



**F E A T U R E**

# **Recruiting and Retaining Online Students**

## *An Exploratory Study of Universities with Mid-Size Online Program Enrollments*



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**This study uses an exploratory grounded theory approach to examine how 25 universities organize themselves to enhance student success for students enrolled primarily in online programs. The results reveal that most of these institutions cannot report the retention of these students and do not have a centralized approach to enhance student success. The few institutions that have centralized units enroll more students and use a concierge model that serves students once enrolled and helps recruit online students.**

Approximately 30 percent of all undergraduate and graduate students took all their courses online in 2024 (Aslanian and Fischer 2024). Research on the factors that influence online student persistence and graduation rates is an important emerging area of study. For example, at Southern New Hampshire University and Grand Canyon University, large providers of online education, the combined full-time and part-time undergraduate graduation rates were only 14 percent after eight years (Knox 2025). As Knox explains, online students often show lower persistence and graduation rates than traditional students. In addition, approximately 42 percent of all online college students, or 1.1 million students, were not first-time college students (Wiley 2023). Public policymakers and campus administrators should be concerned about low graduation rates. Less-educated workers have fewer job opportunities and earn lower wages. As a result of their lower earnings, they pay less in community, state, and federal taxes. Furthermore, approximately 42 percent of undergraduate students enrolled in online programs at nonprofit universities took out federal student

loans during the 2019–2020 academic year, and approximately 20 percent of online students defaulted on their loans (NCES 2022).

There is a paucity of research on the factors associated with online student persistence and success. A few studies have considered the types of support services for online learners (Shea and Bidjerano 2018), while others have focused on the importance of social support and financial stability (Qayyum, *et al.* 2019). Bozarth, Chapman, and LaMonica (2004) concluded that comprehensive student services, orientation, and onboarding programs are also important. There is also a large body of research on effective teaching practices (Betts, Hartman, and Oxholm 2013), but this was not the focus of this study. However, little is known about how institutions implement research-based insights to enhance their students' success.

This study initially focused on the policies and practices implemented by universities to enhance student success. As is often the case in exploratory qualitative research, other insights emerged from the data. This study revealed that good practices for

online student success are often the best practices for online student recruitment. Additionally, the potential importance of student debt and loan defaults has emerged as a significant concern.

## Sample

One-hundred and thirty-one universities offering more than ten online undergraduate or graduate programs, with an undergraduate retention rate of over 70 percent, were invited to participate in a one-hour interview (see Appendix A). The focus was on institutions that enroll most of their students on campus, with the largest online enrollment being no more than one-third of the total number of students. The interviews examined how institutions were organized to enhance student success. Each institution received an invitation from the principal investigator, sent to the online program director if identified, or sent to the provost. Non-responding institutions received a follow-up email after two weeks. A total of 31 institu-

tions indicated a willingness to participate in the study, but only 25 set up times for interviews. However, two universities that participated were subsequently excluded due to incorrect IPEDS data regarding the program's criteria. This resulted in 24 usable interviews. Interviews were conducted via Zoom by two researchers using a grounded theory approach for this qualitative exploratory study.

## Methods and Perspective

Because research on institutional policies and practices associated with online student success is limited, this was an exploratory study that used qualitative methods. Qualitative research methods are uniquely suited to exploratory studies that aim to investigate poorly understood phenomena, uncover underlying social processes, and generate hypotheses for future inquiry (Creswell and Poth 2018). Unlike quantitative approaches, which rely on predefined variables and statistical analysis, qualitative methods prioritize



depth and context to identify emergent themes that may be absent from the existing research (Bryman 2016). As Creswell (2013) noted, qualitative research is effective in exploring complex issues where nuanced understanding and context are crucial.

This study employed semi-structured interviews, which enabled the researchers to collect rich narrative data that shed light on a previously understudied area of institutional policies and practices (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The interview protocol was based on previous research identifying best practices for online student success and on extant research on factors influencing online student persistence and graduation.

The researchers followed a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) using iterative data collection and analysis to inductively develop theories based on the emergent themes. It is also important to acknowledge the positionality they brought to the analysis of the interview data. Two of the researchers in this study brought the perspective of scholars who have extensively examined research on enrollment management, particularly college student persistence and academic success. In addition, two of the researchers served as enrollment managers, and student retention efforts were part of their portfolio of responsibilities. The third researcher has a wealth of practical experience in enhancing the academic success of college students who have stopped out at either the undergraduate or graduate level and are re-enrolling as online students. In addition, the researchers brought both positivist and constructivist perspectives to this study. Positivism assumes that the researcher and the observed reality are independent of each other and that the research undertaken must be value-free and objective (Karupiah 2022). Constructivists believe that knowledge can be accumulated through the informed reconstruction of the experiences of those being interviewed (Boyland 2019). Each session was audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes, patterns, and unique insights in the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). The researchers met four times during the interviews to check inter-rater reliability and to triangulate the meanings they were making of the interviews (Denzin

2012). In addition, during the ongoing process of the interviews, the researchers checked whether they had heard any emergent themes that merited exploration in the remaining interviews. This iterative analysis process informed the subsequent data collection, illustrating the adaptive nature of qualitative research (Charmaz 2014). The iterative nature of qualitative research also enabled the researchers to explore and shed light on three topics that emerged during the interviews. For example, one topic that emerged was concern about student debt, students who had unpaid bursar bills, and students in default on federal loans. The other topic that emerged was how staffing patterns and services, as well as policies related to credit for life experience and curricular offerings, were related to both student success and greater success in recruiting online students. As a result, the researchers added questions on these topics as the interviews progressed.

To establish the importance of student loan debt, the Department of Education announced that nearly ten million borrowers could default within months. Only 38 percent of borrowers were current in the repayment of their student loans (U.S. Department of Education 2025). NSLDS statutes prohibit defaulted students from receiving additional loans, Pell Grants, or SEOG awards. The potential for students to be declared in default and its impact on online students has become increasingly relevant.

Student debt in the form of unpaid bursar bills is also important. A recent study using 2020 data estimated that 40 to 60 percent of all students who attended public institutions and dropped out had unpaid bursar bills (Ithaca S+R 2020). This study estimated that 6.6 million students had unpaid bursar bills. In addition, this number is likely to have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (Soria, Horgos, and Justina 2023). While the “Stranded Credit Law” makes it illegal for postsecondary institutions to hold transcripts from student requests, enrollment professionals privately acknowledge that there are many ways to make it more difficult for students to secure their transcripts (Palmer 2024). In addition, Palmer noted that some colleges are reluctant to enroll students who have defaulted on federal loans or have a history of not paying

their bills. Four-year colleges with high default rates and community colleges are very concerned that enrolling in default could ultimately result in a loss of access to federal financial aid programs (Arrojas 2025; Cheng 2025).

This study found connections between retention and recruitment staffing and policies. Respondents with larger, more centralized structures to enhance student success consistently mentioned using concierge staffing models. This staffing model consists of offices with trained staff ready to help online students navigate the application, enrollment, and registration processes. Furthermore, it helps students after they have matriculated, when they may be having academic problems or difficulty with financial aid. They help students throughout the entire enrollment process, similar to how a hotel concierge assists guests in finding activities or restaurants that suit their needs or interests (WICHE 2010). They also discussed the connections among timely evaluation of transfer credits, credit for prior learning, and academic programs that enabled students to transfer more credit hours as being important for both retention and recruitment.

As a result of the intersection of the interviews with public and institutional policy issues, the researchers also explored these issues in subsequent interviews.

## Study Results

The results are organized as follows.

- Identification of senior administrator(s) responsible for enhancing student success and graduation rates
- The extent to which universities set enrollment goals and track persistence
- Degree of centralization in managing online programs
- Strategies for retaining and recruiting online students
- Availability of student support services beyond regular working hours
- The focus on labor market alignment and academic programs
- Secondary themes

## Discussion

### Primary Responsibility for Online Education

The findings showed that 68 percent of the individuals overseeing online education reported to the provost, with titles ranging from director to associate vice president for strategic outreach. Senior enrollment management administrators formed the next largest group (30 percent). Two institutions (1%) used a matrix structure to split responsibilities between the provost and other administrators, and in two instances (1%), the senior administrator reported to vice presidents who were responsible for technology areas in their universities.

### Focus on Online Learners

When asked about the organizational structure of offices that support online student success, 77 percent of respondents reported that no structure existed. One of the interviewees, who was the vice president for enrollment management at a public flagship university, described the state of the organizational focus on online learning as the “Wild West.” Another participant indicated that support programs for online learners were distributed across student affairs and academic departments. Only 23 percent reported having either a clear or partial structure in place. Additionally, respondents expressed uncertainty about academic program-level policies and strategies; only 39 percent believed that their university had a strong focus on online student retention and graduation.

Of the institutions studied, 54 percent did not generate online student retention reports or provide staff with independent access to these data. Only 13 percent had readily available data, while 33 percent tracked enrollment patterns. Emblematic of the lack of data, when researchers asked one associate vice chancellor for enrollment management if she had access to reports on the persistence rates of online students, or any reports that tracked the degree progress of online students, her answer was a quick and emphatic, “no.” Another senior enrollment officer at a large public regional university responded that reports on reten-

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tion and graduation rates were available but nobody at a senior level “wakes up every morning looking at them.” Only 30 percent had set goals for online student enrollment and graduation. Two-thirds of the institutions had no goals, with the remaining schools offering broad statements about increasing their enrollment. It is axiomatic that institutions lacking data-informed insights and clear goals are less likely to prioritize online student success.

### Degree of Centralization

While one participant who worked at a public flagship university reported that online education was very decentralized at her institution. Another interviewee from a public flagship university led a large and centralized unit for online education. He stated that although they were slow to develop online programs, they have been actively involved in strategic planning around online learning since 2022. He added, that “we will soon launch a suite of options for online learning.” Staff sizes for offices that oversaw online learning ranged from five to 200, with larger sizes correlating with increased centralization and more online offerings. Institutions with larger, centralized staff systematically tracked online student success and established enrollment objectives to improve student retention. Five universities with staff exceeding 35 managed transfer evaluations and credit for prior learning within self-contained units featuring the following:

- Mini-admissions operations
- Registration and records services
- Financial aid processing
- Concierge-style advising supports students from inquiry to recruitment through degree completion.

One centralized unit implemented career-planning services specifically for online learners.

Decentralized models feature smaller staff members distributed across academic units. Online education leaders in these institutions typically serve as knowledgeable insiders, leveraging campus-wide relationships rather than directing formal structures to achieve their goals. Continuing studies and veterans’

programs frequently operated within these decentralized offices.

### Extended Support Hours

Another measure of an institution’s commitment to serving online students is the availability of student services beyond typical business hours (McKinsey and Company 2022). The study’s interviews revealed that more than half of the institutions’ bursar and registrar offices were unavailable beyond 9 AM to 5 PM. Approximately 15 percent of the respondents offered after-hour appointments during periods of course registration, which are peak time periods for the offices of advising, bursar, financial aid, and registration and records. Regarding academic advising, all institutions had online degree audit systems such as DARS or Elucian Degree Audit and Planning, which allowed students to see the courses required for degree completion. However, few had degree planner programs that showed course offerings two to three semesters in advance. Ziskin, Torres, Hossler, and Gross (2023) found this to be crucial for working community college students’ persistence, as it helped them arrange work schedules around courses. There is every reason to think that this would help students enroll in four-year college degree programs. Fifty-nine percent of these institutions provided academic advising in the evenings and on weekends. Many had concierge staff available to help students with academic advising and support issues. Regarding academic tutoring, one-third of the respondents offered 24x7 support or evening and weekend appointments. In some instances, 24x7 support was provided by external vendors. Mathematics courses most commonly require academic support.

Respondents indicated that IT support was available 24x7 or well into the evenings on weekdays and weekends, often through third-party vendors. Services for academic advising, academic support, and IT support were less available during the evenings and weekends. Finally, although research on retention consistently shows that student—faculty interaction promotes student persistence, faculty support and interaction were rarely mentioned during interviews (Loes, An, and Trolian 2024).

## The Labor Market and Academic Programs

Half of the participants reported aligning programs with labor market trends, with 25 percent focusing specifically on state or regional needs. Two states had policies mandating or incentivizing an increase in the number of graduates in targeted fields.

Undergraduate programs included the following:

- Business
- Education
- Nursing (B.S.N.)
- Public health
- Criminal justice
- Social work
- Psychology
- Computer science

Approximately 52 percent offered general studies bachelor's degrees with flexible transfer policies that include proactive and transparent information about how credits will transfer. Online students are responsive to policies that are responsive to student mobility and the reality that students often take classes from several different institutions. Free and rapid transfer credit evaluations and acceptance decisions are important to students who have stopped out and are re-enrolling (AACRAO 2017). However, transferring credits was not easy at all the institutions where researchers interviewed staff. Indeed, one participant stated that "if we continue to give transfer students the runaround...they are not going to come here." Graduate program offerings most often mentioned included the following:

- Business (M.B.A.)
- Education
- Social work
- Public health
- Computer science

Specialized Curricular Offerings Linked to Institutional Strengths and Regional Needs

- Environmental science
- Online engineering degrees with virtual engineering labs

- Programs tailored to veteran populations (aerospace studies, national defense)

## Institutional Financial Aid and Student Debt

Only four schools (15%) reported using campus-based financial aid for online student enrollment. For example, the associate vice president for online education at a regional public university reported that they offered scholarships they called "stay the course scholarships" to new students who continued taking courses after their first semester. Overall, the finding that few universities in this study offer any financial aid to online students is significant. This is notable, as the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO 2025) reports that public universities' average discount rate has increased to 24 percent. Only one private university and three public universities use institutional aid to influence online student retention and recruitment. Two additional schools reported discussing this issue. One university reported that to attract and retain more transfer students, they charged transfer students from in-state community colleges the same tuition rate as their originating institutions.

Although it was not included in the original interview protocol, student debt emerged as a significant concern during later interviews. One private university reported implementing programs for stop-outs with debt. At this university, students with unpaid bursar bills could receive debt forgiveness for each successive semester in which they re-enrolled in a degree program. Three public universities expressed concern that the federal decision to begin calculating student defaults on federal loans could result in fewer online students being eligible for federal student loans in future semesters. However, one interviewee noted that most online students did not borrow, rendering the issue less salient for their institution.

## Retention and Recruitment Overlap

It became evident that good practice in recruiting online students was also good practice for student retention. Research has shown that college transfer students who need fewer credits are more likely

to graduate (CHEPP 2024, 3). Campus-based efforts for rapid transcript evaluation help students quickly identify their remaining course requirements. Academic policies that allow credit for prior learning can reduce the number of courses required for degree completion. Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) offers college credit for skills and knowledge gained through life and work experience rather than traditional classroom study. CPL processes enable postsecondary institutions to evaluate learning from experiences such as military training, work experience, industry certifications, as well as from portfolios that demonstrate knowledge that merits academic credit, or certification toward a degree or credential (CAEL n.d.). One participant, who was the director of online learning at a regional public institution, offered the following statement: “The biggest issue I’m finding is that not enough people on campus, who are in charge of meeting 1:1 with these students, are aware of credit for prior learning, nor have they been trained to advise for prior learning. It is amazing because we know the impact it has on the academic journey of adult students.” Clear transfer credit policies and prior learning credits will increase graduation rates and reduce degree costs (CHEPP 2024, 21). The respondents also emphasized the importance of rapid admission and enrollment for student recruitment and persistence.

Several institutions have developed generalized degree-completion programs within integrated bachelor’s and master’s degree programs that enable students to count credits previously taken and complete degrees related to their original enrollment interests in less time (Middle Tennessee State University n.d.). Other institutions follow guidelines from state system offices or workforce development studies to increase the number of degree-holders in the local workforce. Institutional marketing involves various tactics, from purchasing credit reports of non-completers to using alumni records with outdated contact information. Surprisingly, most respondents indicated that they typically do not contact former students who left before completing their studies.

As previously noted, when prospective students were identified, institutions began the re-enrollment

process. Some schools had trained in-house staff to evaluate prior learning and conduct portfolio reviews, rather than outsourcing these functions. They also had in-house staff to undertake transfer credit articulation and dedicated offices for re-enrollment. This enables prospective students to move through these activities more rapidly. Others have had no special processes or assessment staff in place, so that admission processes for transfer evaluations had to compete with traditional student applications for time. On the other hand, several participants noted delays in transfer evaluations, with one school reporting longer admission times for returning stop-outs than first-time applicants. Indeed, one interviewee who was responsible for online course offerings at a regional public institution noted that it “takes longer for a stop-out who wants to re-enroll to be admitted than it does for a first-time applicant.” These situations often leave adult learners in extended queues, causing uncertainty and reducing their interest. Institutions that provided clear next steps achieved better enrollment yields than those that did not focus on adult students (ACE n.d.).

For schools where respondents indicated that credit for prior learning is a programmatic policy that helps them recruit online students to complete their degrees, only 29 percent of the interviewees had internal staff managing this process. Several interviewees also noted that they had developed interdisciplinary bachelor’s and master’s degrees that permitted more courses to transfer into these programs, thus reducing time to degree and incentivizing more students to re-enroll.

These results demonstrate how comprehensive efforts to retain online students are intertwined with effective methods of recruiting returning and online students. Reducing the time to degree has a positive influence on the recruitment and retention of these students. Flexible degree programs that enable students to bring in more credits from previous courses taken, as well as awarding credit for previous experience, make the student more likely to matriculate and enhance the probabilities that they will persist and graduate.

## Secondary Themes for Future Exploration

In addition to these findings, other policies were mentioned that were important to their efforts to increase online student enrollment. These policies went beyond the scope of this study, but merit future investigation.

- *Budget Systems and Incentives:* A few schools used responsibility-centered management (RCM) models. RCM is a budget model where all revenue-generating units, such as a school of business or college of arts and sciences (also called responsibility centers), must generate sufficient funds through tuition, grants, and other avenues to finance curricular needs and personnel (DeLancey and deVries 2023). One interviewee, who served as the dean of graduate and online education at a regional public university, told the researchers that online programs were budgeted as an auxiliary enterprise, which gave her great latitude as to how she spent the fees from online education. An associate vice provost who was responsible for online initiatives at a public flagship university with a large number of online programs told the researchers that the university had just put in place a revenue-share model that provided bonuses to faculty who teach courses in online programs. These approaches enabled academic units to offer more online degrees and online administrative units to hire staff and launch retention and recruitment initiatives.
- *Flexible Start Dates:* Some universities allow students to begin courses every seven weeks or at any time for asynchronous courses. Slow transcript evaluation processes are incompatible with online programs that offer multiple starting dates throughout the year.
- *Readiness for Adult Learners:* A Texas university launched an in-person program to introduce older students to the technology skills they would need to succeed in online courses.
- *AI:* Several interviewees reported using AI to provide students with information about academic advising, the bursar's office, the registrar's office, IT support, and academic support.

- *Webpages:* During open-ended discussions at the end of the interviews, some schools mentioned the difficulty of getting the funding and campus priority to provide adequate webpages, and making them easy to find specifically designed for recruiting and serving online students. As Sweak (2024) notes, there is always competition among different divisions within universities for both the development of web pages and keeping them up to date.

## Conclusions

Overall, these findings suggest that most institutions in this study lack a strong focus on the success of online students. Only 17 percent reported robust staffing and infrastructure to serve online students effectively, while almost two-thirds had no organizational structure focused on enhancing persistence and graduation rates for online students. Often, these kinds of services fell under individual academic programs, and respondents did not know about the practices of each program. Universities with larger online enrollments and centralized structures have adequate staffing to recruit and provide ongoing student support. However, many universities lack sufficient staff for retention or recruitment efforts.

Just 13 percent of online program leaders had easy access to reports on the academic success of online students, and only 33 percent tracked online enrollment patterns at all. Schools that fail to monitor students who persist are unlikely to focus on student success or to re-enroll stop-outs—the students who enrolled previously and who are most likely to restart their courses.

Many of the schools in this study provide support for the offices of advising and IT services that go beyond 9 AM to 5 PM on weekdays, and for them to be available on the weekends. Access to registrars, bursars, and financial aid offices is limited, although some universities offer extended hours during peak periods. Many institutions provide administrative support for online students beyond regular hours.

In closing, state policymakers should be pleased that the universities in this study align their academic programs with labor-market trends. A small

number of schools have adopted concierge models with coaches throughout students' enrollment cycles. While more research is needed on these models, respondents in this study who work with concierge staff believe they are effective for student navigation and student success. Many universities use artificial intelligence (AI) to provide baseline information. In addition, some institutions partner with specialized vendors for recruitment, potentially increasing their enrollment. Finally, it appears that multiple start dates benefit online students in managing their careers and their families.

## Recommendations

- Universities should create reports to track stop-outs to facilitate re-enrollment efforts. It is hard to know if a university needs to enhance efforts to retain online students if it lacks information on the persistence and academic success of online students.
- Institutions should strive to create a central unit that oversees efforts to support and retain currently enrolled online students, and to recruit new online students. Too often, respondents were uncertain what individual academic programs were doing to retain or recruit students. Institutions should create less-siloed student success units across academic and non-academic boundaries. However, without a clear mandate from the president or provost, this is challenging to accomplish.
- Online programs should have a central unit and establish a clear set of policies that deal with the admission, transfer credit, and credit for prior learning for new applicants. Leading online universities, such as Southern New Hampshire University, Western Governors University, and the University of Maryland Global, complete transfer credit evaluations within three to ten days of the student's application (Klein-Collins 2010). Klein-Collins also notes that while 90 percent of two- and four-year colleges recognize credit for prior learning, only 50 to 55 percent have internal assessment processes and 25 to 30 percent have dedicated staff for evaluating portfolios, work experience, and military learning. In this study, 29 percent of universities had internal staff for these functions.
- The larger and more successful online units used concierge models to provide seamless support for online students. Advisors worked with students from their initial inquiry through their continuous enrollment. Further research is needed to determine the efficacy of these services and optimal student-to-advisor ratios.
- Regarding the emerging concern over student loan default, the first step is for institutions to explore their financial aid data to determine the extent to which online students have used student loans to finance their education.
- Research is also needed on the relationship between the budgeting models used to fund online programs and the scope of online units and their activities. Research is also needed on the use of AI to support online students, as well as on the extent to which schools enable online course planning tools that look two and three semesters into the future and support multiple start dates for courses. Studies are also needed to examine the extent to which online programs are prioritized, so they have sufficient web pages to attract and retain students.

## Final Thoughts

The enrollment cliff, the potential impact of online student loan defaults, and student debt underscore the importance of institutional action for schools committed to online learning so that they can avoid financial crises. The National Student Clearinghouse indicates that there are 36.8 million individuals with some college, but with no degree and no credential (June 6, 2024). However, determining the best path to pursue these needs is difficult, given the fiscal realities facing universities.

Institutions for which debt is a common way for online students to pay their tuition fees may need to take actions such as dedicating staff specifically for outreach and support to this population, including professional staff from the offices of admissions, the registrar, financial aid, and the bursar, to attract and

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retain students who are in default or at risk of being in default.

Unpaid bursar bills may also be a problem for some schools. Even though the “Stranded Credit Law” makes withholding transcripts because of unpaid bursar bills illegal, colleges have a myriad of ways to make it difficult for students to get their transcripts, and some universities are reluctant to admit students with credit problems from their previous institution.

This study provides senior campus leaders with a clear overview of the strengths and weaknesses of serving online students at many universities. In rare cases, concerns on some campuses may prompt a presidential or provost mandate to address these issues. Funding for new programs and staff typically follows such edicts. Universities may then quickly provide resources or partner with vendors to enhance online student enrollment and success and work with students in default.

In the current fiscal environment, most universities face resource demands that exceed the available dollars, making base funding difficult to secure. Beyond financial constraints, organic institutional change occurs slowly at four-year universities. As Marginson (2021) shows, most curricular, student services, and financial aid reforms took five to ten years to be fully implemented. This period may be too long for some institutions.

Another path to reform support services and academic programs is to create a strategic plan for the required changes. Strategic plans usually identify the resources needed and organizational changes. Advocates of online education can help identify policy, staffing, and programmatic changes for iterative implementation. Nevertheless, strategic plans typically

focus on three- to five-year periods; changes often do not occur quickly.

In lean times, leaders are reluctant to make base-budget commitments without persuasive evidence of positive ROI. Consequently, universities may need to turn to consulting groups to find short-term solutions. These groups can offer expertise in working with online students, analytics to identify potential students, concierge systems, marketing expertise, approaches to financial aid and debt relief, and web development capabilities. The benefit of this approach is that they require one-time commitments rather than base funding, and as a result, face less resistance. Gagliardi and Espinosa (2018) note that while extended reliance on external vendors should be avoided, they can provide valuable expertise and facilitate quick changes. One-time commitments and knowledge transfer can help institutions provide attractive programs for online students. Consultants assist in evaluating policies and practices that can be addressed quickly. The long-term goal is for universities to develop their own internal capacity to serve online students.

This study suggests that many of the universities have much to do to improve their efforts to enhance the success of online students. Additionally, it turns out that there is an inter-connectedness between the programs and policies that help to retain students and also to recruit them. Finally, universities that provide credit for life experiences and that offer broad, integrative undergraduate and graduate majors that enable students to transfer in more credits, help students to persist and graduate. In addition, institutions with concierge staffing models help students succeed and are also used to recruit and enroll online students.

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## APPENDIX A

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### Universities Invited to Participate

Appalachian State University  
Auburn University  
Ball State University  
Baylor University  
Boston University

Bowling Green State University  
Brigham Young University  
California State University, Fullerton  
California State University, Long Beach  
California State University, Northridge

Central Michigan University  
Central Washington University  
Clemson University  
Cleveland State University  
Coastal Carolina University

College of Charleston  
 Colorado Mesa University  
 Colorado State University Fort Collins  
 Drexel University  
 Eastern Kentucky University  
 Eastern Michigan University  
 Eastern Washington University  
 Florida International University  
 Florida State University  
 Georgia Institute of Technology  
 Georgia State University  
 Gonzaga University  
 Idaho State University  
 Illinois State University  
 Indiana State University  
 Indiana University, Indianapolis  
 Iowa State University  
 Kansas State University  
 Kennesaw State University  
 Lehigh University  
 Louisiana State University  
 Marshall University  
 Mercer University  
 Michigan State University  
 Middle Tennessee State University  
 Minnesota State University, Mankato  
 Mississippi State University  
 Missouri State University  
 Montana State University  
 New Mexico State University  
 Nicholls State University  
 Northeastern University  
 Northern Kentucky University  
 Ohio State University  
 Old Dominion University  
 Oregon State University  
 Purdue University, Indianapolis  
 Quinnipiac University  
 Radford University

Rider University  
 Rutgers University-Camden  
 Sacred Heart University  
 Saint Louis University  
 Salisbury University  
 San Diego State University  
 Seattle University  
 Seton Hall University  
 South Dakota State University  
 Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
 Southern Utah University  
 St. Cloud State University  
 Stevens Institute of Technology  
 SUNY Albany  
 SUNY Binghamton  
 SUNY Stony Brook University  
 Syracuse University  
 Texas Tech University  
 Troy University  
 University of Alabama  
 University of Alabama at Birmingham  
 University of Alaska Anchorage  
 University of Arkansas  
 University of Arkansas – Little Rock  
 University of California, Davis  
 University of California, Irvine  
 University of Central Florida  
 University of Colorado Boulder  
 University of Colorado Denver  
 University of Delaware  
 University of Georgia  
 University of Hawaii at Manoa  
 University of Houston  
 University of Kansas  
 University of Kentucky  
 University of Louisiana at Lafayette  
 University of Louisiana at Monroe  
 University of Maine  
 University of Maryland, College Park

University of Massachusetts Amherst  
 University of Massachusetts Boston  
 University of Memphis  
 University of Minnesota Twin Cities  
 University of Mississippi  
 University of Missouri  
 University of Montana  
 University of Nebraska at Omaha  
 University of Nebraska – Lincoln  
 University of Nevada, Reno  
 University of New Mexico  
 University of Northern Iowa  
 University of Pittsburgh  
 University of Rhode Island  
 University of South Carolina – Columbia  
 University of South Dakota  
 University of South Florida  
 University of Southern Indiana  
 University of Southern Mississippi  
 University of St. Thomas  
 University of Tennessee Chattanooga  
 University of Tennessee Knoxville  
 University of Tennessee Martin  
 University of Utah  
 University of Washington  
 University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire  
 University of Wisconsin – Green Bay  
 University of Wisconsin – La Crosse  
 University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee  
 University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh  
 University of Wyoming  
 Utah Valley University  
 Virginia Tech  
 Wayne State University  
 West Chester University of Pennsylvania  
 West Virginia University  
 Western Kentucky University  
 Western Washington University

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## About the Authors

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**Don Hossler** has spent his entire career in higher education. First, he spent ten years at his alma mater, California Lutheran University, working in student affairs. After earning his Ph.D. in higher education, he spent four years as a professor at Loyola University of Chicago, followed by 30 years at Indiana University Bloomington, and six years at the University of Southern California. His primary areas of research are enrollment management and economics and finance of higher education. During his tenure at IU, he also served as the executive associate dean of the School of Education and as the vice-chancellor for enrollment services. He is the founding director of the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. At retirement from IU, he was named a provost professor and received the Sonneborn Award for excellence in research and teaching.

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