Online Learner Expectations Survey: Fall 2022 Results

Submitted to the Indiana University Office of Online Education

Prepared by:

Colleen Chesnut, Ph.D.
Research Associate

Anne-Maree Ruddy, Ph.D.
Co-Director

Lisa Simmons-Thatcher, M.L.D
Evaluation Coordinator

Rebekah Sinders, B.Sc.
Project Associate

CEPR

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Executive Summary

This report presents a summary of the results of the second full administration of the Online Learner Expectations Survey (OLES) in fall 2022, conducted by the Center for Evaluation, Policy, and Research for the Indiana University Office of Online Education. The primary purpose of OLES is to gather information about IU Online students' expectations and experiences in online programs. The key research questions guiding this study are (1) what are students' expectations of online education courses? and (2) how do students define value and quality in online courses?

After a pilot survey and subsequent revisions in fall 2020 and early 2021, the finalized OLES instrument was distributed to all students enrolled in IU Online undergraduate programs at the regional campuses in for the first time in September 2021. The OLES instrument was distributed for the second time in September 2022. This report contains an overview of the survey development, revisions, and methodology, survey results for 2022, discussion of findings with comparisons to 2021 OLES results, if applicable, and recommendations for moving forward with ongoing survey implementation.

Based on a review of the literature, interviews with a sample of students, and the results of the pilot survey, we identified indicators of program quality in online education to include on the OLES instrument to probe students' perceptions of quality in those areas based on their experiences learning online. Survey items were organized into the following areas:

- Employment status
- Level of experience with online learning (with IU Online and with other providers)
- Reasons for taking courses with IU Online
- Factors contributing to satisfaction and dissatisfaction
- Communication within IU Online courses (with instructors and with students)
- Overall satisfaction

Below are key findings from the 2022 OLES data related to the original research questions, as well as trends in demographic comparisons, with additional findings and detail presented throughout the associated sections of the report:

Key Findings

1. What are students' expectations of online education courses?

- <mark>Convenience and flexibility.</mark> In both 2021 and 2022, the majority of OLES respondents identified convenience and flexibility as one of the most important factors in their decision to take IU Online courses and as a primary reason they would recommend their program to a colleague or peer.
- Opportunities for career advancement. OLES respondents in both 2021 and 2022 identified career advancement as a primary reason for their decision to take IU Online courses.

2. How do students define value and quality in online courses?
   - <mark>Relevant, clear content and manageable workload.</mark> In both 2021 and 2022, OLES respondents identified applicable or practical course content as the most important factor in their satisfaction with IU Online courses. Across both years, course workload and unclear course requirements were the factors most frequently cited as contributing to OLES respondents' dissatisfaction with courses.
   - <mark>Effective and communicative instructors.</mark> Survey respondents identified instructors as an important factor in both their satisfaction and dissatisfaction with IU Online courses, and most were satisfied with their communications with their instructors. Of the small percentage of respondents (5%) who indicated that they would not recommend their IU Online program, the most frequently cited reasons in both 2021 and 2022 were related to instructor or instruction quality.

3. Trends in demographic comparisons
   - There were similarities found across 2021 and 2022 OLES results with regard to comparisons between respondents' overall levels of satisfaction and in communications based on age group and race/ethnicity, with respondents who were 55+ reporting the lowest levels of satisfaction in communication with instructors and with fellow students and respondents who were identified as Asian reporting the lowest levels of satisfaction in communications and overall.
   - Some differences were found between the 2021 and 2022 OLES results in demographic comparisons based on program type, sex, and campus of enrollment. For example, in 2021 no differences between female and male respondents' satisfaction in communications with instructors and their overall satisfaction with their IU Online programs were found, whereas in 2022, female respondents reported higher levels of satisfaction than male respondents in each of these areas.

Introduction

The Indiana University Office of Online Education (OOE) collaborates with all IU campuses to provide academic programs and services that give students a high-quality, interactive, and engaging experience. OOE is housed in University Academic Affairs. To the public, it is known as IU Online. OOE acts as a curricular clearinghouse and provides seamless, shared services for IU's online students (https://teachingonline.iu.edu/about/staff/index.html).

The Office of Online Education collaborates with IU's Center for Evaluation, Policy, and Research (CEPR) to conduct the Online Learner Expectations Survey (OLES) to assess students' expectations of and experiences with fully online undergraduate programs at Indiana University. A brief description the survey's development and implementation follows.

Objectives & research questions

This survey stems from lack of research in the field related to assessing the quality of online education programs from students' perspectives. This study does not address the quality of specific online courses; rather, it examines students' general expectations of and experiences with online education. The primary objective of the survey is to increase understandings of how undergraduate students enrolled in fully online programs perceive quality and value in their online courses. The overarching questions framing the study are the following:

- What are students' expectations of online education courses?
    - Do these expectations differ across time? By degree program? By other demographic and background characteristics?
    - To what extent, and in what ways, do students' expectations for online education programs align with their experiences with these programs? Does the alignment (or nonalignment) impact students' perceptions of quality and value?
- How do students define value and quality in online courses?
    - What key factors and variables do students use to assess value and quality?
    - Do the factors that determine value and quality change over time (e.g., is quality defined differently at the beginning of a course, as compared to the middle or end of a course)?
    - To what extent, and in what ways, do students' definitions of value and quality differ based on various factors (e.g., number of previous online courses completed, degree program, demographic characteristics, etc.)?

Prior to OLES administration, CEPR used multiple research methods to conduct a four-phase study addressing these questions. These phases included:

1. Development of detailed protocols and instruments,
2. Qualitative interviews for the purposes of addressing key questions, and informing the development of a subsequent survey for broader data collection,
3. Development of a student survey and plans for implementation, and
4. Piloting the survey, analyzing data, and creating a long-term, sustainable plan for ongoing survey implementation.

This report presents the results of the second year of fully implementing OLES as revised after the pilot survey administration. We provide an overview of the OLES development and revision, survey findings with comparisons to the previous year's results, where applicable, and recommendations for next steps based on these findings.

Methodology

Literature review

To begin this study, researchers conducted a review of scholarship in online education at the postsecondary level, which will be briefly summarized here. Although there are few studies focusing on the perspectives of online students in examining quality in online education, scholars have identified several general aspects related to quality in online learning from the provider standpoint. These include the institution's reputation, curriculum and instruction, staff support, learning support, technology support, QA mechanism, and student outcomes (Jung, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2005). From the student perspective, it is also important to consider students' prior experiences and their self-efficacy with online learning (Arbaugh, 2004). Based on these studies, the researchers identified several indicators of online learning program quality to include in research instruments that would probe the perspectives of students enrolled in online courses.

Survey development and revision

To inform development of the pilot survey and OLES, researchers interviewed 20 students enrolled in undergraduate IU Online programs, using a semi-structured interview protocol based on the review of the literature on quality in online education. Analysis of the interview data subsequently informed the creation of the pilot survey for a sample of IU Online students. Specifically, we identified factors contributing to students' satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their online courses/programs and crafted survey items asking respondents to how or to what extent these factors played a role in their online learning experiences. These factors included, for example, relevance of course content, instructor quality, and communication among both online students and instructors. The pilot survey also included basic demographic questions for respondents to indicate their age range, race/ethnicity, gender identity, and employment status, as well as questions with regard to their IU Online campus of enrollment, number of courses taken, and previous experience with online education. These questions allowed for cross-tabulation analysis of certain other survey responses, to determine if significant differences exist among responses based on these categories.

Pilot survey implementation and responses from a sample of 500 students enrolled in fully online undergraduate programs across the six regional campuses in Fall 2020 informed survey revision to create the OLES final instrument. To reduce survey length, demographic questions for data that could be gleaned from the OLES survey sample (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, sex,

program of study, and campus of enrollment) were removed, but questions about employment status, number of courses taken, and previous online learning experience were included. Additionally, several pilot survey questions that resulted in data redundancies in the findings were removed. Two open-ended questions were added to give OLES respondents the opportunity to list additional factors that would contribute to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their online programs, and questions about frequencies of utilizing various modes of communication with online instructors and students were included.

Sampling and distribution

The IU Office of Online Education provided a full list of students enrolled in fully online undergraduate programs in Fall 2022 across the regional campuses (IUPUC, IU East, IU Fort Wayne, IUPUI, IU Kokomo, IU South Bend, IU Northwest, and IU Southeast). Please note that IU Bloomington is not included, due to the small number of fully online programs housed there.

Using the Qualtrics survey platform, the survey invitation and link were distributed to the full sample of students (3,118 valid email addresses) on September 20, 2022. Over the next three weeks, four email reminders from CEPR and two from the IU Office of Online Education were sent, and the survey was closed on October 12. Out of the entire sample of 3,118, a total of 518 responded to the survey, for a response rate of 17%.

Incentives were offered to the first 200 respondents who completed the survey. Both the email survey invitation and the online survey included information about the incentives: $10 electronic Amazon gift cards offered to the first 200 respondents who chose to enter their name and email address upon survey completion in order to receive the gift cards.

Data analysis

After the survey closed, all partial responses were recorded and included with the survey data. Please note that all respondents did not answer all questions; frequencies and percentages for each survey item are based on the number of responses to that item only. All survey data were downloaded into Excel files for further analysis. Quantitative data included responses to questions on respondent demographics, as well as demographic information included in the respondent sample, rank-order questions related to reasons for taking courses with IU Online and factors related to satisfaction and dissatisfaction, modes, frequencies, and levels of satisfaction with communication with instructors and other students, and yes/no questions related to whether respondents would recommend their IU Online program. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for the quantitative data, as well as cross-tabulations of responses

based on demographic indicators. Qualitative data included responses to the open-ended survey items, in which respondents were asked to elaborate on responses to several questions related to their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with their online learning experiences and their reasons for recommending or not recommending their online programs. Text responses were analyzed using qualitative coding procedures, with researchers identifying themes within responses to each open-ended question, grouping responses according to these themes, and calculating frequencies and percentages for each theme based on the number of responses.

Survey findings

Respondent demographics

Demographic information provided in the survey sample included age, race/ethnicity, sex, campus of enrollment, and program of study. After survey responses were recorded, these data were merged into the data set for the respondents. To provide additional demographic data, respondents were asked to indicate their current employment status. These data not only illustrate the characteristics of survey respondents but also allow for further analysis based on the information provided. The tables and figures included in the following section outline the demographic breakdown of survey respondents.

As indicated in Figure 1, three-fifths of all respondents fell within two age ranges: 31% were 18-24 and 29% were 25-24.

Figure 1. Age of survey respondents
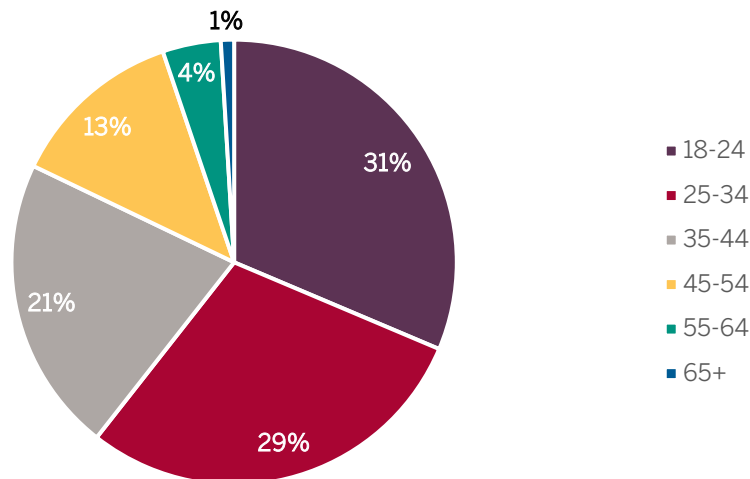
N=518

Figure 2 illustrates the racial/ethnic categories of survey respondents. A majority (73%) were White.

Figure 2. Races/ethnicities of survey respondents

Asian
Black/African American
Hispanic/Latino
White
NR-Alien
Unknown
Refused to Answer
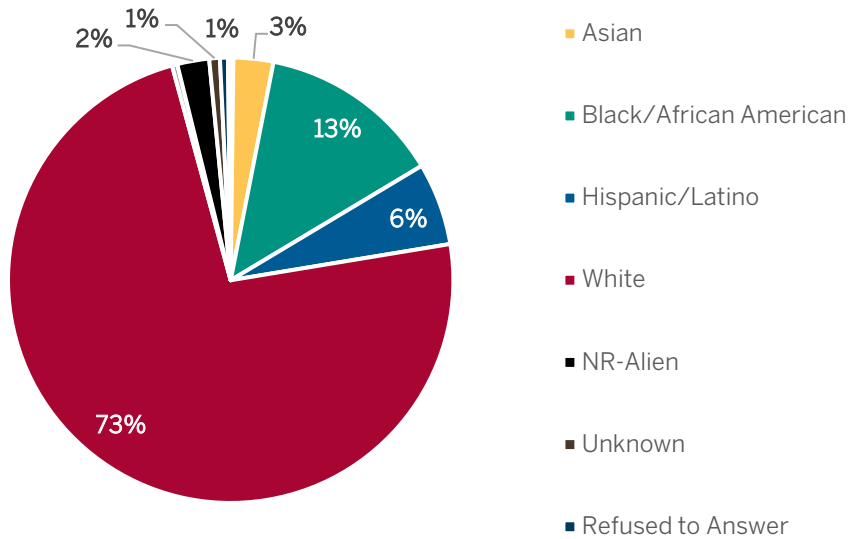
N=518

Note: Respondent groups with an n rounding to less than 1% do not appear in the figure.

Figure 3 depicts the sexes of survey respondents. Of 518 respondents, 74% were female.

Figure 3. Sex of survey respondents

Female
Male
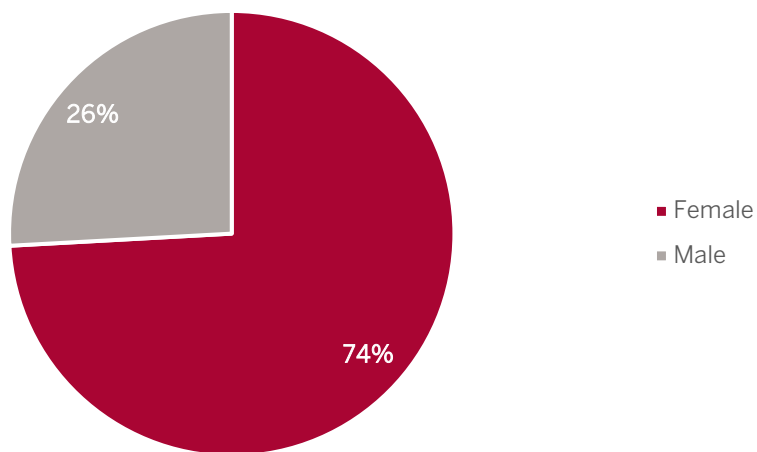
N=518

Respondents were asked to select their current employment status. Please note that respondents could select more than one option, thus percentages may exceed 100. Most respondents (60%) indicated that they were employed for pay, full-time (35+ hours/week). Table 1 illustrates full data on survey respondents' employment statuses.

Table 1. Employment statuses of survey respondents

What is your current employment status? Select all that apply.	Frequency	Percentage
Employed for pay, full-time (35+ hours/week)	**312**	**60%**
Employed for pay, part-time	93	18%
Full-time student, employed in academic work (e.g., research assistant)	15	3%
Full-time student, not employed	71	14%
Retired	7	1%
Stay-at-home parent	35	7%
Unemployed	30	6%
Unpaid internship	7	1%

N=518 (F=570)

Additional survey sample data and survey questions provide information about respondents' IU Online campus of enrollment, program of study, number of courses taken in Fall 2022, number of semesters taken with IU Online, and previous experience with online coursework through another college or university.

Figure 4 breaks down the campuses of enrollment for survey respondents. Nearly half of respondents (49%) were enrolled at IU East.

Figure 4. Campus of enrollment for survey respondents
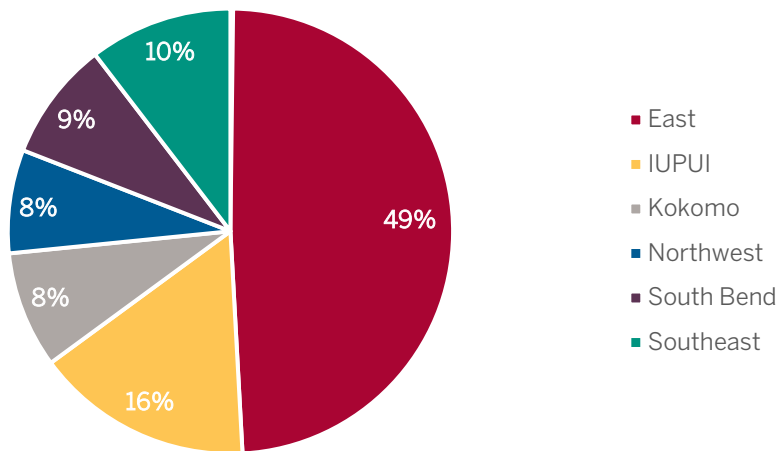
N=518 (F=519*)

Note: Campuses with a number of respondents rounding to less than 1% do not appear in the figure. In addition, one respondent was enrolled at two campuses.

The survey sample included information about respondents' programs of study. These are listed with corresponding response frequencies in Table 2. The programs of study represented most frequently among survey respondents included Business Administration BS (17%), Psychology BS (12%), and General Studies BGS (11%). After the survey was administered, we received additional information from the IU Office of Online Education about the structure of these programs, i.e., whether they are collaborative, wherein students may enroll in courses across more than one campus, non-collaborative, wherein students take courses through only one campus, or certificate/non-degree programs. Breaking down the respondents by program type, 6% (29) were enrolled in certificate/non-degree programs, 41% (212) were enrolled in collaborative programs, and the remaining 54% (278) were enrolled in non-collaborative programs.

Table 2. Programs of study of survey respondents

What is your program of study?	Frequency	Percentage
Non-Collaborative Degree Program		
Communication Studies BA	9	2%
Communication Studies BS	10	2%
Criminal Justice BS	21	4%
English BA	14	3%
General Studies BS	58	11%
Health Information Management BS	8	2%
Health Sciences BS	9	2%
Labor Studies AS	1	0%
Labor Studies BS	9	2%
Mathematics BS	48	9%
Natural Science & Math BA	1	0%
Nursing RN to BSN	15	3%
Political Science BS	8	2%
Psychology BS	62	12%
Sociology BS	4	1%
Technical Communication BS	1	0%
Collaborative Degree Program		
Applied Health Sciences BS	19	4%
Applied Science BAS	7	1%
Business Administration BS	**86**	**17%**
Data Science BS	18	3%
Digital Media and Storytelling BS	7	1%
French BS	2	0%
German BS	2	0%
History BA	19	4%
Informatics BS	34	7%
Medical Imaging Tech BS	5	1%
Spanish BS	4	1%
Sustainability Studies BA	9	2%
Certificate/Non-degree Program		
Applied Computer Sci CERT	1	0%
Events Management CERT	1	0%
Histotechnology CERT	5	1%
Human Resource Mgmt CERT	2	1%
Medical Coding CERT	6	1%
Multi-Device Development CERT	1	0%
Non-Degree Undergraduate	8	2%
Pure Mathematics CERT	2	1%
Themed Entertainment Design CERT	4	1%

N=518 (F=526*)

As illustrated in Figures 5 and 6, respectively, most survey respondents (63%) were taking three or more courses with IU Online in Fall 2022, and 33% had taken four or more semesters/summer sessions with IU Online. Another 30% had enrolled in their first IU Online course(s) in Fall 2022. Finally, respondents were asked whether they had previously taken online courses with any other college or university. Over half (59%) responded that they had.

Figure 5. Number of IU Online courses in which respondents were enrolled for Fall 2022
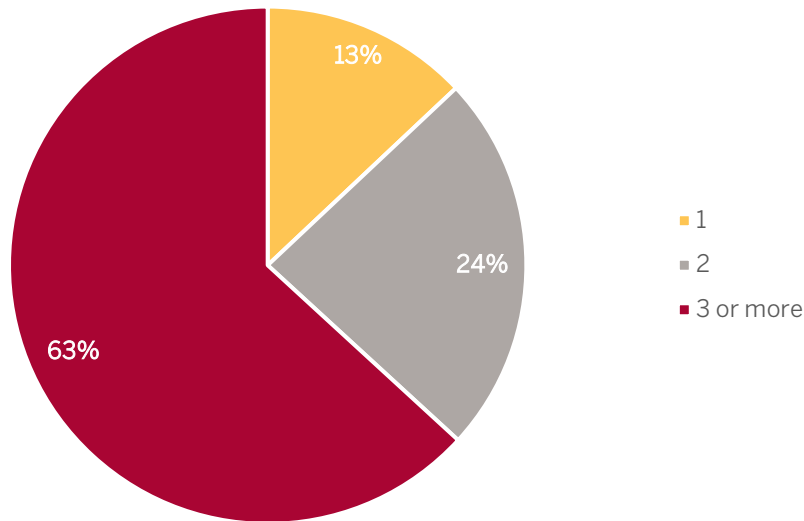
N=516

Figure 6. Number of semesters in which respondents had enrolled overall
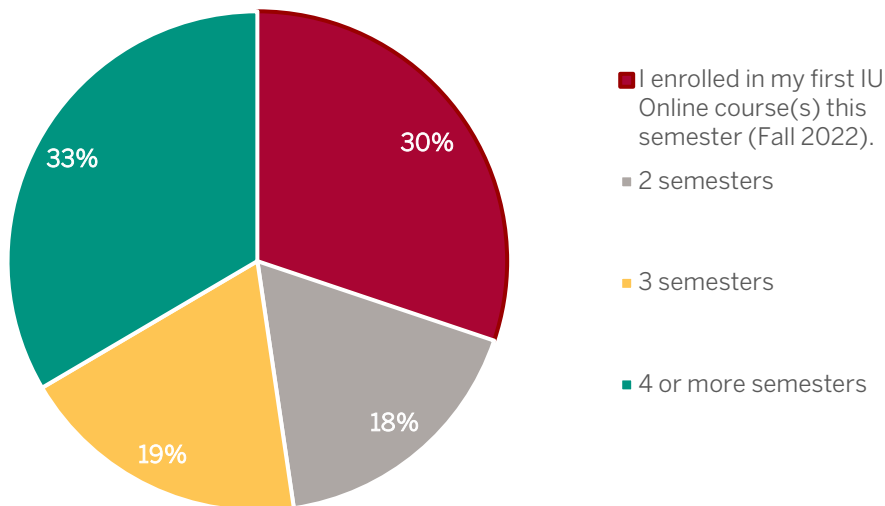
N=514

Reasons for taking IU Online courses and factors contributing to satisfaction and dissatisfaction

Survey respondents were asked to rank seven factors, from most to least important, in their decisions to take courses with IU Online. These factors included career advancement, convenience/flexibility, cost of the program, educational advancement, personal interest, reputation of IU, and other reason (text entry). Among 510 respondents, nearly two-thirds of respondents (62%) ranked convenience/flexibility as either the most or second-most important factor in their decision. Over half of respondents (55%) ranked career advancement as either the most or second-most important factor. Respondents overwhelmingly (89%) ranked "other reason" as the least important factor, so we consider the factors ranked as second or third-least important (six or five, on the seven-point scale) to illustrate which of the predetermined items were deemed less important. Among these, nearly two-thirds (64%) ranked the reputation of IU as a less important factor, and nearly half (48%) ranked personal interest as a less important factor in their decision to take courses with IU Online. Figure 7 depicts the full results of this survey question.

Figure 7. Rankings of reasons for taking IU Online course
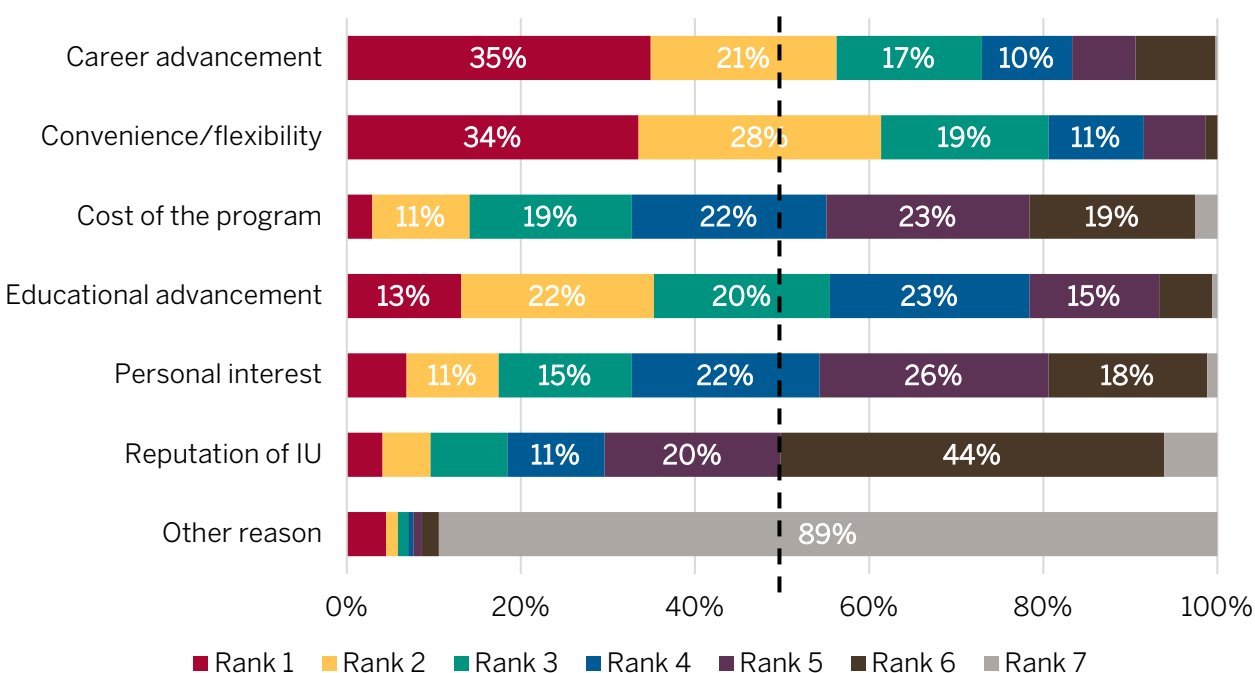
N=510

Note: For readability, data labels are only displayed for rankings with greater than 10% of respondents. Black dotted line indicates the median ranking where it passes through each bar (e.g., for "Career advancement" and "Personal Interest" the median responses were Rank 2 and Rank 4, respectively).

In addition to ranking the importance of the listed factors in their decisions to take courses with IU Online, respondents could enter text to indicate another reason for taking courses. These text responses were analyzed and grouped thematically; 64 respondents listed another reason here. Some of the themes were similar or identical to the reasons listed in the rank-order question; for example, frequently cited "other" reasons listed by respondents were related to flexibility or convenience of the online program. Response themes, frequencies, and examples are listed below:

- Program or course availability or features (27%, 17)
    - *IU Online offers the degree I am looking for.*
    - *Clinical opportunities (research)*
    - *Course was hard to find at other institutions, especially in a flexible online form.*
- Flexibility/convenience (20%, 13)
    - *Allows me to do school full time and work full time.*
    - *I have a child and can't easily attend classes in person with that and my work schedule.*
    - *Best transition for military PCS/travel.*
- Personal or career advancement (19%, 12)
    - *Reputation for myself and example for my kids.*
    - *Need credentials to support experience.*
    - *Opportunities for a greater career.*
- General or other (17%, 11)
    - *Wanted to attend online school*
- Medical/disability reasons (13%, 8)
    - *I am disabled. Therefore I am unable to continue my university education in a traditional classroom setting.*
- Cost or tuition benefit (5%, 3)

To provide more information on the factors contributing to IU Online students' satisfaction with their courses, survey respondents were asked to rank five factors from most to least important. These factors related to online coursework included applicable or practical content, course organization, easy-to-complete requirements, interesting content, and quality of instructor(s). Over half (55%) of the 506 respondents ranked applicable or practical course content as the most or second-most important factor contributing to their satisfaction with IU Online courses, and nearly half (43%) ranked course organization as the most or second-most important factor.

At the other end of the scale, over half of respondents (52%) ranked interesting content as either the least or second-least important factor contributing to their satisfaction with IU Online courses (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Rankings of factors contributing to course satisfaction
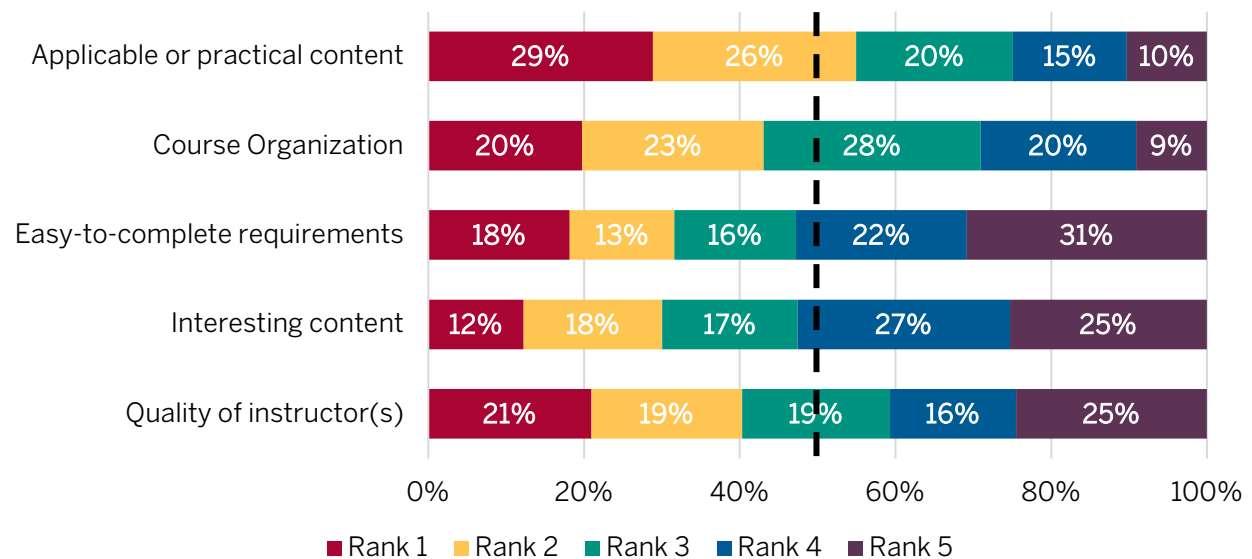
N=506

Note: Black dotted line indicates the median ranking where it passes through each bar (e.g., for "Applicable or practical content" and "Course Organization" the median responses were Rank 2 and Rank 3, respectively).

In an open-ended follow-up question, respondents were asked to list any additional factors that would contribute to their satisfaction with IU Online courses. These text responses were analyzed and grouped into thematic categories, with some responses categorized in more than one area, thus percentages exceed 100. Among the 59 responses, the most cited factors were related to course or program content. Response themes, frequencies, and examples are listed below:

- Course/program content or resources (27%, 16)
  - *Some of the videos need to be updated.*
  - *Use of open/free textbooks when possible.*
  - *I would like to see something more than just "read the text and answer the questions." Doing project and watching videos I think would be more interesting.*
  - *More lectures would be nice.*

- Flexibility (22%, 13)
  - *Being able to work at my own pace in all the courses.*
  - *Having courses be truly asynchronous where there are no weekly deadlines; everything is open at the beginning, and I can complete assignments whenever I have time is the best structure.*
  - *Flexible due dates.*
- Accessibility/availability of technology/platforms (19%, 11)
  - *Accessible support options (technical and related to the course)*
  - *No third-party proctoring services, like Examity*
  - *The Canvas program runs smoothly and staying in touch with University news is easy.*
- Instructors or instruction (17%, 10)
  - *Professors are always very interested In helping their students both with their studies and things going out outside of school.*
  - *Instructor engagement (top priority)*
  - *Better access to online tutoring would be great*
- Workload (8%, 5)
  - *I would prefer for it to be equal (not more than) the amount of work of in-person classes.*
  - *No busywork*
- General or other (14%, 8)

Respondents were also asked to rank the importance of factors contributing to their dissatisfaction with IU Online courses. These factors included course workload, course organization, instructor issues, technology or platform issues, and unclear course requirements. Nearly half of the 498 respondents (49%) indicated that unclear course requirements were the most or second-most important factor in their dissatisfaction with IU Online courses, and nearly half (48%) ranked course workload as the most or second-most important factor. Almost two-thirds of respondents (61%) ranked technology or platform issues as the least or second-least important factor contributing to their dissatisfaction with IU Online courses (See Figure 9).

Figure 9. Rankings of factors contributing to course dissatisfaction
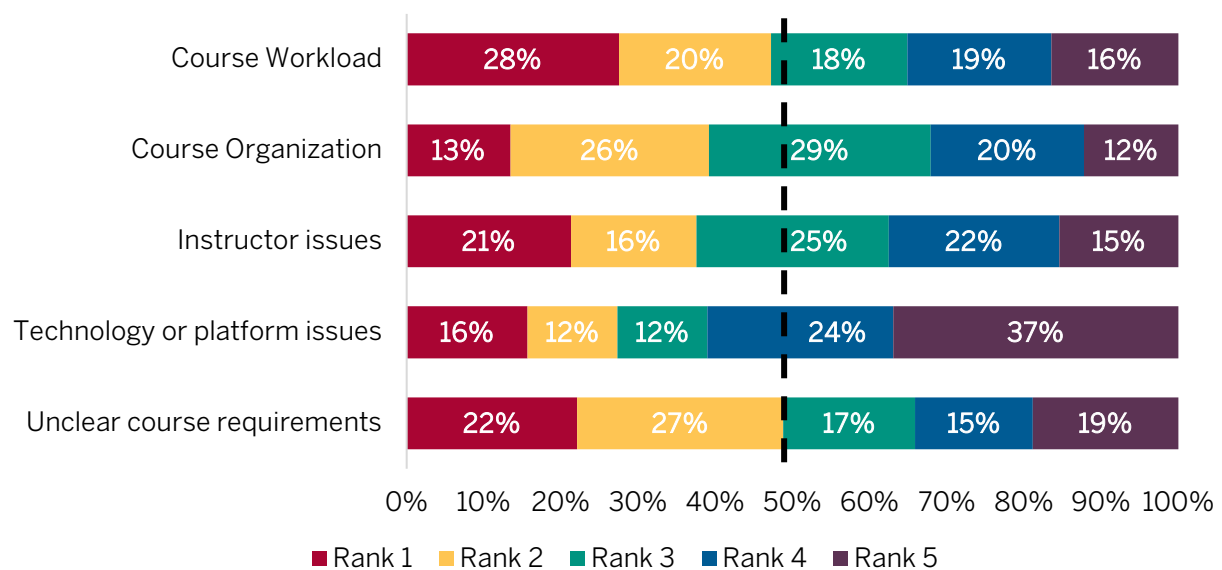
N=498

Note: Black dotted line indicates the median ranking where it passes through each bar (e.g., for "Course workload" and "Course Organization" the median responses were both Rank 3).

In another open-ended follow-up question, respondents were asked to list any additional factors that would contribute to their dissatisfaction with IU Online courses. Again, these text responses were analyzed and grouped into thematic categories. Similar to the results for the factors contributing to respondent satisfaction, among the 47 responses to this question, the most common factors related to dissatisfaction were related to course or program content and resources. Additional response themes, frequencies, and examples are listed below.

- Course/program resources and/or content (28%, 13)
  - *Whether assignments seem/feel purposeful.*
  - *Curricula missing important content/themes.*

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- - *The workload varies too much between classes in a single degree program.*
    - *Inability to test out of lower-level courses.*
    - *I wish textbooks and Pearson material could be used more easily on mobile.*
- Instructors (21%, 10)
    - *Lack of responses from professors over email.*
    - *Rude instructors is something I have a very low tolerance for.*
    - *Most instructors are good communicators, but some do not reply timely.*
- Lack of flexibility (17%, 8)
    - *Lack of concern for the differing needs of online/distant/working/mature students versus traditional students.*
    - *Office hours and study sessions that don't take into account people working full time.*
    - *Tight deadlines, where you only have a few days to complete assignments really hurts my ability to complete the course as I work full time.*
- Organization or course platform (15%, 7)
    - *Some instructors in the same department have no uniform platform on managing online instruction.*
    - *Canvas accessibility. More specific training/webinars for how to use/amange Canvas.*
    - *Discussion boards are an absolute waste of time.*
- Communication/interaction with fellow students (9%, 4)
- No dissatisfaction (6%, 3)
- Cost (4%,2)
- Availability of courses (4%,2)
- Other (2%,1)

Communication within IU Online courses

To investigate communication within IU Online courses, the survey included questions with regard to modes and frequency of communication and satisfaction with communications, with separate questions related to communication with instructors and with other online students. Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they communicate with IU Online instructors using various modes of communication, including direct messages in Canvas, discussion boards, email, in-person meetings, video calls, phone calls, text or messaging on another platform, or another mode (see Table 3). Respondents most frequently use discussion boards to communicate with their IU Online instructors, with over two-thirds (68%) indicating that they use these either weekly or daily. Furthermore, over half of respondents (57%) indicated that they were very satisfied with their communication with IU Online instructors and another third (33%) indicated that they were somewhat satisfied (see Figure 10).

Table 3. Modes of communication with IU Online instructors

How frequently do you communicate with online instructors in each of the following ways?	Never		Rarely		Monthly		Weekly		Daily	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Direct messages in Canvas	34	7%	144	29%	126	26%	172	35%	18	4%
Discussion boards	38	8%	94	19%	36	7%	**282**	**57%**	44	9%
Email	38	8%	193	39%	102	21%	138	28%	23	5%
In-person meetings	387	78%	84	17%	10	2%	11	2%	2	0%
Video calls (e.g., Zoom, Skype)	224	45%	175	35%	51	10%	41	8%	3	1%
Phone calls	368	74%	109	22%	12	2%	3	1%	2	0%
Texts or messaging on another platform (e.g., WhatsApp)	395	80%	74	15%	11	2%	11	2%	3	1%
Other	461	93%	16	3%	1	0%	13	3%	3	1%

N=494

Figure 10. Satisfaction with communication with IU Online instructors

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
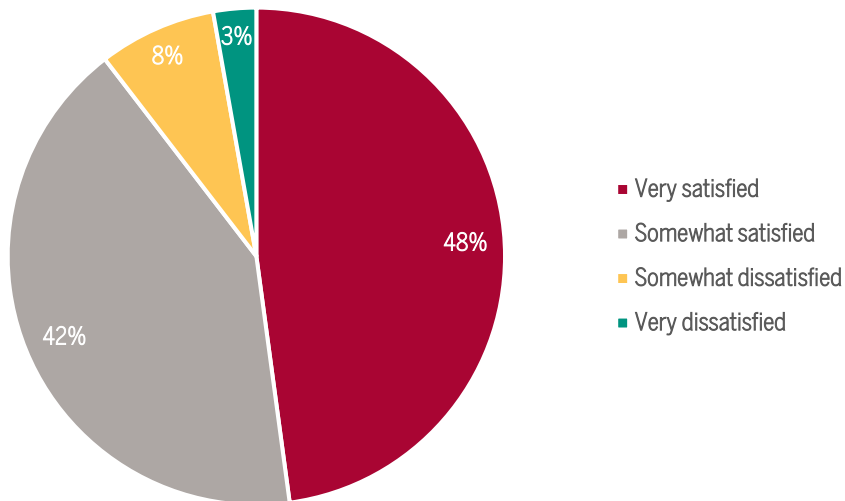- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
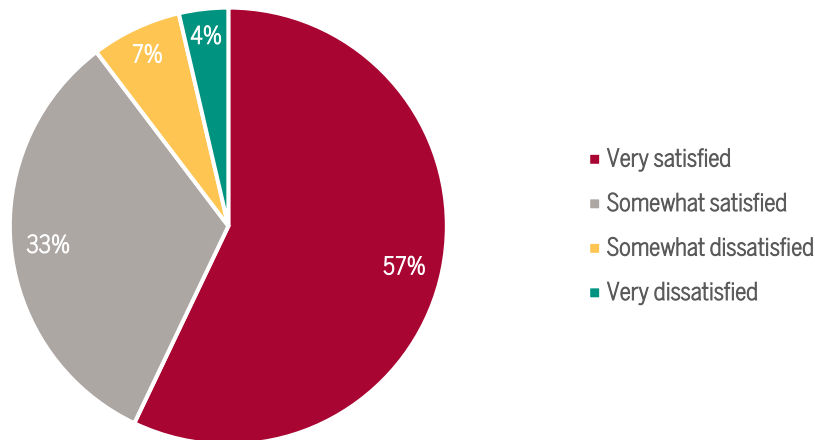
N=494

Respondents were asked a similar set of questions related to their modes and frequency of and satisfaction with communications with other IU Online students (see Table 4). Similar to communication with instructors, respondents most frequently use discussion boards to communicate with other IU Online students, with 86% indicating that they use these either weekly or daily. Reported levels of satisfaction with communication with other IU Online students were lower than for the instructor communication, with under half of 492 respondents (48%) reporting that they were very satisfied, and another 42% reporting that they were somewhat satisfied in their communications with other IU Online students (see Figure 11).

Table 4. Modes of communication with IU Online students

How frequently do you communicate with other students in your IU Online courses in each of the following ways?	Never		Rarely		Monthly		Weekly		Daily	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Direct messages in Canvas	186	38%	175	36%	45	9%	71	14%	15	3%
Discussion boards	18	4%	28	6%	21	4%	**369**	**75%**	**56**	11%
Email	239	49%	174	35%	34	7%	40	8%	5	1%
In-person meetings	426	87%	44	9%	7	1%	12	2%	3	1%
Video calls (e.g., Zoom, Skype)	294	60%	116	24%	35	7%	45	9%	2	0%
Phone calls	430	87%	49	10%	9	2%	2	0%	2	0%
Texts or messaging on another platform (e.g., WhatsApp)	344	70%	80	16%	18	4%	38	8%	12	2%
Other	461	94%	17	3%	7	1%	6	1%	1	0%

N=492

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Figure 11. Satisfaction in communication with IU Online students

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

48%
42%
8%
3%

N=492

Overall satisfaction with IU Online

Survey respondents were asked whether they would recommend their IU Online program to a friend or colleague. A majority of the 492 respondents (95%) answered that they would (see Figure 12). In an open-ended follow up question, respondents were asked why they would or would not recommend their program. These text responses were analyzed and grouped into thematic categories, and some respondents included comments that spanned multiple themes, thus percentages exceed 100%.

Figure 12. Respondents recommending their IU Online program to a peer/colleague

- Yes
- No

5%
95%
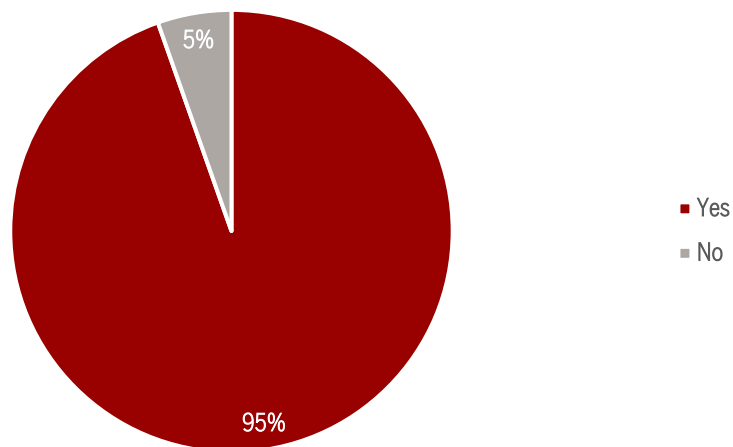
N=492

Of the 417 respondents who provided their reasons for recommending their online programs, over half (58%) remarked on the convenience or flexibility provided by online courses. Response themes, frequencies, and examples are included below:

- Convenience/flexibility (58%, 242)
    - *It is a good way to earn a degree without actually being at the school.*
    - *It offers the flexibility needed for people who work full-time.*
    - *For most classes you can pick what semesters you complete them in.*
    - *It is very manageable with any schedule you have. Deadlines are reasonable.*
    - *It has allowed me to keep working and be involved in other social groups.*
    - *I like it because I can get my degree without being forced to be at class every day. I can dedicate as much or as little time as I need to a subject.*
- Course organization or program quality (25%, 103)
    - *The quality of the courses and the ability to do everything online.*
    - *Educational content, ease of use.*
    - *So far it has been pretty easy-going and very self-organized.*
    - *Access to a good selection of courses.*
    - *It's a solid program. You get out of it what you put into it.*
- Instructors/staff/advisors (19%, 78)
    - *The professors and staff have overall been wonderful to work with, and I have enjoyed my classes.*
    - *The instructors are knowledgeable and helpful.*
    - *The level of accommodation. I communicated exactly what I wanted for a degree, and the advisors/program directors made every effort to fit it in. This showed a higher level of attentiveness and care for students than I've seen in other programs.*
    - *I have never had problems communicating with instructors.*
- Course or program ease of use or access (14%, 57)
    - *Small classes, can communicate with instructors, so far, course structure is great.*
    - *It is a very inclusive program and makes me feel included despite things being states away.*
    - *I really like how clear communication is. I don't have to dig to find information. There are so many resources available, and it's easily accessible.*
- Cost/affordability (most responses included more than one theme) (12%, 51)

- - *So far, the program has been very well-based, and it is affordable.*
  - *Good degree options, affordability.*
  - *It is very cost-efficient, and there is a ton of flexibility.*

- Non-substantive responses (7%, 31)
- Career/educational advancement (5%, 20)
- Reputation of IU (5%, 19)
- Unique opportunity (1%, 6)

Respondents who indicated that they would not recommend their IU Online program were also asked why they would not recommend the program. Twenty provided responses to this question, and the most frequently cited reasons included issues related to lack of support or instructors. These text responses were analyzed and grouped into thematic categories, and some responses included more than one theme, thus percentages exceed 100. Response themes, frequencies, and examples are included below:

- Lack of support/instructors (40%, 8)
  - *Many courses are completely automated, with no instructor personalization, engagement or feedback. Does not feel valuable compared to the cost of courses.*
  - *Feels like I'm paying to teach myself.*
  - *I had to switch to in-person because of poor structure of the courses and a very poor instructor that is required for the degree.*
- Cost (30%, 6)
- Inconvenience (25%, 5)
- Workload (20%, 4)
- Lack of relevance (15%, 3)

Differences Across Demographics

Three survey questions were examined to discover if there were differences in responses based on eight demographic markers. The questions included those on level of satisfaction with communications with IU Online instructors, level of satisfaction with communications with fellow students, and whether respondents would recommend their IU Online program. The demographic markers included sex, age, race/ethnicity, employment status, campus of enrollment, program type, length of IU Online enrollment, and previous experience with online

learning at a different institution. Some questions did show differences in responses but did not have large enough N values to be considered a quality sample size. The following section summarizes the results of these analyses where notable differences were found among the demographic groups. Throughout this section, figures are included to illustrate variations in responses across groups, and the group size (n) is indicated within the figure. Please note that the n for each group may vary, because some respondents did not respond to all questions.

Communication within IU Online courses

For the two questions on satisfaction with communication with IU Online instructors or with fellow IU Online students, the responses of somewhat satisfied and very satisfied were added together to create a total satisfaction rating. The 55+ age range showed the lowest total satisfaction rates with 77% either very or somewhat satisfied with communication with instructors (see Figure 13) and 67% either very or somewhat satisfied with communication with fellow students (see Figure 14).

Figure 13. Satisfaction with communication with instructors by age range
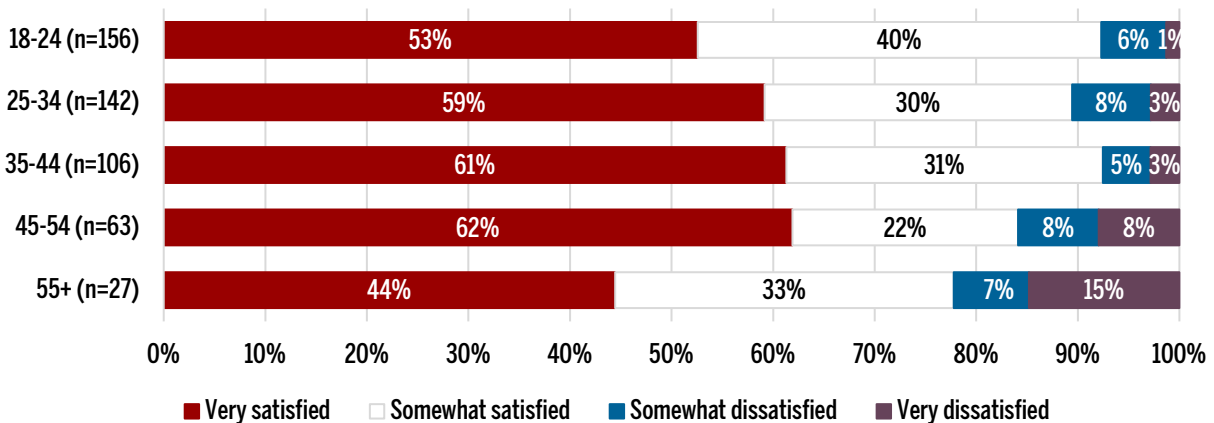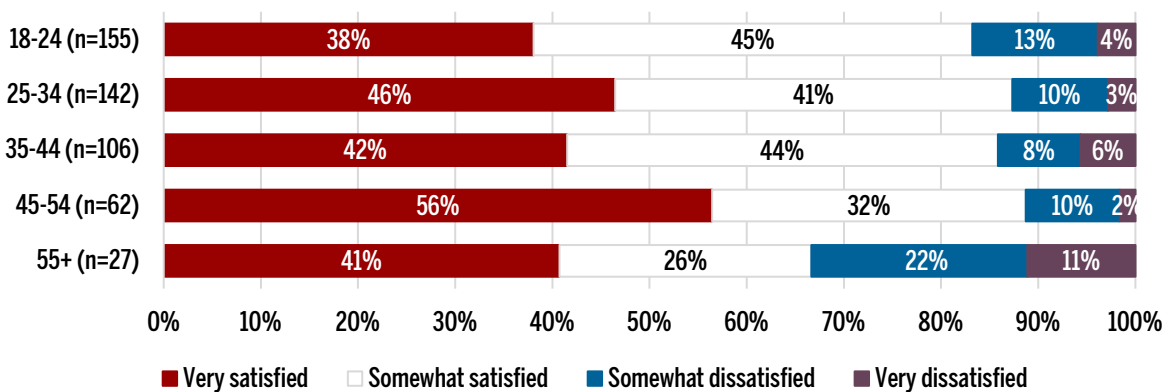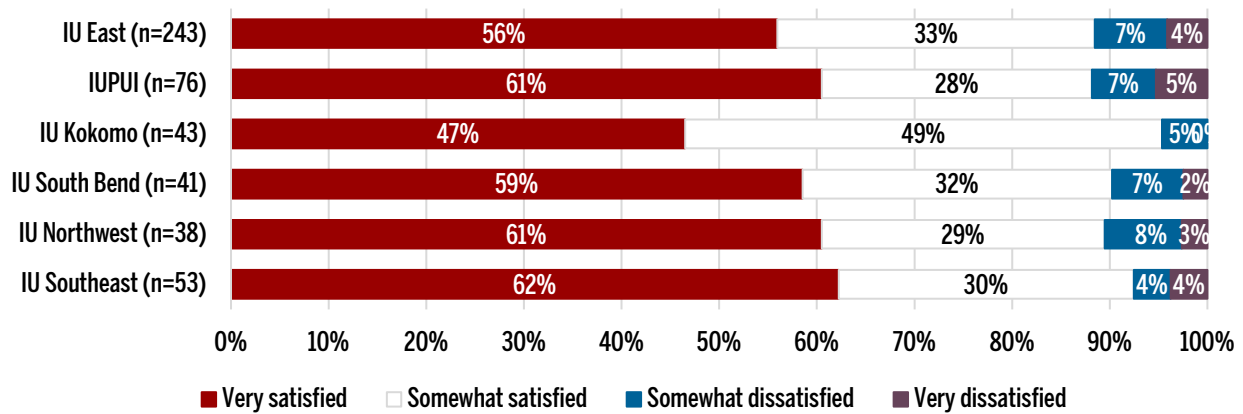

Figure 14. Satisfaction with communication with fellow students by age range


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Levels of satisfaction with communications with instructors and students also varied according to a respondent's campus of enrollment. For communication with instructors, IU East and IUPUI had the lowest total satisfaction ratings for communication with instructors, each with 88% either very or somewhat satisfied (see Figure 15), while IU Kokomo had the lowest total satisfaction ratings for communication with students at 79% either very or somewhat satisfied, respectively (see Figure 16).

Figure 15. Satisfaction with communication with instructors by campus

Note: Campuses with an n lower than 10 have been excluded.

Figure 16. Satisfaction for communication with students by campus

Note: Campuses with an n lower than 10 have been excluded.

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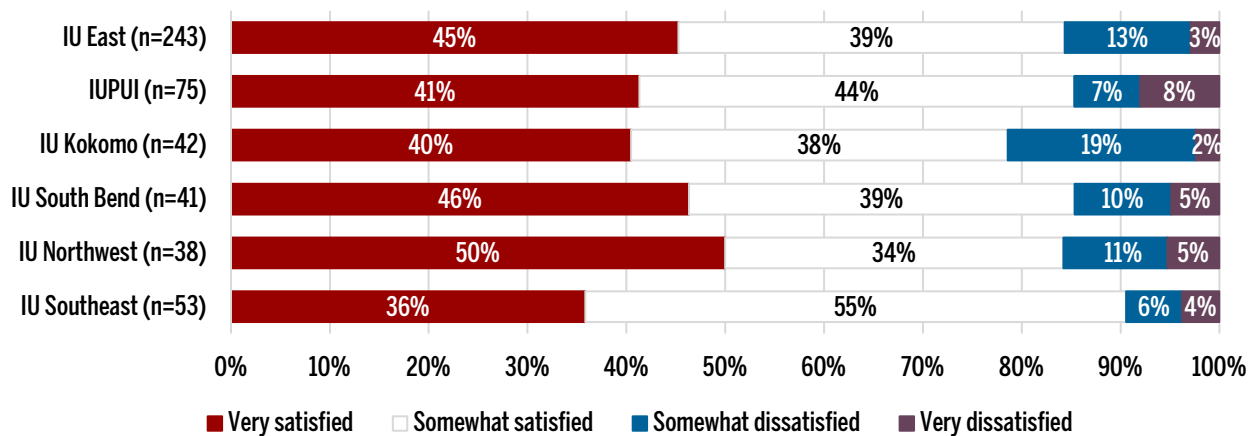
There were some differences in satisfaction with communication with instructors and with students according to the types of programs in which students were enrolled (e.g., collaborative, non-collaborative, or certificate/non-degree programs). As Figure 17 depicts, respondents enrolled in collaborative and non-collaborative programs reported lower levels of satisfaction with instructor communication, compared with those enrolled certificate/non-degree programs.

Figure 17. Satisfaction with communication with instructors by program type
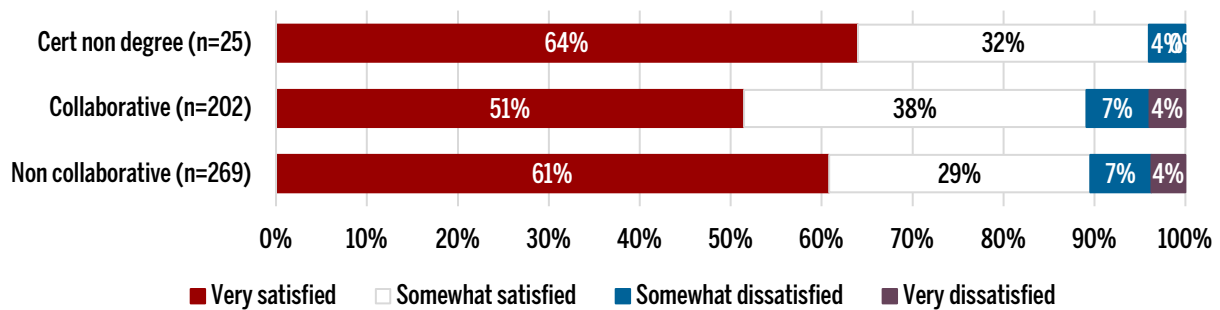
Differences were also noted in levels of satisfaction with communication with other students according to respondents' program type. On this question, students enrolled in collaborative programs reported lower levels of satisfaction with communication with other students, and respondents in certificate/non-degree programs reported the highest levels of satisfaction (see Figure 18).

Figure 18. Satisfaction with communication with students by program type
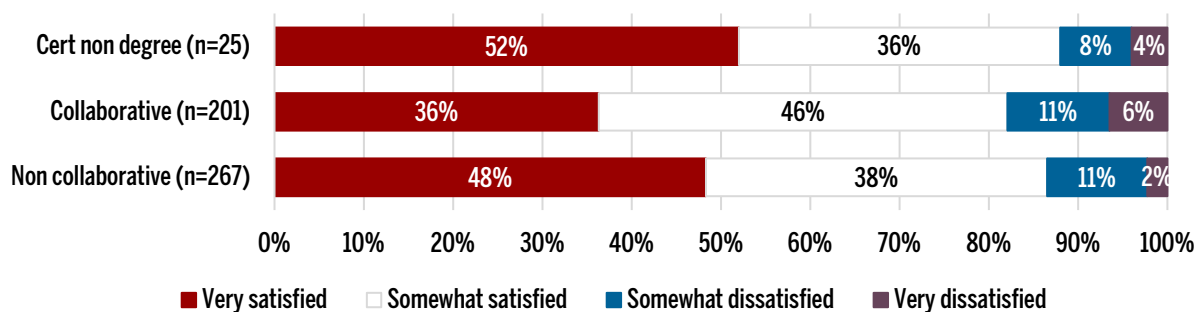
There was also a difference in satisfaction with communication with both instructors and with fellow students between male and female respondents. In comparison with female students, male students reported lower levels of overall satisfaction in communication with instructors (84%) (see Figure 19). Both female and male students reported similar levels of total satisfaction in communication with fellow students, but for this question, male students more often indicated that they were somewhat satisfied, whereas female students more frequently indicated that they were very satisfied (see Figure 20).

Figure 19. Satisfaction with communication with instructors by sex

Figure 20. Satisfaction with communication with fellow students by sex

Respondents who were identified as Hispanic/Latino had the lowest satisfaction ratings for communication with instructors, with 48% very satisfied and a total satisfaction rating of 83% (see Figure 21).

Figure 21. Satisfaction with communication with instructors by race/ethnicity

Respondents who were identified as Asian had the lowest satisfaction ratings for communication with fellow students, with 15% indicating that they were very satisfied and a total satisfaction rating of 69% (see Figure 22).
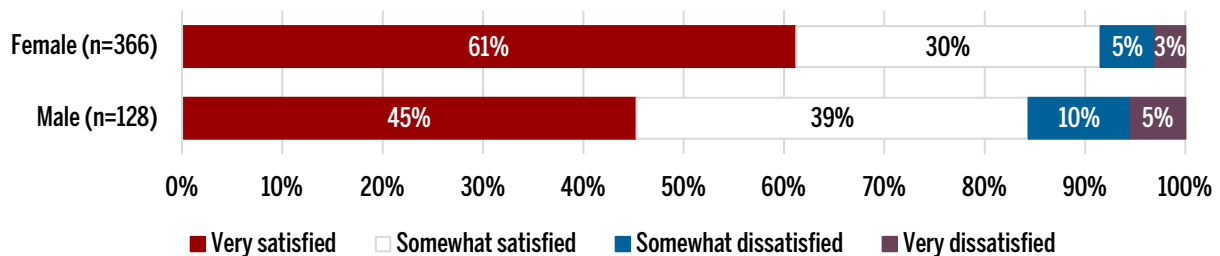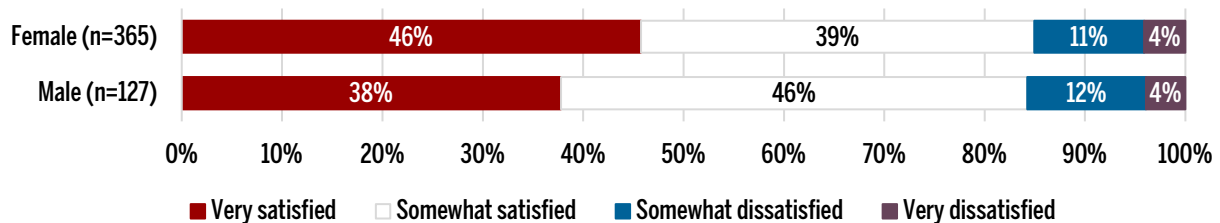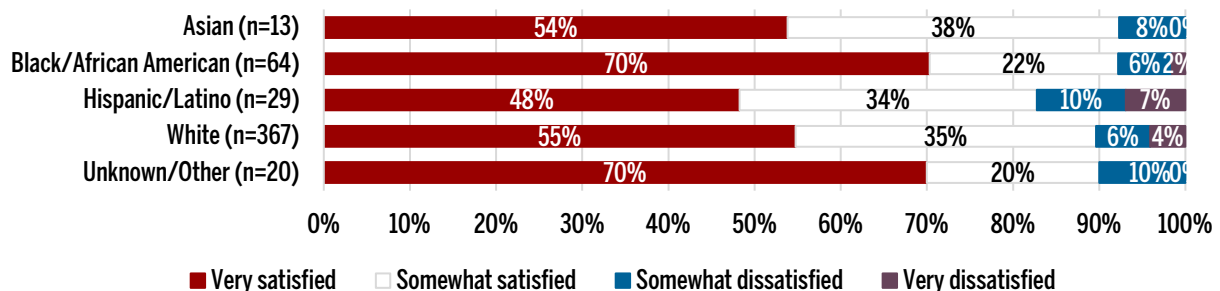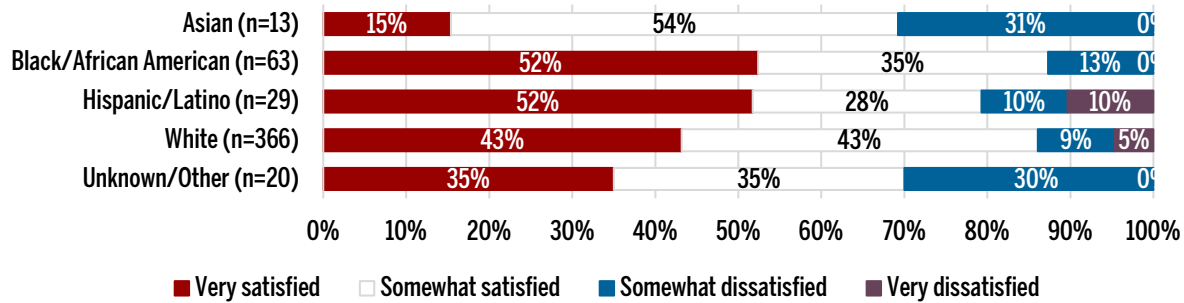
Figure 22. Satisfaction with communication with fellow students by race/ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Asian (n=13)	15%	54%	31%	0%
Black/African American (n=63)	52%	35%	13%	0%
Hispanic/Latino (n=29)	52%	28%	10%	10%
White (n=366)	43%	43%	9%	5%
Unknown/Other (n=20)	35%	35%	30%	0%

Note: Race/ethnicity markers with an n lower than 10 have been excluded.

Overall satisfaction with IU Online

Respondents were asked if they would recommend the program to others. Some respondent groups that had lower total satisfaction ratings for communication with fellow students or with instructors also had lower rates of responding that they would recommend their IU Online program. As shown in Figure 23, female respondents were more likely to recommend their IU Online program than male respondents.

Figure 23. Would recommend program by sex

Sex	Yes	No
Female (n=365)	97%	3%
Male (n=127)	91%	9%
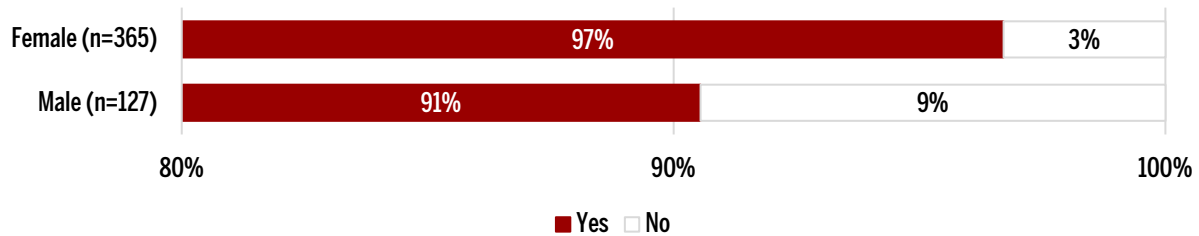
As Figure 24 indicates, students whose race/ethnicity was identified as unknown or other were the least likely to recommend their IU Online program, whereas 100% of Black/African American respondents would recommend their program.

Figure 24. Would recommend program by race/ethnicity
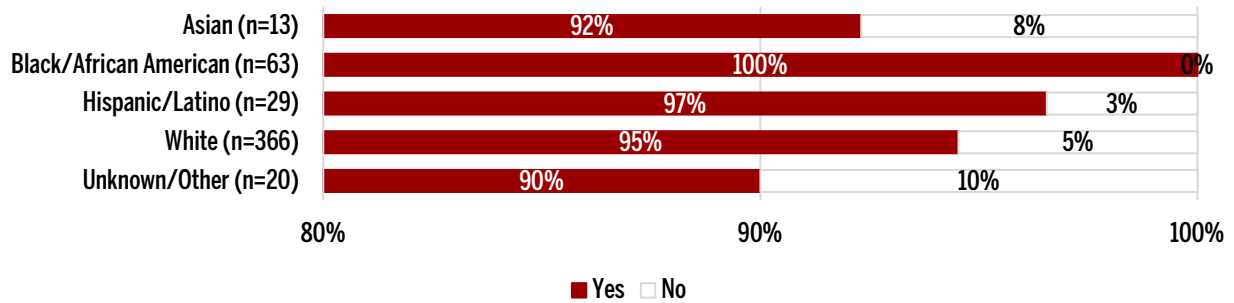
Note: Race/ethnicity markers with an n lower than 10 have been excluded.

Respondents from IUPUI and IU East provided the lowest rates of recommending the program to others, whereas all respondents at IU Kokomo would recommend their program (see Figure 25).

Figure 25. Would recommend program by campus
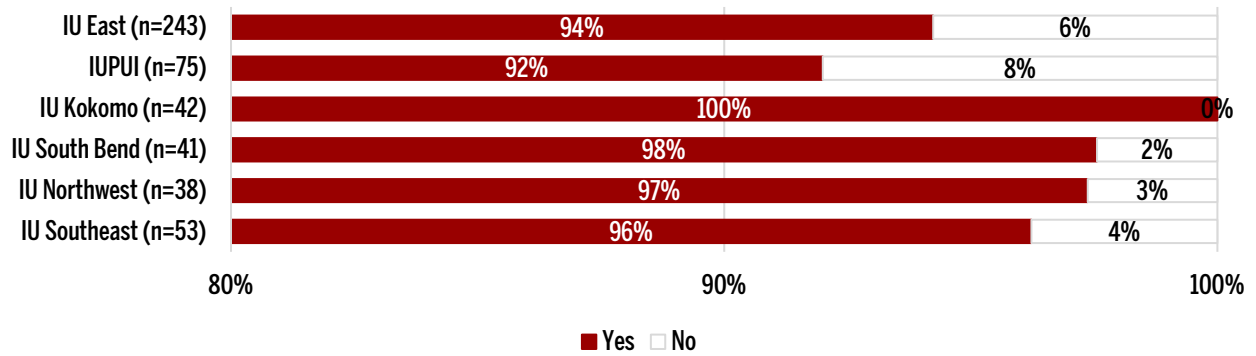
Note: Campus locations with an n lower than 10 have been excluded.

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Discussion

In general, the fall 2022 OLES results were similar to those from the fall 2021 OLES administration. The following section summarizes the results of the fall 2022 OLES administration, with comparisons between these and the fall 2021 results.

For both fall 2021 and fall 2022, OLES respondents frequently cited the convenience or flexibility offered by online education as a key factor in both their decision to enroll in IU Online courses and their overall satisfaction with their online learning programs. OLES respondents in both years also cited career advancement as a primary reason for taking courses with IU Online, with over half ranking it as the most or second most important reason. Across both years, these results were within one or two percentage points of each other, indicating that respondents consistently consider convenience/flexibility and career advancement when they decide to enroll in IU Online programs.

In fall 2022, over half (55%) of OLES respondents identified applicable or practical course content as a primary factor in their satisfaction with IU Online courses, and half (50%) did the same on the fall 2021 survey. Results related to other factors contributing to course satisfaction were also similar across both years of survey administration, with 43% (2022) and 48% (2021) citing course organization as a highly important factor, and 40% (2022) and 44% (2021) citing the quality of instructor. Across both years, responses to the open-ended follow-up questions were also thematically similar, with the highest proportions of respondents in each year commenting on course or program content as an additional factor that would contribute to their satisfaction with IU Online.

Results of the questions related to factors contributing to course dissatisfaction in each year of OLES administration were also similar. In both years, approximately half of respondents cited unclear course requirements as the most or second most important factor, with 49% in 2022 and 51% in 2021. Course workload was also a highly important factor contributing to course dissatisfaction, with 48% of respondents in each year ranking this as either most or second most important. In both years, responses to the open-ended follow up question were also thematically similar, with the highest percentage of respondents indicating that course assignments/content/requirements would be an additional factor contributing to their dissatisfaction with IU Online.

Similar to the fall 2021 OLES findings, where 58% reported being very satisfied, over half (57%) of 2022 OLES respondents were very satisfied with their communication with IU Online

instructors, and approximately another third (35% in 2021 and 33% in 2022) were somewhat satisfied. In both years, over two-thirds of respondents indicated that they communicate with instructors most frequently via discussion boards, either weekly or daily. Levels of satisfaction in communication with IU Online students were the same across both years of OLES administration, with 48% in each year reporting that they were very satisfied.

In both 2021 and 2022, 95% of OLES respondents indicated that they would recommend their online program to a colleague or peer. Additionally, in both years, responses to the open-ended follow-up questions asking why respondents would/would not recommend their program were thematically similar, with approximately half citing convenience or flexibility and about one-quarter citing course organization as a reason to recommend their program each year. For those who would not recommend their program, the most frequently cited reasons in both years were related to instructor quality or support. The consistency in these responses and themes across both years indicates that OLES respondents are, overall, satisfied with their online programs, particularly due to the convenience and flexibility offered.

Trends in demographic comparisons

For both years of OLES results, the larger number of respondents has allowed for more meaningful analysis and findings comparing responses across different demographic groups. By cross-tabulating responses according to respondent characteristics, in each year we discovered some differences across the results for questions related to instructor communication, student communication, and overall program satisfaction based on respondents' age, sex, race/ethnicity, campus of enrollment, and program type. Please note that in fall 2021, we found differences related to respondents' previous online enrollment, but in fall 2022, there were no significant differences found based on this characteristic. In the following section, we will compare the results of these cross-tabulation analysis across both years, highlighting any differences from 2021 to 2022.

Although in each year there was a small group of respondents who fell into the 55+ age range, in both years these students indicated lower levels of satisfaction with communications with both instructors and students, when compared with other age groups. Total satisfaction ratings for communication with instructors among the 55+ age group of respondents were the same in each year, with 77% indicating that they were either very or somewhat satisfied, but in 2022 a higher proportion of this age group indicated that they were very dissatisfied, with 6% in 2021 and 15% in 2022. Satisfaction ratings related to communication with fellow students were also lower in 2022 than in 2021 for the 55+ age group. In 2021, 75% of respondents who were 55+ were very

or somewhat satisfied, and in 2022 this percentage was 67%. However, in both 2021 and 2022 these respondents (55+ years old) were just as likely to recommend IU Online as most other age groups. Taken across both years, these findings may indicate that satisfaction with communication with instructors and/or fellow students is not a strong predictor of overall satisfaction (as measured by whether or not a respondent would recommend IU Online), at least for students who are 55+.

Additional analyses of respondents according to program type, broken down by those enrolled in collaborative, non-collaborative, or certificate/non-degree programs, yielded some differences among these groups with regard to satisfaction with communication, and there were some differences in these findings between 2021 and 2022. In 2021, OLES respondents enrolled in programs classified as certificate or non-degree programs reported lower levels of satisfaction with communication with instructors and also were less likely to recommend their IU Online program than respondents from other program types. However, in 2022, respondents enrolled in certificate or non-degree programs reported the highest level of satisfaction with communication with both instructors and students when compared with respondents from other types of programs, and respondents from all program types were similarly likely to recommend their IU Online program. In 2022, OLES respondents enrolled in collaborative programs reported the lowest levels of total satisfaction in communication with both instructors and students. Whereas the 2021 OLES results in this area may have indicated lower levels of satisfaction with communication and overall for respondents in certificate or non-degree programs, the 2022 results indicate the opposite, and the similarities in overall satisfaction across all program types in 2022 may indicate that these differences in satisfaction with communications by program type are not strong predictors of overall satisfaction.

There were also some differences to highlight among racial/ethnic groups of respondents, as well as some distinctions between these results in 2021 and 2022. In both 2021 and 2022, when compared to all responses and to other racial/ethnic groups, respondents who were identified as Asian reported lower levels of satisfaction with communication with other students, and they were also less likely than others to recommend their IU Online program; 86% (2021) and 92% (2022) of Asian respondents indicated that they would recommend their program, compared with 95% of all respondents in both years, 95% (2021) and 97% (2022) of Hispanic/Latinx or 95% (2021) and 94% (2022) of White respondents, and 94% (2021) and 100% (2022) of Black/African American respondents. These findings may point to a more meaningful correlation between satisfaction in communication with fellow students and overall program satisfaction for this group of students. An additional finding of note for 2022 is that respondents

identified as Hispanic had the lowest level of satisfaction in communication with instructors, at 83%, but the level of overall satisfaction for this group was similar to other groups, as indicated above.

Whereas in 2021, there were notable differences in respondents' satisfaction with student communication based on sex, but not in their satisfaction with instructor communication or overall, in 2022 these differences based on sex were notable in each of these three areas. On the 2022 OLES results, 92% of female respondents were satisfied with their communications with instructors, compared with 84% of male respondents. Within these findings, there was also a difference based on sex between the percentages of those who were very satisfied, with 61% of female respondents indicating that they were very satisfied in their communications with instructors, compared with 45% of male respondents. Similarly, although total satisfaction with communication with students was similar for both male (84%) and female (85%) respondents in 2022, a higher proportion of female respondents (46%) than male respondents (38%) indicated that they were very satisfied in this area. Additionally, in 2022, 97% of female OLES respondents indicated that they would recommend their IU Online program, whereas 91% of male respondents did the same. For 2022, these findings of differences based on sex in satisfaction related to communications and overall may indicate correlations between levels of satisfaction in communications and overall satisfaction for male and female respondents.

There was some variation between 2021 and 2022 OLES respondents in terms of differences in satisfaction with communications and overall based on campus of enrollment. For communication with instructors, in 2021 IU Northwest had the lowest level of total satisfaction (83%), while in 2022 OLES respondents from IU East and IUPUI each had the lowest levels of satisfaction in communication with instructors, at 88%. For communication with students, in 2021 respondents from IU South Bend had the lowest levels of satisfaction at 84%, whereas in 2022 respondents from IU Kokomo had the lowest levels of satisfaction with students, at 79%. With regard to overall satisfaction as reflected by respondents' indications of whether they would recommend their IU Online programs, in 2021 OLES respondents from IU Southeast had the lowest levels, at 89%, while in 2022, respondents from IUPUI were less likely to recommend their programs, with 92% indicating that they would. These findings may not yet indicate systematic differences among the campuses, but will be important to continue to monitor for variance across programs in terms of levels of satisfaction with communications and overall.

Recommendations

Distribution

The continued distribution to the full population of undergraduate students enrolled in IU Online programs through all regional campuses for the fall 2022 OLES administration allowed for deeper analysis of responses to certain survey items based on demographic differences among respondents and comparison of these results to the fall 2021 OLES findings. Moving forward, we recommend continuing to distribute the survey to the full sample of students enrolled in IU Online undergraduate programs, which will allow for continued analysis of demographic differences among respondents and the potential to identify trends across the years of administration.

The fall 2022 OLES response rate was 17%, slightly lower than the 2021 response rate of 19%, and the survey distribution in mid-September of both years did not coincide with other student surveys administered by the IU Office of Online Education. We recommend continuing to offer financial incentives for survey completion to a portion of the survey respondents, and in 2023 we intend to revise the recruitment procedure to select incentive recipients randomly among those who complete the survey to boost response rates. We also recommend that the IU Office of Online Education continue to send email notifications and reminders for survey completion to emphasize the importance of student feedback in their improvement processes.

Ongoing survey implementation

Moving forward, we propose the following steps for ongoing survey implementation:

- Continued attention to sample data and possibilities for further analyses of differences among respondent groups and identifying trends across the years, for example if additional demographic information may be available within the sample.

- Continued timing of the survey distribution during the early to middle part of a semester and planning carefully to avoid overlap with other surveys that may be distributed to the same population. We also recommend continuing to offer incentives for survey completion to boost response rates, and we intend to offer these incentives to a randomly selected number of respondents, rather than those first to complete the survey.

- Analysis of survey data and reporting of findings. We seek feedback from IUOOE on the present report and plan to incorporate and adjust accordingly in reporting on future survey administration. We plan to continue to present quantitative and qualitative

findings in both visual and narrative form. We will continue to conduct cross-tabulation analysis to determine any differences across demographic groups.