

STUDENTS WANT CHOICE

A new Digital Learning Pulse survey from Bay View Analytics shows a growing preference for online and blended learning options.

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IN A RECENT SURVEY OF 1,277 COMMUNITY COLLEGE students, over two-thirds of respondents report that they would like to take some of their courses in a fully online format, and more than half (58%) stated they would like the option to take some of their courses as a mix of online and in-person instruction.

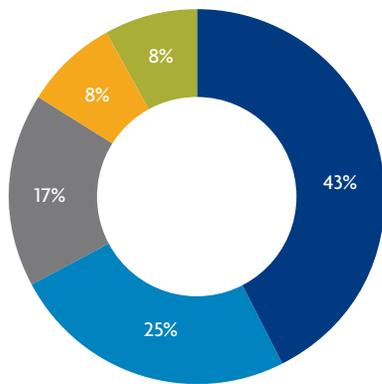
These results are part of the Digital Learning Pulse survey, an ongoing research project to understand how the pandemic is changing higher education. The survey asked current community college students about their post-pandemic educational preferences. Bay View Analytics is conducting the ongoing survey project throughout the year in partnership with Cengage, ACCT, Achieving the Dream (ATD), Phi Theta Kappa (PTK), the Online Learning Consortium (OLC), the Higher Education Research & Development Institute (HERDI), and College Pulse.

There is considerable overlap among students who would like

the option of attending courses online and those who say they would like courses that combine online and in-person instruction; 44% of respondents say they would like both options. There are also significant numbers of students who prefer one over the other, with 23% preferring online-only courses and 13% preferring only classes combining online with in-person instruction. Only 19% of all respondents did not desire either option.

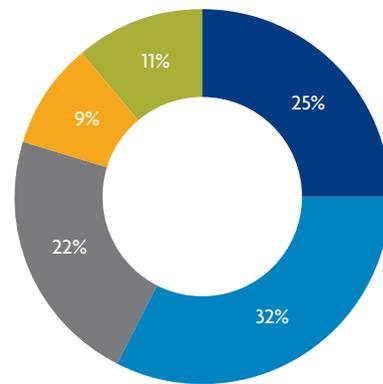
The desire for online courses and courses that mix online with in-person instruction is not new for many of these students, who held these desires before the pandemic. But a growing number of students are expressing this opinion. This shift may be due to changing attitudes towards courses with an online component, driven by exposure to online and hybrid courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 40% of all community college students reported that they are now more optimistic about

I would like the option to take some of my courses in a fully online format



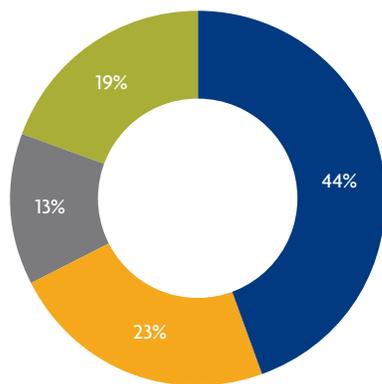
■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neutral
■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree

I would like the option to take some of my courses combining in-person and online



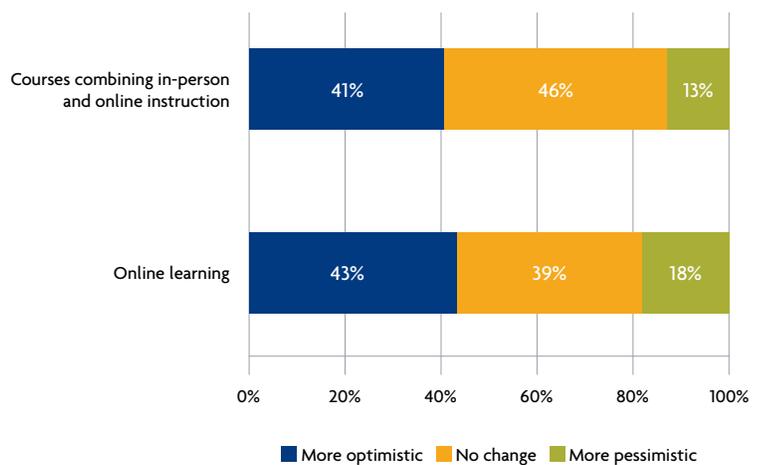
■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neutral
■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree

I would like the option to take some of my courses...



■ Online and courses combining in-person and online
■ Online ■ Courses combining in-person and online
■ Neither online or courses combining in-person and online

In what way has your attitude changed since prior to the pandemic?



■ More optimistic ■ No change ■ More pessimistic

UNDERSTANDING WHY STUDENT PERCEPTIONS ARE SHIFTING IS CRITICAL TO UNDERSTANDING THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THE CHANGING DESIRES FOR COURSE DELIVERY MODES.

fully online courses and classes that mix online with in-person instruction than they were before the pandemic.

Student Voices

Understanding why student perceptions are shifting is critical to understanding the potential impact of the changing desires for course delivery modes.

A large group of student comments were overwhelmingly positive about the potential for online instruction, without specifically stating why:

"I enjoyed online learning. I hope we are allowed to have that option again."

"I like online courses and would encourage more of those."

"I wish there would be more online-only choices for the full catalog."

"I actually enjoy learning fully online."

"I enjoyed being able to work at my own pace online."

"I enjoyed the online environment!"

"I learned I'm [an] online fanatic."

The comments by students about courses that mix online with in-person instruction mirrored those about online classes, with many expressing their desire without providing specific reasons:

"I like the hybrid format and hope it can continue."

"I strongly prefer hybrid and fully online classes over in-person ones."

"I very much appreciate the option of hybrid learning."

However, among the students who did provide a rationale for their choice, the flexibility that online and courses that mix online with in-person instruction provide was, by far, the most mentioned factor:

"I enjoy online courses! I would prefer to have my schedule for the rest of the school year online because it provides flexibility for me and the professors are helpful online!"

"I would definitely like the option to take some classes online as it would provide a more flexible schedule, especially with asynchronous lectures."

"It would be really nice for there to always be online options, being I work full time to support myself it limits my ability to take classes that generally start in the late morning or early afternoon. "

"Having to commute to and from school makes me want to prefer online classes more. However, lab experiments are necessary to do in person."

"I would like classes to be fully online. It helps me be more flexible with my schedule."

"Just would really like the opportunity to have classes that will allow us to either be in class or online. It could help the students that have jobs that are 9-5."

It is important to understand that while most students expressed a desire for more online courses, that feeling was by no means universal. Some students noted the lack of interaction they saw in online classes and the impact of a lack of motivation when studying online:

"I prefer in-person courses as I have more at stake in terms of personal relationships with professors and students vs. being completely online where I only interact via Zoom and do my own thing otherwise."

"In-person classes make it easier to be engaged and focused during the class."

"I would prefer to take my classes in person because of the lack of motivation."

"I have come to despise online learning. I feel it is a terrible way for me to learn, and I wish I would have had the option to take my classes in person, even if it required smaller classes and wearing masks inside. In hindsight, I would have probably paid more for in-person learning."

Next Steps

Overall, community college students have a more favorable attitude to fully online and partially online instruction than ever before. An overwhelming majority report that they want the option to include these types of courses as part of their future education. While these results show that the potential demand for fully online and courses that mix online with in-person instruction is growing, they do not estimate the full extent of the potential demand.

The common factor in all student responses is matching course delivery modes to their needs and desires. Many students look to the flexibility these delivery modes provide and prefer all their courses to be remote, while others are looking for a "mix and match" approach for their education. The bottom line for community colleges trying to meet their students' expectations will be to provide greater flexibility for the choice of delivery options, with a greater number of fully online and partially online courses in the mix.



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