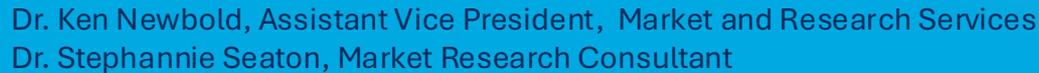




Using Research to Enhance Your Graduate and Online Program Strategy



Dr. Ken Newbold, Assistant Vice President, Market and Research Services
Dr. Stephannie Seaton, Market Research Consultant

What is driving your graduate and online strategy?

Leveraging history while innovating and energizing



Stabilizing enrollment / revenue



Securing emerging opportunities



Increasing credential attainment



Increasing access



Creating a post-pandemic digital norm



Meeting labor market needs

Moving GO from the margin to the core

Things to consider

- Traditional direct-from-high-school enrollment is shifting and declining.
- Competition for adults and graduate students is intense.
- Attainment rates have increased over the recent decade.
- High wages for entry-level jobs are providing a competitive alternative to attending college.
- The higher education value proposition is in question.
- Certificates, micro-credentials, and non-credit options have expanded.
- Digital connection is the new normal.
- Collaboration is critical.

Data-informed instead of data-driven

Strategy: “A plan of action designed to achieve a major or overall aim”

- **Situation Analysis**

- SWOT – *strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats....*
- Coupling internal and external data to understand the current state
 - Where is there capacity and where should capacity be added?
 - What are the institutional program strengths (reputation, relevance, authenticity)?
 - How do your current Graduate and Online offerings align with demand research?

- **Action Planning**

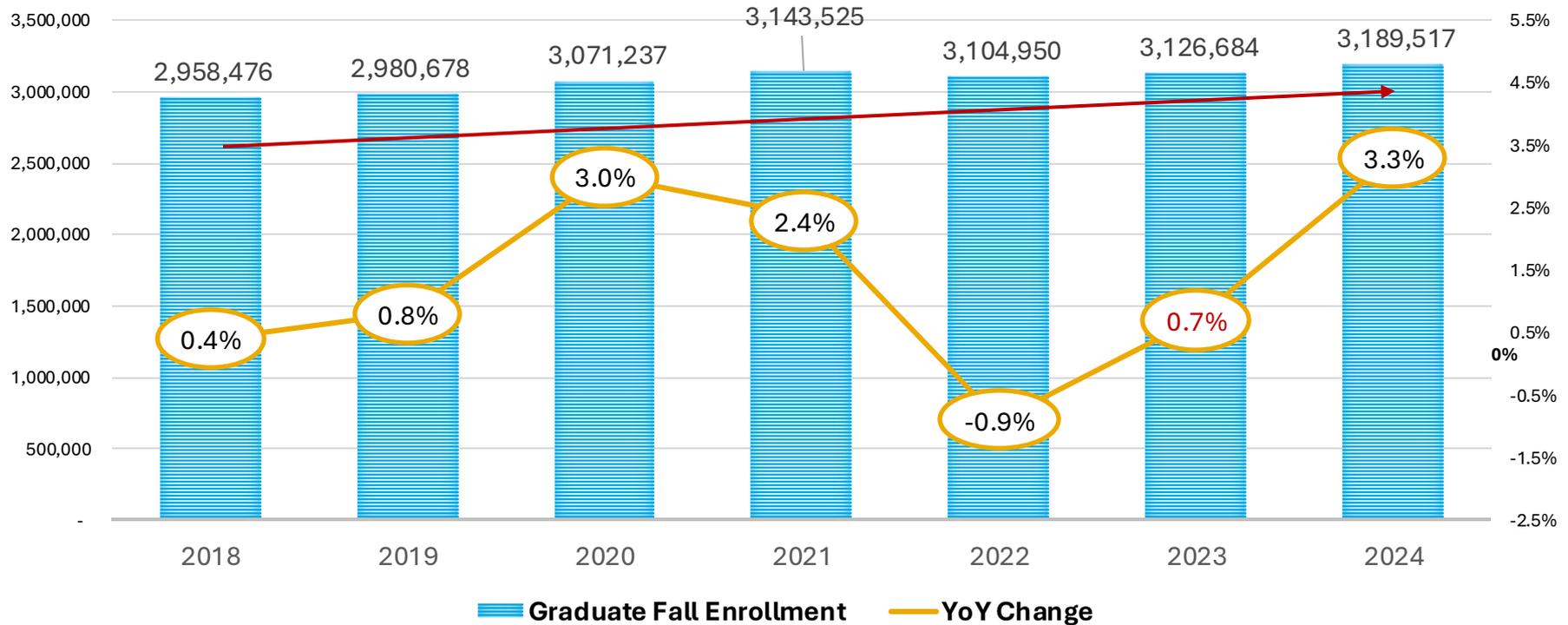
- What are the steps to implement?
- What resources are needed?
- What is the market size and how much share can we secure?
- What are the characteristics of the students we want to enroll and how will we engage with them?



A Growing Graduate and Online Market

1

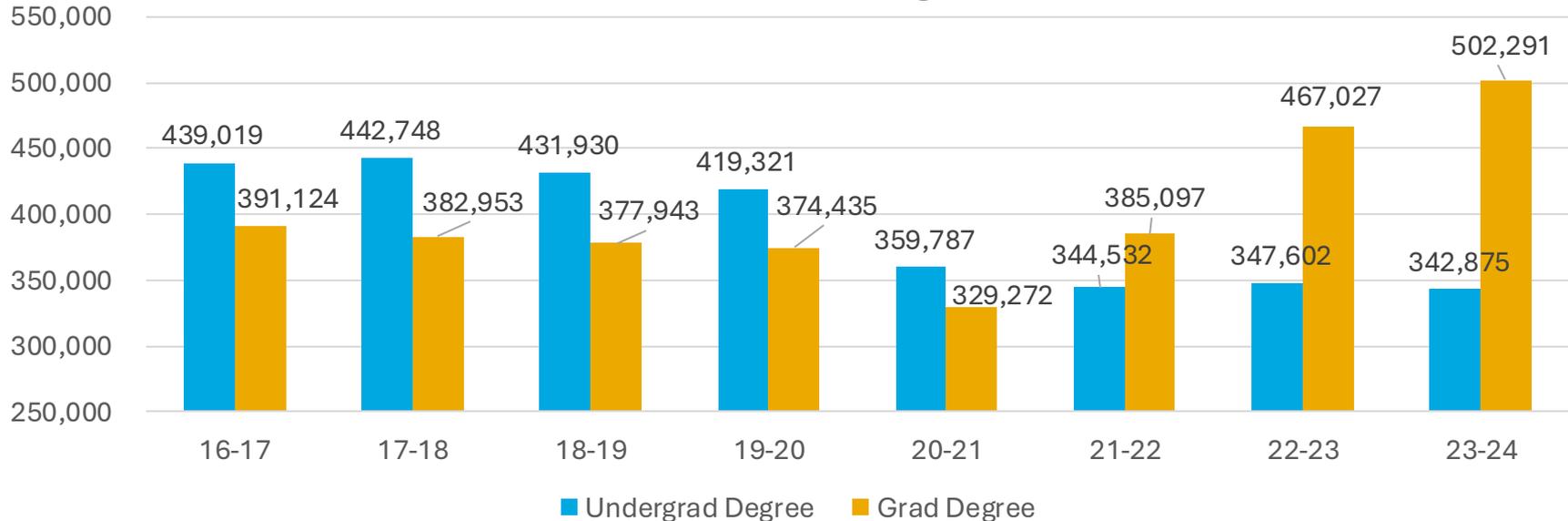
Graduate Enrollment is Returning to Pre-Pandemic Rates of Growth



*Source: National Student Clearinghouse, [CTEF, Fall 2024](#)

Graduate programs have been relying more on international students

Total International Student Degree Enrollment



❖ In 2024, approximately half of new graduate enrollment was derived from international students.



**Utilizing Internal Data in
Graduate and Online
Program Strategy**

2

Current program performance

Understanding what we know about existing programs



ENROLLMENT
TRENDS



PROGRAM
MIGRATION PATTERNS



RETENTION AND
COMPLETION

Current program performance

Financial and operational metrics

- Credit hour generation.
- Courses/credit hours required for the program.
- Ratio of shared courses with other programs and general education (if applicable).
- Instructional mix.
- Space and equipment needs including capital expenses.
- Revenues (tuition, gifts, appropriations, endowments) and costs of the program.
- Capacity.

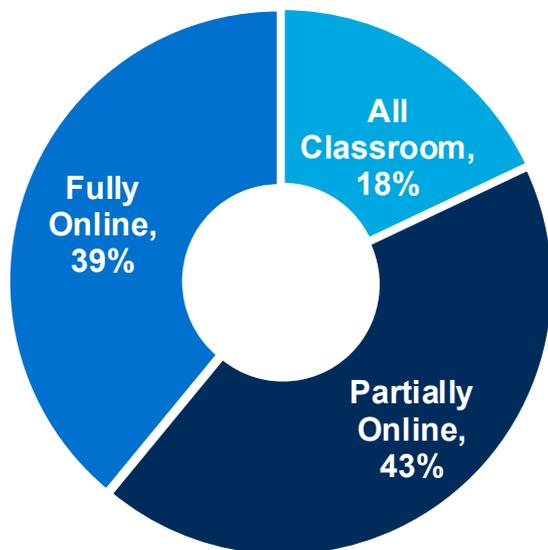


What We Know About Graduate and Online Program Preferences

3

Graduate programs: All modalities

Intended Graduate Format



Broad Subject of Intended Graduate Study	Percent of Total
Business	24%
Health Professions	13%
Computer/Information Science	11%
Education	9%
Counseling/Psychology	7%
Arts & Humanities	6%
Social Work/Public Administration	5%
Engineering	5%
Biological/Physical/Earth Sciences	5%
Communications	4%
Criminal Justice/Law/Homeland Security	4%
Social Sciences	3%

Graduate programs: All modalities

Broad Subject of Intended Graduate Study	Post-Bacc Certificate	Grad Certificate	Master's Degree	Doctoral Degree
Business	22%	24%	27%	8%
Health Professions	16%	11%	11%	30%
Computer/Information Science	12%	13%	10%	8%
Education	7%	8%	9%	10%
Counseling/Psychology	9%	6%	7%	11%
Arts & Humanities	5%	6%	6%	2%
Social Work/Public Administration	3%	4%	5%	2%
Engineering	7%	6%	5%	4%
Biological/Physical/Earth Sciences	3%	3%	5%	8%
Communications	3%	6%	4%	3%
Criminal Justice/Law/Homeland Security	3%	4%	4%	7%
Social Sciences	3%	2%	4%	2%

Online programs

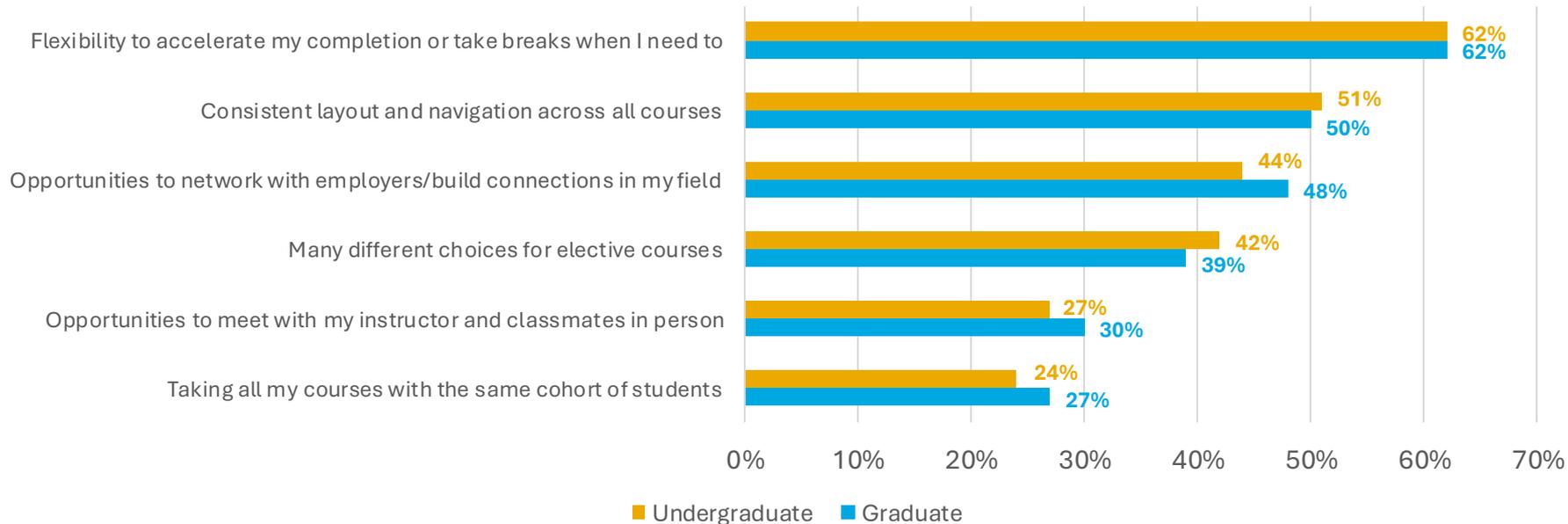
Intended Undergraduate Major	Percent of Total
Business Administration	16%
Computer/Information Science	6%
Psychology	5%
Accounting	5%
Criminal Justice	4%
Biology	4%
Art	4%
Nursing	4%
Healthcare Administration	3%
Computer Engineering	2%

Intended Graduate Major	Percent of Total
Business Administration	19%
Accounting	4%
Computer/Information Science	4%
Education/Higher Ed Administration	3%
Psychology	3%
Nursing	3%
Business Analytics	3%
Artificial Intelligence	3%
Healthcare Administration	3%
Art	3%
Social Work	3%

Online program characteristics

Similar program characteristic preference for undergrad and graduate

What characteristics do you value most in a program?



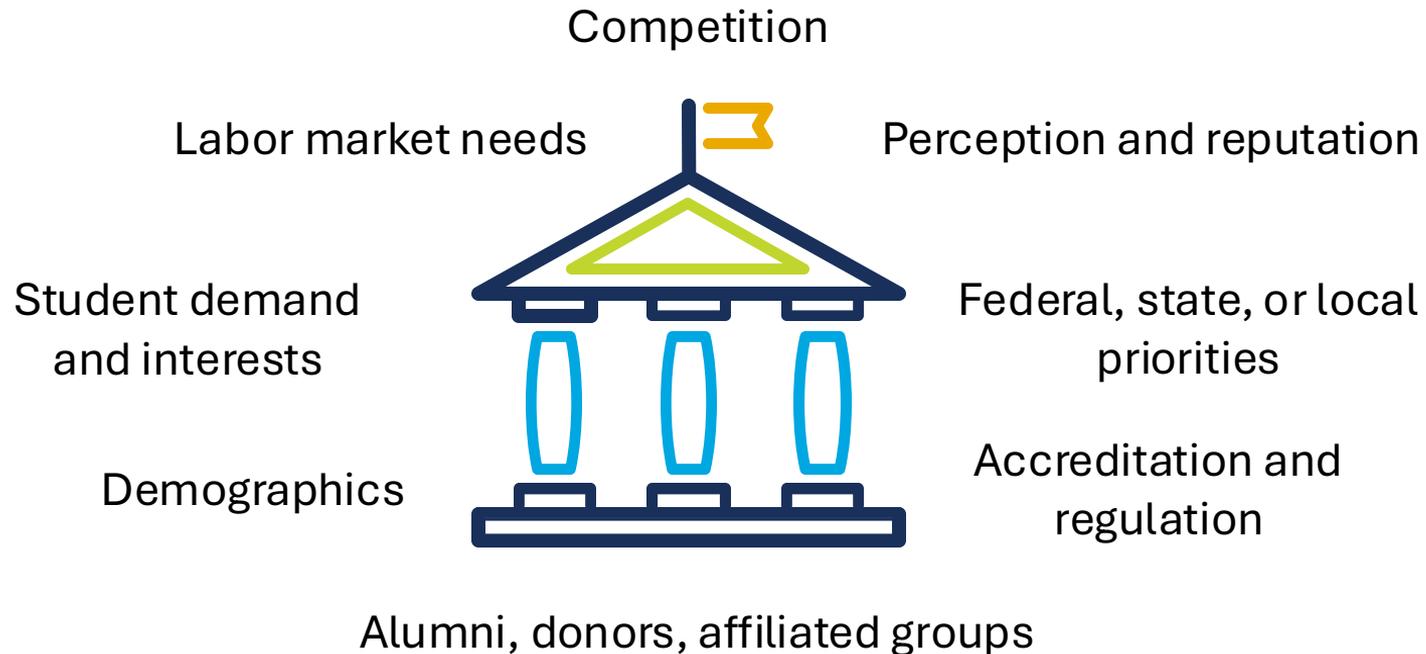


Utilizing Market Research in Graduate and Online Program Strategy

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External Influences

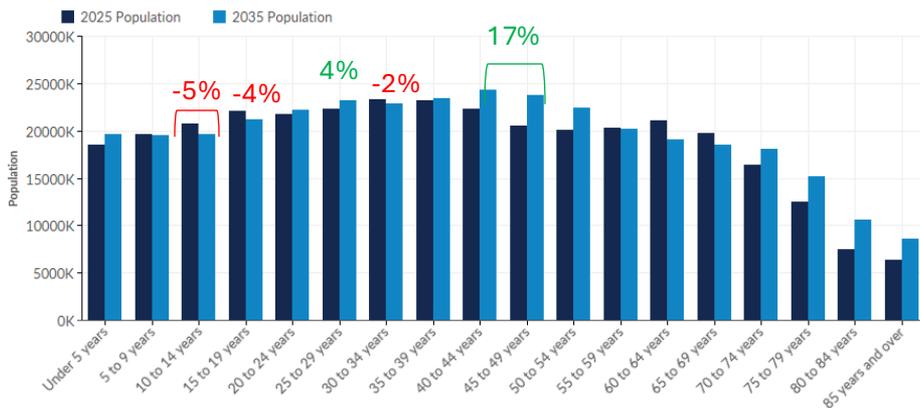
They are all around us and can have positive and negative impacts



Understanding the market starts with demographics

National population increase of 4%

Population by Age Cohort



Source: Regional Demographics. Lightcast™.



Other factors

- Region, state, locality variation
- Migration patterns—
amplified by the pandemic
- Degree attainment rates
- Changes in racial/ethnic composition

Student demand

Using existing sources helps to understand prior or current student demand



National Study
Data



Admissions Funnel
Trends



Publicly Available
Sources like IPEDS

Academic program demand – Associate’s

Nationally, at the associate’s degree level in 2023, 66% of degrees were awarded in the top 20 program CIPS, 50% in the top 5 CIPS, and 40% with a distance component

CIP Code	Description	Annual Openings	2023 Assoc Completions	Five Year Change in Degree Completions
24.0101	Liberal Arts and Sciences/Liberal Studies	2,722,069	229,781	(12%)
24.0102	General Studies	2,722,069	90,200	(8%)
51.3801	Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse	310,159	81,014	5%
52.0201	Business Administration and Management, General	2,146,532	56,241	1%
30.0101	Biological and Physical Sciences	320,251	23,920	(3%)
24.0103	Humanities/Humanistic Studies	11,502	17,966	(14%)
42.0101	Psychology, General	425,312	17,944	45%
52.0101	Business/Commerce, General	931,685	17,198	(0%)
24.0199	Liberal Arts and Sciences, General Studies and Humanities, Other	2,629,144	16,235	(12%)
47.0604	Automobile/Automotive Mechanics Technology/Technician	147,718	10,074	31%
45.0101	Social Sciences, General	156,946	9,981	(13%)
51.0000	Health Services/Allied Health/Health Sciences, General	270,992	9,511	204%
43.0103	Criminal Justice/Law Enforcement Administration	353,448	8,722	30%
26.0101	Biology/Biological Sciences, General	223,358	7,513	29%
51.0911	Radiologic Technology/Science - Radiographer	31,313	7,020	18%
13.1210	Early Childhood Education and Teaching	627,700	6,792	(6%)
43.0104	Criminal Justice/Safety Studies	495,965	6,415	(21%)
43.0107	Criminal Justice/Police Science	90,257	6,367	(52%)
11.0103	Information Technology	430,824	6,092	25%
52.0302	Accounting Technology/Technician and Bookkeeping	356,026	5,800	(23%)

Academic program demand – Bachelor’s

Nationally, at the bachelor’s degree level in 2023, 46% of degrees were awarded in the top 20 program CIPS, 25% in the top 5 CIPS, and 26% with a distance component

CIP Code	Description	Annual Openings	2023 Bach Completions	Five Year Change in Degree Completions
51.3801	Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse	310,159	144,069	3%
52.0201	Business Administration and Management, General	2,146,532	137,064	(5%)
42.0101	Psychology, General	425,312	116,692	7%
26.0101	Biology/Biological Sciences, General	223,358	77,935	3%
52.0801	Finance, General	776,443	46,003	5%
11.0701	Computer Science	460,523	43,494	58%
52.1401	Marketing/Marketing Management, General	303,272	43,185	6%
45.1001	Political Science and Government, General	340,218	39,728	3%
52.0301	Accounting	461,513	39,643	(24%)
14.1901	Mechanical Engineering	70,954	33,548	(5%)
13.1202	Elementary Education and Teaching	142,153	29,635	5%
43.0104	Criminal Justice/Safety Studies	495,965	29,263	(7%)
11.0101	Computer and Information Sciences, General	467,661	27,915	31%
23.0101	English Language and Literature, General	175,633	27,267	(21%)
31.0505	Exercise Science and Kinesiology	76,421	26,462	3%
09.0101	Speech Communication and Rhetoric	55,986	25,834	(24%)
45.1101	Sociology, General	324,356	25,833	(15%)
52.0101	Business/Commerce, General	931,685	25,307	(4%)
54.0101	History, General	182,082	23,342	(8%)
24.0101	Liberal Arts and Sciences/Liberal Studies	2,722,069	21,108	(16%)

Academic program demand – Master’s

Nationally, at the master’s degree level in 2023, 43% of degrees were awarded in the top 20 program CIPS, 22% in the top 5 CIPS, and 56% with a distance component

CIP Code	Description	Annual Openings	2023 Masters Completions	Five Year Change in Degree Completions
52.0201	Business Administration and Management, General	2,157,763	104,829	(2%)
44.0701	Social Work	238,408	34,512	17%
11.0701	Computer Science	464,303	22,201	76%
52.1301	Management Science	363,948	21,993	365%
51.3801	Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse	314,062	20,288	22%
11.0101	Computer and Information Sciences, General	470,256	18,308	61%
13.0401	Educational Leadership and Administration, General	52,538	18,176	(6%)
13.0301	Curriculum and Instruction	21,423	17,249	13%
52.1399	Management Sciences and Quantitative Methods, Other	496,859	15,331	426%
52.0301	Accounting	454,465	14,423	(27%)
13.0101	Education, General	523,063	14,044	(31%)
13.1001	Special Education and Teaching, General	220,057	14,006	20%
51.0701	Health/Health Care Administration/Management	587,261	13,364	32%
51.3805	Family Practice Nurse/Nursing	248,364	13,013	2%
51.2201	Public Health, General	211,845	12,220	20%
44.0401	Public Administration	502,377	11,893	(2%)
13.1101	Counselor Education/School Counseling and Guidance Services	31,104	11,783	7%
51.0912	Physician Assistant	13,192	11,521	35%
42.2803	Counseling Psychology	67,953	9,438	16%
52.0101	Business/Commerce, General	958,024	9,050	(5%)

Academic program demand – Doctoral

Nationally, at the doctoral degree level in 2023, 67% of degrees were awarded in the top 20 program CIPS, 43% in the top 5 CIPS, and 17% with a distance component

CIP Code	Description	Annual Openings	2023 Doctoral Completions	Five Year Change in Degree Completions
22.0101	Law	41,691	35,279	2%
51.1201	Medicine	19,731	20,423	7%
51.2308	Physical Therapy/Therapist	14,377	13,287	12%
51.2001	Pharmacy	88,580	12,894	(14%)
51.1202	Osteopathic Medicine/Osteopathy	15,805	7,884	23%
51.3818	Nursing Practice	310,790	7,474	81%
51.0401	Dentistry	4,500	6,869	10%
13.0401	Educational Leadership and Administration, General	52,538	6,134	30%
51.2306	Occupational Therapy/Therapist	10,981	3,503	291%
01.8001	Veterinary Medicine	4,769	3,466	9%
40.0501	Chemistry, General	266,832	2,970	6%
51.0101	Chiropractic	2,115	2,681	7%
13.0101	Education, General	523,063	2,501	(4%)
42.2801	Clinical Psychology	63,419	2,314	(5%)
52.0201	Business Administration and Management, General	2,157,763	2,198	1%
14.1001	Electrical and Electronics Engineering	55,091	2,141	(7%)
40.0801	Physics, General	90,649	1,879	8%
14.1901	Mechanical Engineering	70,633	1,842	16%
13.0301	Curriculum and Instruction	21,423	1,763	24%
51.1701	Optometry	1,934	1,758	8%

Labor market demand

Using existing sources helps to understand recent, current, and projected labor market needs



Bureau of Labor Statistics



Lightcast – Job Posting Data

Labor market needs – Associate’s

Advertised wages rose 16.0% in postings over the last 3 years for positions requiring an associate’s degree

Top Posted Occupations

Occupation (SOC)	Total/Unique (May 2024 - May 2025)	Posting Intensity	Median Posting Duration
Registered Nurses	1,634,133 / 457,047	4 : 1	23 days
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	987,634 / 316,520	3 : 1	23 days
Medical Assistants	208,197 / 72,837	3 : 1	26 days
Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary	171,557 / 66,652	3 : 1	26 days
Medical and Health Services Managers	151,838 / 59,644	3 : 1	26 days
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive	143,944 / 57,928	2 : 1	24 days
Health Technologists and Technicians, All Other	172,808 / 50,453	3 : 1	27 days
Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	93,713 / 42,757	2 : 1	24 days
Customer Service Representatives	108,357 / 41,677	3 : 1	24 days
Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	119,189 / 40,669	3 : 1	28 days

Labor market needs – Bachelor’s

Advertised wages rose 30.0% in postings over the last 3 years for positions requiring a bachelor’s degree

Top Posted Occupations

Occupation (SOC)	Total/Unique (May 2024 - May 2025)	Posting Intensity	Median Posting Duration
 Registered Nurses	2,300,332 / 624,508	4 : 1 	24 days
 Software Developers	873,852 / 362,777	2 : 1 	22 days
 Computer Occupations, All Other	729,634 / 305,959	2 : 1 	24 days
 Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	612,858 / 244,404	3 : 1 	27 days
 Project Management Specialists	540,536 / 230,912	2 : 1 	25 days
 Financial Managers	493,530 / 211,014	2 : 1 	27 days
 General and Operations Managers	511,372 / 195,962	3 : 1 	26 days
 Accountants and Auditors	406,665 / 179,352	2 : 1 	26 days
 Sales Managers	411,112 / 178,937	2 : 1 	27 days
 Medical and Health Services Managers	424,322 / 165,785	3 : 1 	26 days

Labor market needs – Master’s

Advertised wages rose 36.9% in postings over the last 3 years for positions requiring a master’s degree

Top Posted Occupations

Occupation (SOC)	Total/Unique (May 2024 - May 2025)	Posting Intensity	Median Posting Duration
Registered Nurses	445,077 / 130,548	3 : 1	24 days
Software Developers	300,046 / 115,403	3 : 1	23 days
Medical and Health Services Managers	276,833 / 108,626	3 : 1	26 days
Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors	293,203 / 106,944	3 : 1	24 days
Postsecondary Teachers	286,666 / 101,875	3 : 1	32 days
Computer Occupations, All Other	253,129 / 99,930	3 : 1	24 days
Speech-Language Pathologists	220,123 / 95,215	2 : 1	31 days
Nurse Practitioners	241,696 / 86,962	3 : 1	26 days
Financial Managers	186,642 / 79,112	2 : 1	27 days
Child, Family, and School Social Workers	193,234 / 74,636	3 : 1	25 days

Labor market needs – Doctoral

Advertised wages rose 44.2% in postings over the last 3 years for positions requiring a doctoral degree

Top Posted Occupations

Occupation (SOC)	Total/Unique (May 2024 - May 2025)	Posting Intensity	Median Posting Duration
 Postsecondary Teachers	282,481 / 93,938	3 : 1 	32 days
 Lawyers	183,199 / 76,745	2 : 1 	31 days
 Pharmacists	128,149 / 49,164	3 : 1 	26 days
 Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors	142,152 / 46,205	3 : 1 	26 days
 Medical and Health Services Managers	109,328 / 44,890	2 : 1 	26 days
 Physical Therapists	120,384 / 40,635	3 : 1 	20 days
 Dentists, General	96,455 / 34,020	3 : 1 	24 days
 Registered Nurses	90,215 / 24,877	4 : 1 	22 days
 Data Scientists	60,875 / 23,150	3 : 1 	23 days
 Software Developers	65,501 / 22,167	3 : 1 	23 days

Competitor analysis

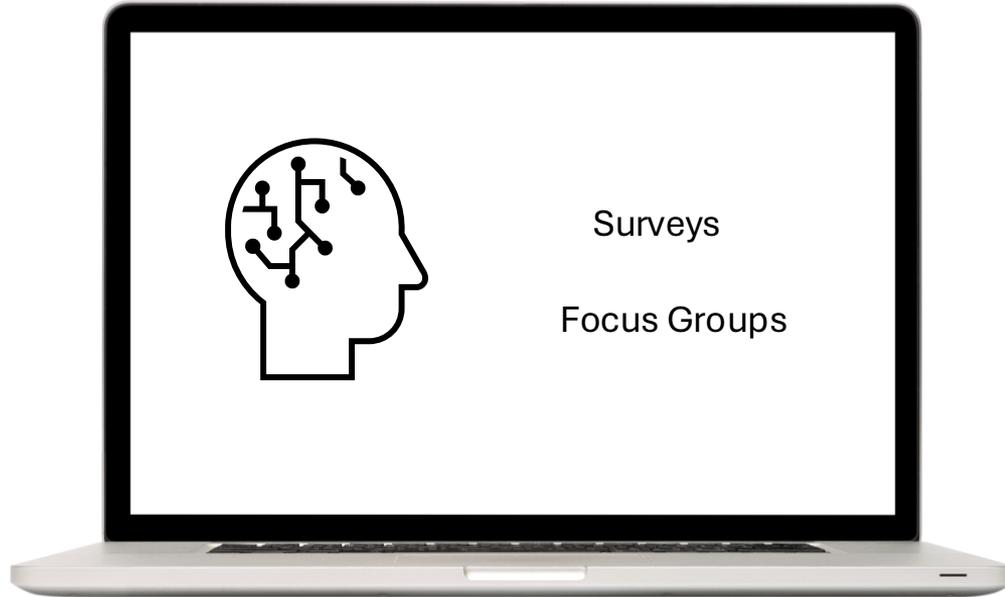
Understanding key program features



- Curriculum differentiators
- Program features
- Program marketing
- Cost
- Time to completion
- Term length
- Modality

Primary market research – Student & labor market

Current programs and new program development



- Artificial intelligence
 - AI tech
 - AI literacy
 - Machine learning
- Interdisciplinary programs
 - STEM and humanities integrated
 - Health informatics
- Cannabis science/studies
- Game/Media design



**Best Practices in Academic
Program Planning for
Graduate and Online**

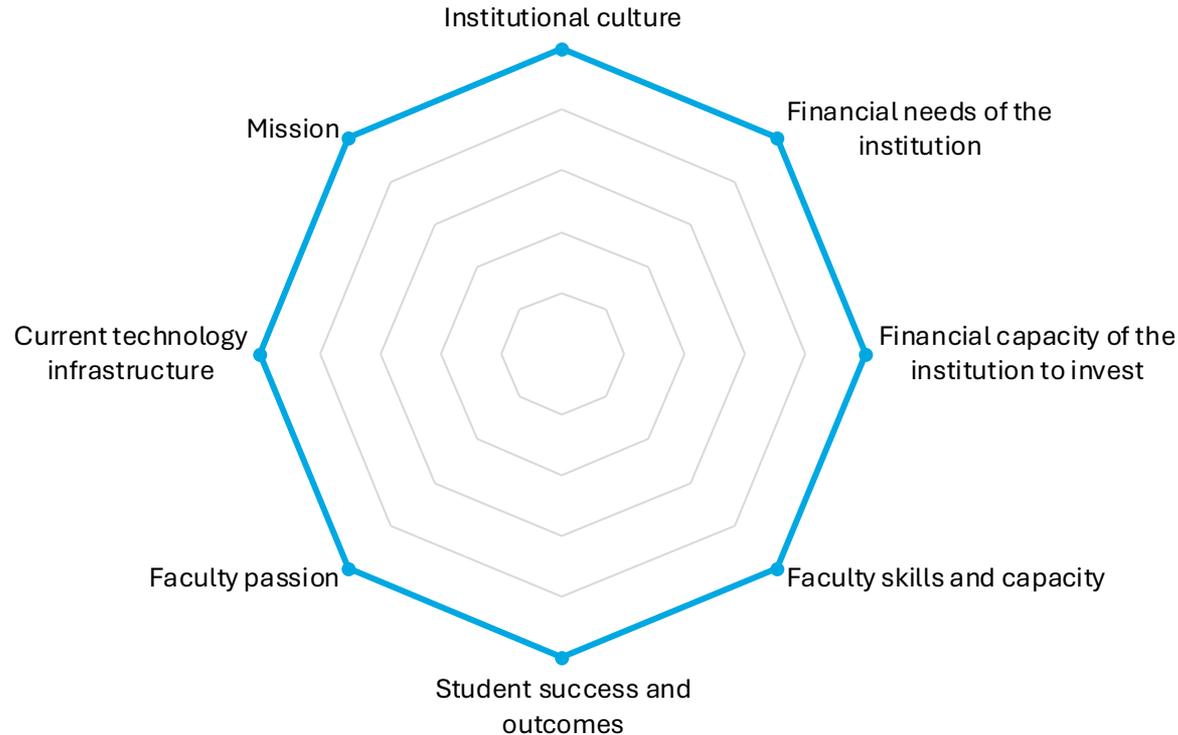
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In academic planning, the intersection is key to viability



Aligning to authenticity

Utilizing internal assets and being aware of challenges



Strategies for enhancing graduate and online program

When considering graduate or online programs...

- Attend to institutional culture. Be aware of fear or resistance if present.
- Listen and **lead**.
- Begin with the end in mind. Design programs that are rooted in mission, informed by market data, and are complementary to existing offerings.
- Incorporate market research to assess opportunities that align student interest and labor market needs.
- Develop curricula that use sound andragogy and are optimized for digital learning.
- Create intentional opportunities for graduate and online student engagement and support.
- Demonstrate and articulate value in the market through competitive pricing, outcomes, and established partnerships.
- Be nimble in institutional processes to help get new programs to market in a timely way and be flexible to be able to innovate as needs change.

An intentional planning process which engages stakeholders at the appropriate time can design out many issues

Issue	Suggested approach
Building programs based on a hunch, interest, or expertise.	Utilize available data to test ideas, hunches, and areas of interest against your market. Just because it is viable somewhere doesn't mean it's relevant in your market.
Building programs with little demand.	Utilize existing or conduct new market research to evaluate student and labor market demand before approving a new program to understand if there is sufficient demand.
Building programs in high-demand fields, but can't compete.	Research competitor offerings to identify areas of differentiation. Ensure authenticity and commit to program quality. Understand brand strength in crowded markets.
Making investments in starting new programs, but not in marketing.	Involve marketing, enrollment management, and finance in the planning process to ensure there is a plan to fund and promote new offerings. The market will not respond positively to a new program that it's not aware of.
Building programs based on demand alone.	Involve faculty in the process of discerning which programs to consider further. Ensure programs align to your mission and are of high quality.

Questions & Discussion



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