. The admissions staff and my professors were top-notch, responsive and attentive to my needs.

— Business program graduate, University of West Alabama

Graduates overwhelmingly see their degree as worth the investment



52% of graduates **strongly** agree with this statement

Consistent with last year, when 86% felt their degree was worth the investment

"I now have the **confidence** to apply for school counseling roles. I also can get **paid more** because I have a master's degree combined with more years of experience."
— Education program graduate, Southeastern Oklahoma State University

"After getting my degree **I was able to find a career that helped my family purchase our first home**. Investing the time into this degree and seeing it through was one of the best choices I have ever made."
— Undergrad program graduate, Campbellsville University

"I saw **an immediate pay increase** when I was done. I grew in confidence and my opportunities were widened."
— Business program graduate, Pittsburg State University

"I feel that the program was **affordable** and the knowledge gained was **beneficial for my new role** in leadership."
— Healthcare program graduate, Radford University

Q15. Please rate your level of agreement with the statement below.
Answer choices: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, NA/Don't know
Base: Graduates who were working full/part-time before and after their program n=8,565

Most feel their degree delivered on the goal of career advancement – a sentiment that is trending up

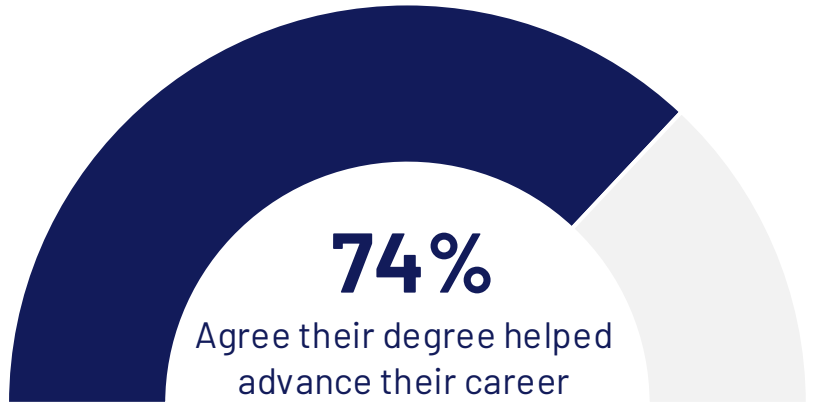
"I have been **promoted twice** since graduating in May 2025."
— Education program graduate, Arkansas State University

"Would likely **not have the job I have without it**. I took a new job in 2021, which paid 25k more than what I was making."
— Business program graduate, University of Northern Colorado

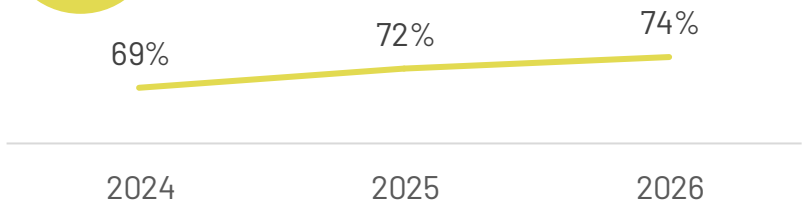
"Earning my degree **helped me transition** into Special Education Teaching and helped me **negotiate a much higher salary** than previously."
— Education program graduate, Southern Oregon University

"I was able to **obtain my dream job**...I would have never even been considered if I didn't have my bachelor's. It came with a **nice pay raise and a huge amount of job satisfaction**."
— Healthcare program graduate, Radford University

42% of graduates **strongly** agree with this statement



Crediting one's degree with career advancement sees a 5-point gain since 2024

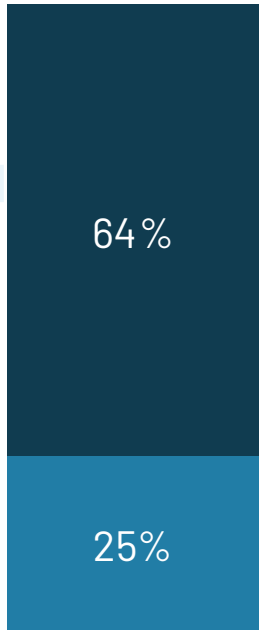


Q14. Please rate your level of agreement with the statement below.
Answer choices: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, NA/Don't know
Base: Graduates who were working full/part-time before and after their program n=8,565

Graduates were able to stay local – and have a positive impact

Online degree programs helped graduates remain **active in their local communities**

89%



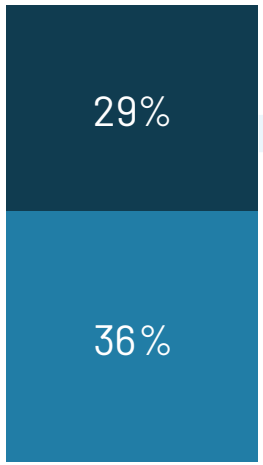
Strongly agree

Agree

Because of my online degree, I was able to **continue living and working** in my local community

"The online platform allowed me to be home, caring for my family. I had always wanted to go back to school, but the timing and location were never right. This program helped me achieve my goals and still be at home."
—Education program graduate, Southeastern Oklahoma State University

65%



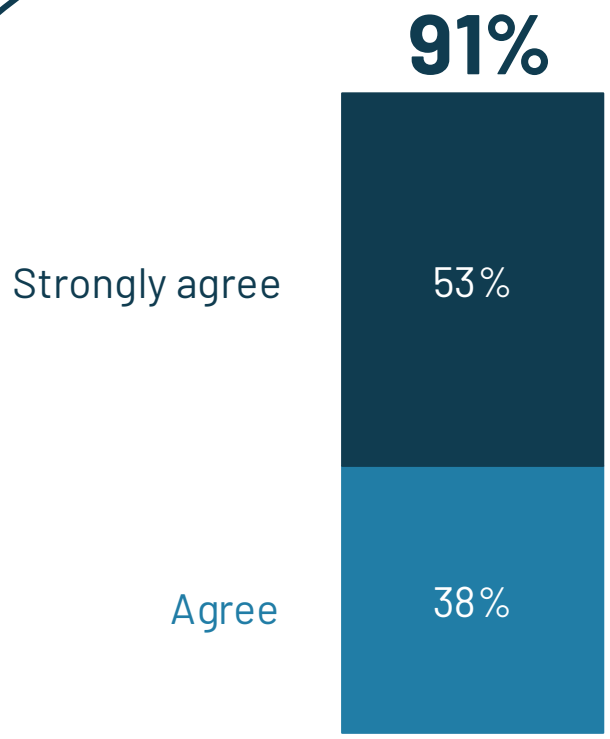
After completing my online degree, I was able to **make a positive impact** in my local community

"It allowed me to advance in my career and be more valuable in the mental health community in my local area."
— Social Work program graduate, Widener University

Q16c. Please rate your level of agreement with the statement below.
Answer choices: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, NA/Don't know
Base: Graduates who were working full/part-time before and after their program n=8,565

Graduates overwhelmingly trust their institutions

The university where I earned my online degree is an **institution I trust**



"I **trust** CU and know that they have given me what I need to be where I am in my career. My experiences in all areas of studies **have led me successfully** to where I have wanted to go."
-Social Work program graduate, Campbellsville University

"I was very satisfied with my program and happy that I chose Southeastern as my institution. I **trusted the instructors** who taught my courses."
- Education program graduate, Southeastern Oklahoma State University

Consistent with last year, when 92% said their university was an institution they trusted

Q16c. Please rate your level of agreement with the statement below.
Answer choices: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, NA/Don't know
Base: Graduates who were working full/part-time before and after their program n=8,565

Sample Composition

Gender

(split reflects high concentrations of females in nursing and education programs)

74% female
24% male
2% prefer not answer

Age

(splits reflects high concentration of working adults in programs)

15% under age 30
66% age 30-49
19% age 50+

Race/Ethnicity

63% White (non-Hispanic)
13% Hispanic
11% Black (non-Hispanic)
4% Asian American (non-Hispanic)
2% Native American (non-Hispanic)
2% Multi-racial (non-Hispanic)

Methodology

A total of 9,335 interviews were completed as part of the research. This report is focused on the 8,565 respondents who were working both before the program and after the program (at the time of the survey). This accounts for 92% of the overall sample and enables a direct comparison of salary outcomes.