# Louisiana Forward

## Online Learning in Louisiana's Higher Education Landscape

## 2023 REPORT

PUBLISHED JUNE 2024

REGENTS

BOARD *of* REGENTS
STATE OF LOUISIANA

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**NOTES**

1 – The following report utilizes the terms "online learning" and "e-learning" interchangeably due to the lack of a standardized definition across Louisiana's public colleges and universities. While efforts were made to maintain consistency, readers should be aware of potential variations in interpretation.

2 – The data presented in this report were sourced either from the Louisiana Board of Regents or data collected through the project's policy analysis, focus groups, and surveys. However, challenges arose in confirming certain data points due to the lack of consistent coding for online students to differentiate between students taking online courses and those enrolled in online programs. Addressing this discrepancy highlights the need for standardized coding practices to capture and differentiate various aspects of online learning participation accurately.

# Welcome

As Chair of the Board of Regents eLearning Taskforce, I'm proud to present the inaugural Louisiana Forward publication, with hopes that it becomes an annual tradition.

This publication represents our collective effort to gain insights and proactively address opportunities in serving a broader base of learners in Louisiana, while strategically advancing online learning initiatives. The decision to entrust leadership from within the University of Louisiana System to spearhead this endeavor underscores our commitment to comprehensive expertise in the field.

Their diligent work, alongside their team, reflects a collaborative exploration into the history of online learning in our state, the current landscape, and the many opportunities for improvement, innovation, and strategic growth.

I want to extend a personal thank you to Dr. Darlene Williams, the inaugural chair of the eLearning Task Force. She offered the necessary historical background for the report. We eagerly anticipate acting upon the recommendations provided in this report and invite your valuable feedback and collaboration as we strive to propel Louisiana forward.

**Missy LaCour**
Chair, eLearning Task Force
Director of New Markets, LCTCS

# The Case for Online Learning

To move Louisiana aggressively forward, in 2019, the Louisiana Board of Regents embraced a robust new attainment goal, calling for 60% of all working-age adults (ages 25-64) in Louisiana to hold a degree or high-value credential by 2030. As the state stood on the brink of a new decade, this Master Plan, born of the Board of Regents' unique charge to guide postsecondary education across the state, set the foundation to increase opportunity. The Talent Imperative was to Educate, Innovate, and Collaborate.

As goals were established, the directive to engage the substantial latent adult learner population emerged as a solution to the impending enrollment cliff expected to affect higher education institutions across the United States in the next decade. Despite the projected decrease in the traditional-age student population, the state of Louisiana holds a significant advantage, with over 635,000 residents having some college experience but lacking a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024).

One way to benefit from this population is via online education. Online education is a rapidly expanding sector within higher education, particularly accelerated by the widespread transition to remote instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic at the beginning of spring 2020. Louisiana has made some strides in online learning as detailed in the milestones.

**Chart 1. Percent of Students Enrolled in Distance Education Courses.**
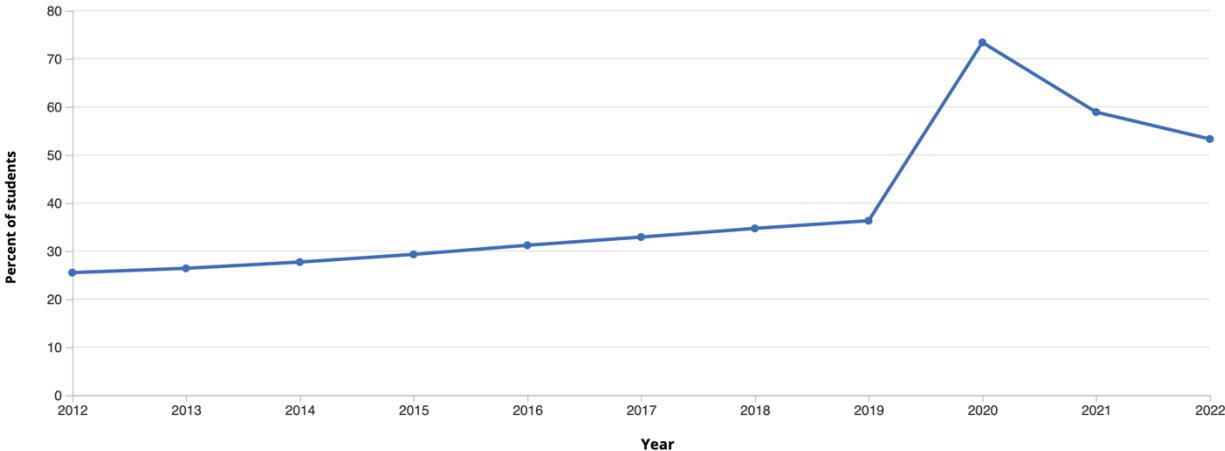


Notes: This table presents data collected from Title IV institutions in the United States.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall Enrollment component final data (2012 - 2021) and provisional data (2022).

# Milestones

During the 1990s and early 2000s, there was a concerted effort that focused on video conferencing, the establishment of a more robust network, and the initial offering of online education. The 2000s focused on collaboration, professional development, and program/course development. State Action Teams, initiated by the Board of Regents, worked on various projects related to or in support of eLearning. Much of the work during this time created the foundation for online education in Louisiana.

**Table 1. Timeline of Online Education in Louisiana.**

| Year | Milestone |
|---|---|
| 2000 | **First Program.** In 2000, the first online degree program was presented to the Louisiana Board of Regents |
| 2006 | **CALL.** The Center for Adult Learning in Louisiana (CALL) was launched as an effort designed to either bring adults to college or bring them back to college. |
| 2009 | **eLearning Task Force.** The Louisiana Board of Regents announced the establishment of the Electronic Learning Strategic Planning Task Force. |
| 2013 | **eLearning Conference.** The Louisiana Board of Regents hosted the first eLearning Statewide Conference. |
| 2014 | **Louisiana Online.** Louisiana launched *Louisiana Online* and became a member of the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA). |
| 2015 | **NC-SARA Institutions.** The group of Louisiana institutions were approved for participation in NC-SARA. |
| 2016 | **Open Education Resources Pilot.** The Louisiana Board of Regents launched an Open Education Resources (OER) pilot project to support student success by making higher education more affordable through the adoption of OER. |
| 2020 | **Digital Inclusion Strategic Action Team.** The Commissioner for Higher Education assembled a Digital Inclusion Strategic Action Team to rapidly assess how the digital divide impacted Louisiana postsecondary institutions during the COVID pandemic. |
| 2021 | **Open Textbooks Pilot Program.** LOUIS: The Louisiana Library Network and the Louisiana Board of Regents announced their selection for a $2M award for the Open Textbooks Pilot Program from the Department of Education. |
| 2024 | **CHELLO.** The Community of Higher Education Louisiana Learning Online (CHELLO) listserv launched. |

Online education is an attractive option for numerous students, especially adults, due to factors such as flexibility for both learners and instructors and potential cost-effectiveness, both for students and for universities. Despite these advantages, accessing higher education through online channels may pose challenges, hindering an online learner's ability to navigate the virtual classroom successfully and earn their
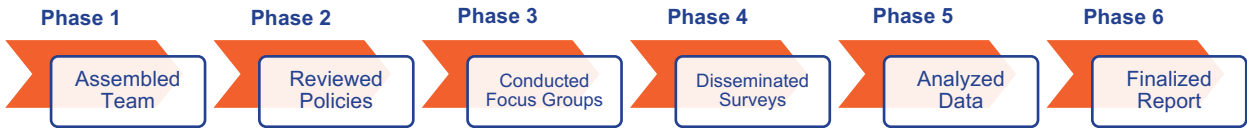
degree. Four main barriers present the main challenges to student success: dispositional barriers (self-confidence), situational barriers (unpredictable/uncontrollable life events), institutional barriers (barriers to entry/persistence), and technological barriers (access to and/or ability to use technology). Identifying and understanding the barriers adult students face in completing their degrees provides valuable insights for effectively serving all learners. This report not only underscores the challenges encountered by Louisiana residents pursuing online education but also offers recommendations to address these opportunities.

# Project Overview

Recognizing the need for a comprehensive approach to enhance online higher education in Louisiana, an ambitious research design was developed to tackle multifaceted challenges and draw upon diverse perspectives and online education expertise across the state. A formal request was sent to Chief Academic Officers at each public institution to identify leaders for online initiatives on their campuses. A subsequent call for collaborators was extended to the identified leadership group, resulting in the engagement of individuals committed to contributing to these efforts.

Three research methods were utilized: (1) focus groups were conducted with the leadership for online education efforts as identified by the chief academic officers for each public institution; (2) two survey instruments were created based on focus group insights, including a survey for faculty/staff/administrators and a survey for 100% online students; and (3) a policy analysis, was developed to supplement the insights of the online learning community, to better understand the current online higher education learning environment in Louisiana.

**Chart 2. Project Phases.**

| Phase 1 | Phase 2 | Phase 3 | Phase 4 | Phase 5 | Phase 6 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Assembled Team | Reviewed Policies | Conducted Focus Groups | Disseminated Surveys | Analyzed Data | Finalized Report |

# Online Learning Trends in Louisiana

## ONLINE STUDENT COUNT

**Chart 3. Online Student Count.**
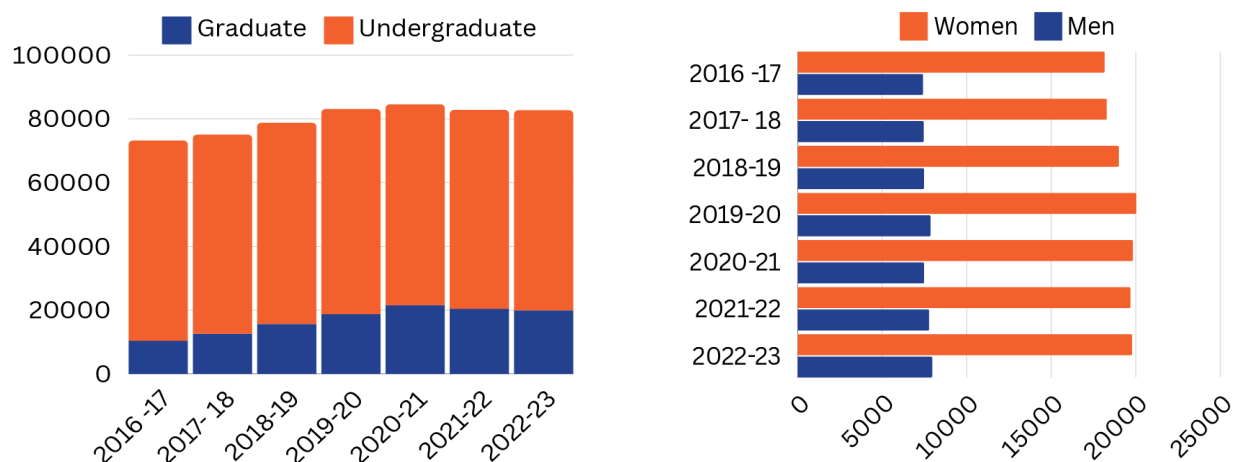


**Table 2. Top 3 Degree Programs by Student Count.**

| Rank | Degree Program |
|------|----------------|
| 1 | Business Management; Marketing and Related Support Services |
| 2 | Health Professions and Related Programs |
| 3 | Liberal Arts and Sciences; General Studies and Humanities |

## ONLINE COMPLETER COUNT

**Chart 3. Online Completer Count.**
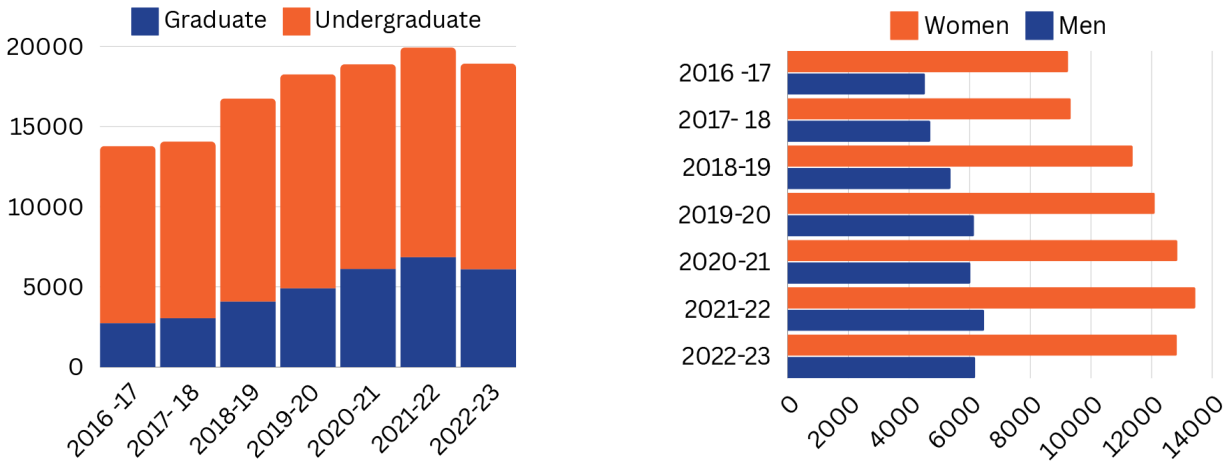


**Table 3. Top 3 Degree Programs by Completer Count.**

| Rank | Degree Program |
|------|----------------|
| 1 | Business Management; Marketing and Related Support Services |
| 2 | Liberal Arts and Sciences; General Studies and Humanities |
| 3 | Health Professions and Related Programs |

# Policy Analysis

To gain a thorough understanding of the current structures and guidance governing online education in Louisiana, the policy analysis examined policies within the state's public higher education institutions. Aiming to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats within these policies, a select team of collaborators was organized into pairs for the review process. In the initial round, each pair examined an assigned set of institutional documents, followed by a second round where pairs switched to review a different set of system and institutional documents. The analysis covered aspects such as purpose, scope, overarching themes, identified gaps, accountability mechanisms, and compliance measures at both campus and system levels. The review also included benchmarking against current policy landscapes, highlighting innovative practices and systemic improvement needs. The main priority was to provide data-driven insights into policy effectiveness and identify strategic priorities to guide the development of more cohesive and forward-thinking online learning policies in the future. The next page provides a high-level summary of each analysis by system.

**Chart 7. Policy Analysis Word Cloud for All Four Public Systems.**

Three policies were highlighted across each of the four public postsecondary systems.

### *University of Louisiana System*

- The institutions refer to governing bodies and/or external entities (e.g., SACSCOC, BOR) rather than re-articulating the standards or policies of those entities in their own words.
- The importance of data security, privacy, and confidentiality.
- Lack of a mechanism for documenting when and how these policies should be reviewed regularly.

### *Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS)*

- Emphasis on ensuring standardization, accessibility, and equivalent services for online students systemwide.
- Detailed guidelines for course development, faculty training, and peer evaluations every three years.
- Need for a centralized e-learning coordination unit and annual surveys for continuous improvements.

### *Southern University System*

- Critical accreditation compliance points are addressed.
- Procedures are detailed and cite case law, but some information is outdated.
- Distance education attendance policy is detailed and comprehensive, featuring explicit implementation guidelines that encompass applicable definitions, criteria for certifying attendance, and protocols for resolving disputes regarding attendance.

### *Louisiana State University System*

- Clear guidelines for fully online programs but lack tailored system-wide policies addressing evolving online needs.
- Inconsistencies in quality assurance for non-program online courses versus online degree programs.
- Opportunities to expand policies on faculty training, quality reviews, and approval processes for strategic expansion of online offerings.

# FOCUS GROUPS



More than 60 leaders from across the state were initially identified as potential participants for the Online Education Leadership focus groups, and ultimately, thirty-two leaders actively participated. All participants provided their consent for recording. The recorded focus group sessions were transcribed, and coded, and the identified themes were utilized in developing survey instruments for online faculty, staff, administrators, and students. The ensuing section presents an analysis of the themes derived from the focus groups in a SWOT format.
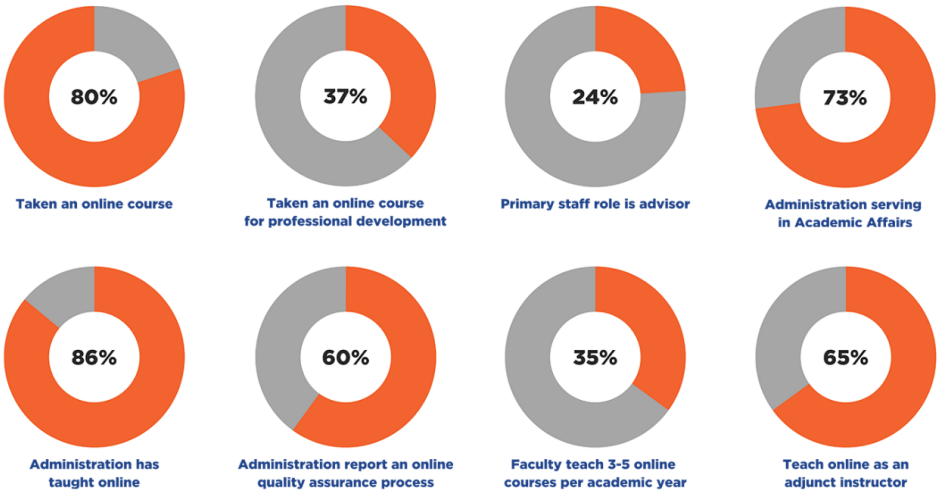
# SWOT Analysis

## Strengths

Enhanced overall educational experience through heightened faculty and student engagement, expanded online course options, increased demand for virtual learning, improved faculty support, and greater utilization of technology.

## Weaknesses

Faculty resistance, limited access and proficiency in technology, insufficient technical support, inadequate quality in online courses, low student engagement, lack of institutional support, and a deficit in statewide coordination.

## Opportunities

Standardizing policies, expanding online access, leveraging open/affordable resources, fostering collaboration, investing in faculty development, enhancing student support, innovating assessments, marketing to students, and utilizing Artificial Intelligence for learning support.

## Threats

The digital divide, issues with digital literacy, academic integrity concerns, insufficient faculty support, potential student isolation, program duplication, sustainability challenges for online programs, and the unique climate conditions in Louisiana.

# Faculty, Staff, and Administrator Survey

The faculty, staff, and administrator survey received 522 respondents from across the state and four university systems. The Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) and the University of Louisiana System represent 82.79% of the total responses. Among the respondents, 87% identified as faculty, 6% as staff, and 6% as administrators. Survey questions for staff focused on student retention strategies and confidence with digital technologies, questions for faculty focused on experience and confidence levels, and administrator questions centered around timing, structure, and certification requirements of online courses.

Key themes included:

- **Support and training.** Independent learning is the top method; more formal options like workshops and mentoring are used less. Instructional design support is the top institutional support. Student readiness, training, and tech barriers are top challenges.

- **Technologies and innovation.** Learning management systems are the most used and familiar technology. Top innovations include Hyflex/flex options and multiple start dates.

- **Student success.** Student readiness is seen as the top challenge and barrier to online learning. Life situations and digital literacy also contribute.

**Chart 8. Key Faculty, Staff, and Administration Survey Statistics.**



| 80% | 37% | 24% | 73% |
| Taken an online course | Taken an online course for professional development | Primary staff role is advisor | Administration serving in Academic Affairs |

| 86% | 60% | 35% | 65% |
| Administration has taught online | Administration report an online quality assurance process | Faculty teach 3-5 online courses per academic year | Teach online as an adjunct instructor |

**Confidence Levels Using Digital Technologies for Faculty and Staff**



- Faculty
- Staff
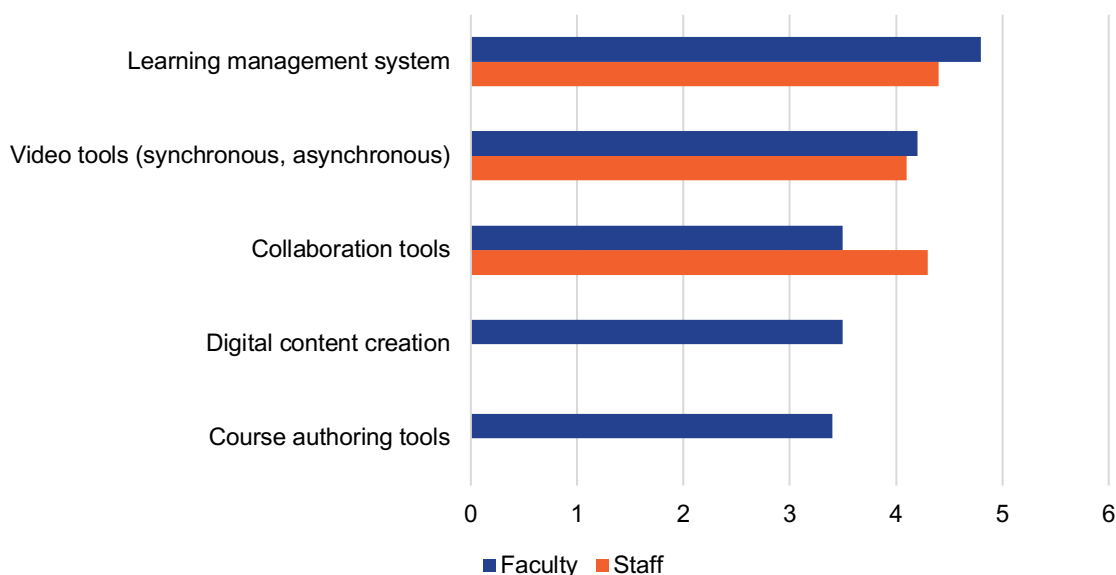
# Student Survey

The online survey distributed across the state focused on students taking 100% of their coursework online. The survey received 3,366 responses from students across 31 Louisiana public institutions. Most respondents were undergraduate students (75%) enrolled full-time (65%). Most respondents (74%) had a fully online fall 2023 schedule. Survey questions for students focused on motivation for choosing online, experience in the online classroom, assessment of their readiness, comfort with and access to technology, and recommendations for improvement.

One in three students experienced technology-related challenges affecting their success in the online classroom.

Key themes included:

- **Support and training.** Students want training for software, tools, online learning resources, online support services, digital security measures, and cybersecurity skills.

- **Technologies and innovation.** Learning management systems are the most familiar technology. Students want creative assessments, robust online support services, and relevant course materials.

- **Student success.** Students report high satisfaction with the support and resources institutions provide to help them succeed in online courses.

**Chart 9. Key Student Survey Statistics.**



| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **73%** Women | **60%** 26 years or older | **77%** Have been employed while attending classes | **36%** Work 40+ hours/week |
| **21%** Never plan to visit campus | **62%** Enrolled in online program | **53%** Use a desktop or laptop to access online coursework | **40%** Pursuing an Associate's Degree |

Military Service
1.5%

Other
28%

Caregiver
45.4%

Community Responsibilities
25.1%
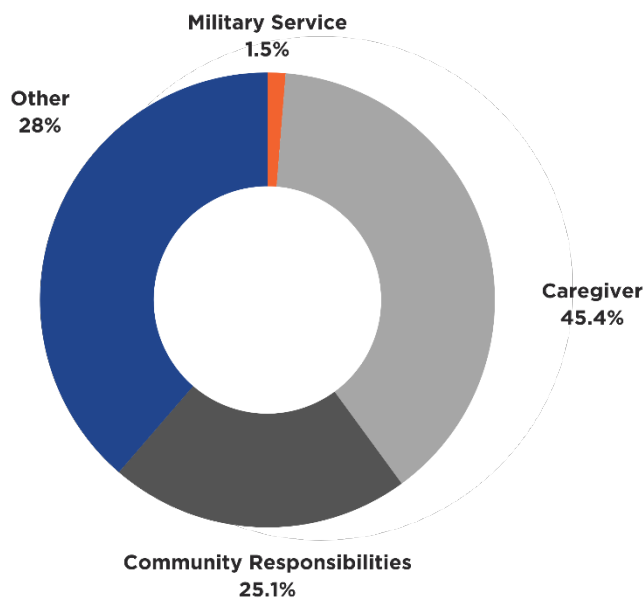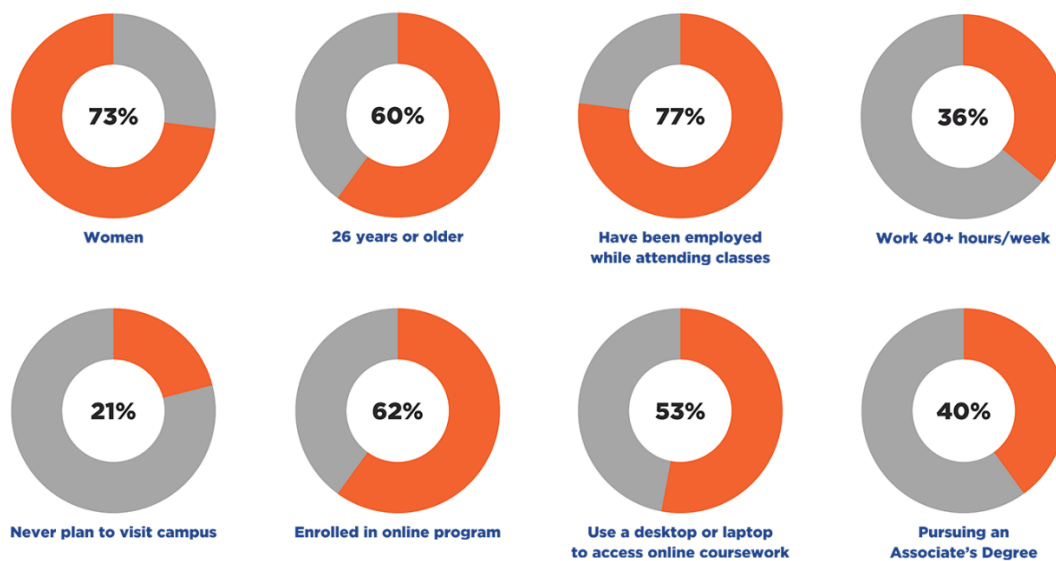
# Findings and Considerations

The following section includes key findings and crucial considerations derived from an in-depth analysis of the impact and challenges posed by online learning within the higher education paradigm. Below are themes that emerged during the analysis process.

## Faculty Training and Support

- Online leadership acknowledged that faculty members are resistant to teaching online, citing concerns about the quality of online learning, the lack of face-to-face interaction with students, and the additional workload required to teach effectively online.
- Online administrators acknowledged that often the online infrastructure that exists is not adequate to provide additional resources and expertise to faculty as needed or on-demand.

> **" I pay out-of-pocket for most of my professional development.**
>
> Faculty Member

- Faculty members discussed the need for ongoing training and support to navigate online learning pedagogies, instructional design, learning management systems, and technological upskilling.
- Faculty survey respondents emphasized the need for training and support, highlighting the importance of training in emerging technologies and online engagement best practices.
- Both the online leadership focus groups and student surveys emphasized the critical necessity for support in creating accessible course designs that meet the needs of all learners.
- Faculty and staff reported seeking out their own professional development, often funding it at their own expense.

## Contrasting Viewpoints, Constrained Resources

- Online leaders across the state discussed challenges leading efforts to help faculty members create engaging course content, supervising and evaluating online instructors as they build and design online courses, providing individualized support to students in online courses, as well as managing other professional obligations as they arise.

- Online leadership across the state demonstrated excitement and passion for the work but expressed frustration at being pulled in different directions as priorities for improvement are often unclear or changing.

> " I would love to have the funding to grow my team so that we could offer more dynamic support.
>
> Focus Group Participant

- Faculty survey results echoed this sentiment, revealing concerns about workload and the need for appropriate compensation for the long hours invested in upskilling as well as developing high-quality online courses and providing ongoing student support.
- Both the focus groups and survey responses showed that tools and processes to manage workloads are varied in availability and use across the state of Louisiana, leaving each campus to determine and create its own online learning infrastructure.
- While some online leaders, faculty, and staff appreciated the flexibility and innovative opportunities online learning offers, others expressed concerns about maintaining academic rigor and effective communication with students and colleagues.

## Quality Assurance Measures

- The policy analysis highlighted that online learning standards vary across the state.
- Leadership reported that online and hybrid courses undergo an internal review process similar to or following the Quality Matters model and rubric at a majority of Louisiana institutions.

> " Required online policies help to standardize quality and consistency in the student learning experience.
>
> Focus Group Participant

- Focus groups and survey feedback highlighted several challenges to strengthening online learning infrastructure including funding for faculty development, funding for instructional design support, skills development, and the pace of technology changes.
- Leadership across the state stated that academic integrity, privacy, and cybersecurity are critically important.
- Online leadership also reported that differentiated instructional approaches bolster academic integrity but would require support to provide widespread training and professional development.
- The focus group, survey, and policy analysis data showed that resources to supplement online course development and online supplemental academic/student affairs support are not available at most institutions.

## Students Value Flexibility

- The survey data emphasizes the significant value of flexibility in online courses for students, particularly adults managing multiple responsibilities. Additional responsibilities include caregiving, community involvement, and other priorities. A substantial portion of students minimally visit campus. A majority work while enrolled, and over half work full-time. Challenges to persistence include financial constraints and time commitment.

- Feedback from faculty, staff, and administrators underscores higher student satisfaction with online learning's flexibility but notes challenges related to limited face-to-face interaction and relationship-building. Self-motivation is highlighted as crucial, and addressing technology disparities is seen as vital for equitable participation.

> " **I enjoy being able to listen to the lectures as many times as needed and being able to view the PowerPoints as insight to the lecture.**
>
> Student

- Insights from focus groups affirm the value of flexibility and convenience, particularly for those with busy schedules or in rural areas. Participants appreciate online learning's affordability and accessibility, emphasizing personalized learning's importance for individual pacing and terms. Interaction is identified as critical for collaboration, engagement, and community building in a virtual setting.

## Addressing Barriers

- **Isolation and Engagement:** The virtual nature of online learning can lead to feelings of disconnection and lack of interaction with instructors and classmates, hindering motivation and engagement.

- **Unpreparedness and Support:** Inadequate preparation for online learning demands, such as time management and self-discipline, coupled with limited support from faculty and staff, can leave students feeling overwhelmed and struggling to keep up.

> " **I do not have a laptop. I borrow one to access school. I had to drop a class because I was unable to fully follow along on my iPhone.**
>
> Student

- **The Digital Divide:** Unequal access to reliable and affordable internet disproportionately impacts rural and low-income communities, hindering enrollment and participation.

- **Technology Hurdles:** Technical difficulties like platform issues, connectivity problems, and incompatible devices can create significant frustration and disrupt the learning process.

- **Resource Deficiencies:** Lack of access to necessary resources like textbooks, computers, and reliable internet connections can further disadvantage students and limit their success in online courses.

- **Disaster/Crisis Planning:** Online leadership across the state expressed concern with the continued climate change. Disaster planning has become a priority and online learning is a central component of that for many institutions.

## Facilitating Innovation

Research indicates that adults/online students want to help influence their learning environments, they want and need to be active in the decisions of what they are studying, how they are learning, and how they are being assessed in the online classroom.

Focus groups, faculty surveys, and student feedback confirmed the below as areas for innovation:

> **" We have a different learner population and different learner needs.**
>
> Staff Member

- Prior Learning Assessments (PLA)
- Industry Credentials
- Alternate Course Providers
- Additional Entry Terms
- Affordable Education Resources (AERs), Open Educational Resources (OERs)
- Artificial Intelligence/Virtual Reality
- Utilizing Authentic Assessments, Virtual Reality, and Video Content Virtual Student Resources

*For a full list of current system innovations, see the eLearning Task Force page at www.laregents.edu/online.*

# Recommendations

**Leverage eLearning for Increased Enrollment**

**Foster Digital Access and Skills**

**Build Capacity for High-Quality, Easily Accessible Online Learning Infrastructure**

**Collaborate through Learner-Centered Online Ecosystems**

## Leveraging eLearning for Increased Enrollment

- **Articulate Micro-credentials and Create Stackable Programs:** Encourage the development of bite-sized online learning modules or stackable certificate programs, providing accessible entry points and pathways to further education or workforce upskilling. Efforts can bolster relationships between higher education and industry, allowing the workforce to upskill and grow.

**BUILD A STRONGER ECONOMIC LOUISIANA WITH AN EMPOWERED WORKFORCE**

- **Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Integration:** Facilitate the development of robust PLA mechanisms within online programs, leveraging prior knowledge and experience to accelerate degree completion for nontraditional students.
- **Strengthen Transfer Partnerships:** Continue to develop strategic partnerships with community colleges to integrate online learning opportunities into workforce development programs and facilitate seamless transitions to bachelor's degrees. The Louisiana Board of Regents approved Statewide Universal Transfer Pathways, mandated by Act 308, effective Fall 2024.
- **Marketing and Outreach Campaigns:** Advocate for targeted marketing campaigns highlighting the benefits and reach of Louisiana's diverse online learning offerings, attracting non-traditional and geographically dispersed students. Focusing on online learning as an opportunity for individuals to empower themselves and their economic situation.
- **Additional Admission Entry Points:** Expanding enrollment entry points provides flexible start dates for students, accommodating those who need extra time to begin without disrupting their momentum. By incorporating bi-term courses, students can balance their workload effectively, focusing on a select number of courses at a time while maintaining full-time enrollment status.

## Fostering Digital Access and Skills

- **Bridging the Digital Divide:** Higher education institutions should avoid making assumptions about students' digital savviness. Instead, they need to consider incorporating digital resources and skills training at every level of education. Focus on skills deployment, because by shoring up those skills will lend to an upwardly mobile economic and technologically savvy workforce and citizens.

**BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE WHILE IGNITING INNOVATION**

- **Interdisciplinary Online Course Development Grants:** Fund collaborative projects to design innovative online courses

addressing high-demand skills or niche fields, offering flexible pathways for diverse learners. Designing and building online courses are often more labor intensive and require more maintenance than teaching in a face-to-face classroom. The online medium requires faculty to frontload directions, resources, communications, and activities/assignments into the learning management system's course. Collaboration helps leverage time and talent.

- **Inclusive Online Learning Design Workshops:** Train instructors to incorporate accessibility principles and universal design strategies into their online courses, ensuring equitable access for students with disabilities. Suggested topics: AI/VR exploration and deployment; O/AER creation and use; Use and Creation of Authentic Assessments.

## Building Capacity for High-Quality Easily Accessible Online Learning Infrastructure

- **Assessing processes, policy, and professional practice that are Frictionless:** Students should move through admissions and enrollment processes easily. **Transparent:** Details, processes, and policies are easy to access and clearly stated. **Timely:** Students should receive timely feedback regarding admissions, enrollment, institution, and instructional communications. **Comprehensive:** Processes, policies, and professional practice should reflect all student types.

**TARGETED PROCESS, POLICY, AND PRACTICE ADDRESSING THE ADULT STUDENT**

- **Targeted Pathways:** Create clear paths back to higher education by implementing multiple entry points, such as bi-term courses, and establishing partnerships with alternate course providers, professional organizations, industries, and other institutions.
- **Targeted Resourcing:** Create structures to support online learning through formalized instructional design support, dedicated recruitment for online students, ongoing professional development, financial aid for adult learners, robust mental health resources, extending support services online, centralized student advocacy, comprehensive digital infrastructure, and sustainable IT support.
- **Targeted Skill Development:** Create upskilling and digital reskilling opportunities for faculty and staff.

## Collaboration and Continuous Improvement

- **Foster Faculty and Staff Learning Communities:** Address challenges and capitalize on opportunities in Louisiana's online learning landscape through ongoing training, support, flexible course options, enhanced communication, collaboration, and institutional reinforcement.

- **Utilize Data-Driven Assessment for Online Instruction:** Integrate data analytics tools into professional development programs to empower instructors in tracking student progress, assessing online learning effectiveness, and refining teaching practices.

**CREATE LEARNER-CENTERED ONLINE ECOSYSTEMS**

- **Enhance Statewide Tracking of Online Learning:** Improve data collection on online learners and programs statewide, aligning with impending federal regulations. Adopt consistent terms and definitions to facilitate accurate evaluation of student enrollment, experience, and satisfaction, overcoming current information gaps.

- **Advocate for Online Leadership and Resource Allocation:** Secure robust support at institutional, system, and Board levels for e-learning initiatives, allocating resources to professional development, technology infrastructure, and ongoing research.

- **Establish a State Network for Online Learning:** Form a state-wide network, collaborating with existing entities to share knowledge, programming, and resources, fostering online education. This network can facilitate borrowing infrastructure, sharing processes, policies, and resources to enhance open educational programming and resources statewide, making online courses and degree pathways more accessible for Louisianans.

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# Project Leadership Team



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This project owes its success to the leadership, feedback, and active participation of those involved in online work, teaching, and learning. A big thank you to the Collaborator team for their enthusiasm, attention to detail, and great leadership throughout the research process. The report is designed to be easy to navigate, with additional resources, research findings, and data available on the committee's website. Gratitude is extended to the Board of Regents and the eLearning Taskforce for trusting us with this important task, reinforcing our commitment to supporting online students, faculty, and staff across the state. Excitement surrounds the opportunity to help move Louisiana forward.

# Appendix A: Project Collaborators

| Name | Institution |
| --- | --- |
| Dr. Radhika Krishnadas | Louisiana State University and A&M College |
| Dr. Veronica McEachin | Southern University at Shreveport |
| Melinda Roberts Perry | Southern University at New Orleans |
| Roy Bertucci | SOWELA Technical Community College |
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| Dr. Will Rogers | University of Louisiana at Monroe |
| Dr. Whitney Sivils-Sawyer | Louisiana Tech University |

# Appendix B: NC-SARA Press Release

## MEDIA RELEASE

**National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements**
A voluntary, regional approach to state oversight of distance education

October 17, 2014

### First SREB states join SARA

Boulder, Colorado – Louisiana, Virginia and West Virginia have been approved by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), as the first states in the compact's region to become members of the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA). Virginia has an effective operational date of today; Louisiana and West Virginia have an effective operational date of December 1, 2014. These states join Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Indiana, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota and Washington as members of SARA. SARA is a nationwide initiative of states that will make distance education courses more accessible to students across state lines and make it easier for states to regulate and institutions to participate in interstate distance education. The effort is funded by a $3 million grant from Lumina Foundation and fees paid by institutions.

"For many students, online classes are key to graduating, which is critical to state goals to increase college completion rates and build a better educated work force," explained SREB President Dave Spence. "Adult students who juggle other responsibilities when they return to complete degrees stand to benefit in particular."

Louisiana's Board of Regents will serve as the state "portal" agency for SARA. The Regents coordinate efforts for the state's 34 public colleges, universities and professional schools. They also serve as the state liaison to Louisiana's accredited, independent institutions of higher learning. The Board of Regents represents the public higher education community before all branches of government and the public and maintains close contact with student interests through the Council of Student Body Presidents.

"Distance education has been like the Wild West, growing so fast that meaningful regulation and student protection has been difficult," said Peter Blake, director of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV). "This agreement brings some much-needed organization to the process and saves the institutions time and money." SCHEV is the Commonwealth's coordinating body for higher education and will serve as the state portal agency for SARA. SCHEV makes higher education public policy recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly in such areas as capital and operating budget planning, enrollment projections, institutional technology needs and student financial aid.

The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission develops and oversees a public policy agenda for West Virginia's four-year colleges and universities. A source of support for institutions and students, the Commission's work includes academic affairs, administrative services, finance and facilities, financial aid, health sciences, human resources, legal services, policy and planning, science and research, and student affairs. The Commission will serve as the SARA state portal agency. "Making distance education courses more readily accepted across state lines will help more students progress toward their degrees," said Dr. Paul L. Hill, Chancellor of the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission. "Our institutions are doing a great job at growing and leveraging online offerings, and West Virginia's participation in SARA will serve to bolster those forward-looking efforts."

The SARA agreements are overseen by the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) and are being implemented by the four regional higher education interstate compacts: the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC), the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE), the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). Once a state joins SARA, accredited degree-granting institutions in the state that offer distance education courses can seek approval to participate in SARA from their state. When approved, these institutions will be able to operate in other participating SARA states without seeking independent authorization. Participating in SARA is entirely voluntary for institutions, as it is for states.

# Appendix B: NC-SARA Press Release

"SARA allows states to focus on their home-state institutions, rather than on institutions from many other states," explained Marshall A. Hill, executive director of NC-SARA. "SARA can help expand educational offerings available to state residents and will significantly reduce costs for institutions that are active in online education, lessening this particular need to raise fees and thereby supporting affordability."

As of October 16, 2014, SARA-enabling legislation has passed in an additional 13 states and three states have determined that no legislation is needed to enable participation in SARA.

**About NC-SARA, MHEC, NEBHE, SREB, WICHE and Lumina Foundation**

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) is a voluntary, regional approach to state oversight of postsecondary distance education. The initiative is administered by the country's four regional higher education compacts (MHEC, NEBHE, SREB and WICHE) and overseen by NC-SARA. States and institutions that choose to participate agree to operate under common standards and procedures, providing a more uniform and less costly regulatory environment for institutions, more focused oversight responsibilities for states and better resolution of student complaints. www.nc-sara.org

The Midwestern Higher Education Compact is a nonprofit regional organization assisting Midwestern states in advancing higher education through interstate cooperation and resource sharing. MHEC seeks to fill its interstate mission through programs that expand postsecondary opportunity and success; promote innovative approaches to improving institutional and system productivity; improve affordability to students and states; and enhance connectivity between higher education and the workplace. Member states are: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. www.mhec.org

The New England Board of Higher Education promotes greater educational opportunities and services for the residents of New England. It works across the six New England states to engage and assist leaders in the assessment, development, and implementation of sound education practices and policies of regional significance; promote policies, programs, and best practices to assist the states in implementing important regional higher education policies; promote regional cooperation and programs that encourage the efficient use and sharing of educational resources; and provide leadership to strengthen the relationship between higher education and the economic well-being of New England. www.nebhe.org

The Southern Regional Education Board works with 16 member states to improve public education at every level, from pre-K through Ph.D. SREB is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization headquartered in Atlanta. SREB states currently participate in SREB's Electronic Campus Regional Reciprocity Agreement, and SREB is working closely with SARA to expand reciprocity nationwide. Member states are Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. www.sreb.org

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education and its 16 members work collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for all citizens of the West. By promoting innovation, cooperation, resource sharing, and sound public policy among states and institutions, WICHE strengthens higher education's contributions to the region's social, economic, and civic life. WICHE's members include: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai'i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (the first of the U.S. Pacific territories and freely associated states to participate). www.wiche.edu

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation committed to increasing the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates and other credentials to 60 percent by 2025. Lumina's outcomes-based approach focuses on helping to design and build an accessible, responsive and accountable higher education system while fostering a national sense of urgency for action to achieve Goal 2025. For more information logon to www.luminafoundation.org.

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# Appendix C: Regents Press Release

**Louisiana Board of Regents**
**Press Release**

May 7, 2014

Contact: Katara Williams, Ph.D
225-342-4253

### Regents' E-Learning Task Force Launches
### Louisiana Online

**Baton Rouge, LA-** The Louisiana Board of Regents recently launched Louisiana Online, a website which provides a comprehensive listing of Louisiana institutions' online and hybrid degree programs.

"Our main goal is to increase the number of students that enroll and complete online/hybrid programs at our public colleges and universities," said Dr. Tom Layzell, senior advisor to the board.

The website delivers a powerful yet simple search feature, to facilitate the location of specific programs easily.

Programs are listed by 2-year, 4-year, advanced degrees, and technical offerings, and are distinguished as completely online or hybrid format which is a combination of both online and face-to-face meeting options. More finite criteria such as program topics and programs category will allow a prospective student to further examine specific academic curriculums.

All schools offering online or hybrid degree programs are represented on the site, with unique pages and links to direct students to each of the schools more comprehensive details about program offerings. Students can request more information using the site contact field or email the school's program contact directly using the information provided on the school's internal page.

Adults who have an interest in pursuing Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) will find helpful information about what PLA is and how it can be helpful in pursing credit through a portfolio, CLEP tests, DSST, ACE, or College/Departmental exams. Students will also find helpful links to financial aid resources.

"It is believed that there are very few websites of this kind," said e-learning task force chair, Dr. Darlene Williams of Northwestern State University. "Louisiana Online is unique in a sense that all online and hybrid degrees available within a given state are presented online. It also provides a pathway by which a specific program can be located and contact made easily between a prospective student and a school."

"Louisiana Online is a 'one-stop shop' for all Louisiana public university online and hybrid programs," said Dr. Larry Tremblay. "We know that it will be very beneficial to the students in this state."

The website can be accessed by visiting www.louisianaonline.org.

**-www.regents.la.gov-**