**HANOVER REPORT ON DRIVERS AND SUPPORT FOR ONLINE LEARNERS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Key Findings**

* The number of students enrolling in online learning has grown steadily since 2012. In 2018, the number of students enrolled in any amount of online education was 35 percent—up from only 26 percent in 2012. This number has only increased with the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, online learners have grown more diverse, with white students accounting for only 59 percent of the total in 2022, down 10 percent from 2017.
* The number of students who perceive on campus learning as superior to online learning has increased since 2018. In 2018, the majority of students viewed online learning as equal or superior to on-campus learning with only 11 percent seeing online education as inferior. As of 2022, nearly one-quarter of students believe that online learning is inferior to in-person education.
* The most common motivation for online learning is scheduling constraints as a result of work and familial commitments. When evaluating potential online programs, students consider cost and institutional reputation most heavily.
* The top challenges faced by all online learners include misconceptions about the rigors of digital education, social isolation, familial conflict, ill- equipped faculty, organization, and a lack of technological savvy.
* All students are primarily concerned about how to balance online education with existing obligations**.** Prospective online students generally have a greater concern for school-life balance than those actually in online learning, and they are also more concerned with how online learning will be viewed by employers in the future.

**Strategies and Recommendations**

#### Implement required orientations and offer digital training to all new online learners. Underestimation of the rigors of online learning and a lack of technical proficiency are major barriers to student success in online learning. First- generation, low-income, and immigrant students are particularly likely to lag their peers in terms of digital acumen. Experts suggest that mandatory orientations and opportunities for training in necessary digital technologies can help support these students and potentially close the gap between them and their peers.

* Robust faculty training in digital tools and online learning strategies is integral to the success of any initiative aimed at improving the success of non-white online learners.
* Increase online learner interactions with peers and faculty. Experts agree that peer-to-peer interaction and a sense of community are essential to the success of all online learners. This is especially true for transfer students and first-generation college students. Similarly, other target populations—notably Hispanic and Black students— have improved performance when they have increased interaction with instructors. Offering digital fora for discussion boards, hosting online office hours, and considering expanded synchronous or hybrid offerings can all assist in boosting necessary human interactions. For example in one study 76% of online learners found virtual office hours “attractive” or “very attractive.”
* Key practices for promoting the success of online learners revolve around faculty training, technological and education orientations, community building, and institutional supports. In addition to these strategies, target populations are most supported through strong course organization, varied course materials, and faculty engagement.
* Institutions should also strive to create a streamlined and regulated onboarding process for new students, including training, credit transfer opportunities, and cost reduction strategies. Relatedly, being [direct about costs](https://res.cloudinary.com/highereducation/images/v1647967676/BestColleges.com/2022_Online-Education_Trends-Report/2022_Online-Education_Trends-Report.pdf#page%3D37) is important to students and may affect their decision to pursue online study.
* Ethnic minorities and low-income students, of whom many are first-generation college students, are particularly likely to lack access to high-speed internet and powerful computing tools. There are, however, some strategies to address access, such as investing in institutional laptops for students or providing mobile hotspots.