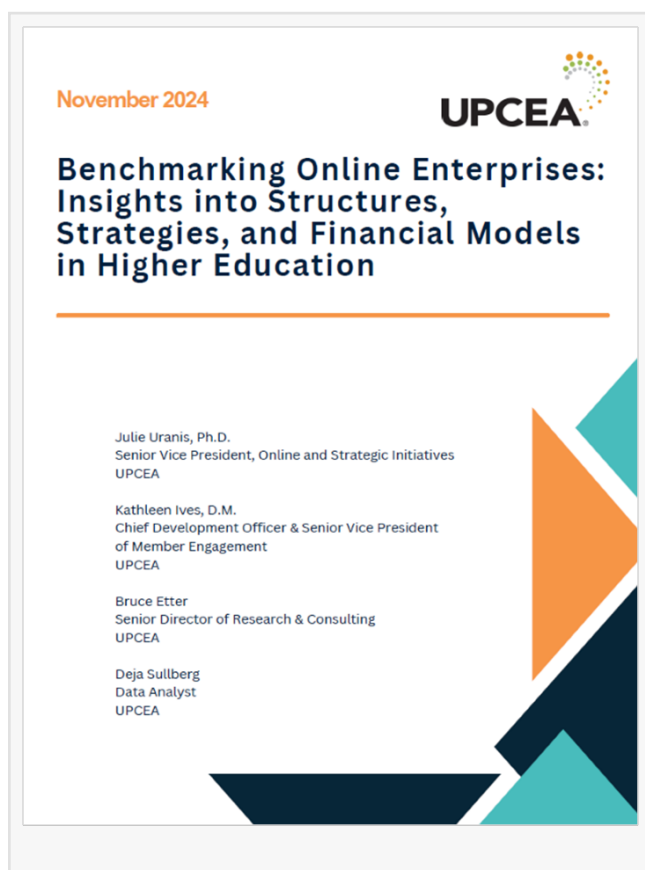


UPCEA Releases Groundbreaking Research Report on Online Education in Higher Education

New annual study provides key benchmarks, insights and recommendations for advancing online learning.

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, November 19, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- UPCEA, the online and professional education association, today announced the release of a [new research report](#), "Benchmarking Online Enterprises: Insights into Structures, Strategies, and Financial Models in Higher Education." The report, based on a comprehensive survey of 182 higher education professionals, primarily Chief Online Learning Officers (COLOs), offers valuable data and analysis to guide strategic decision-making for institutional leaders looking to sustain current online programming and create new opportunities for learners. The survey will be conducted annually, providing presidents, provosts, COLOs, and other senior leaders the vital information they need to ensure their institutions are competitive.



The report examines the structures, functions, finances, and policies of online education units across a diverse range of higher education institutions. It provides a detailed benchmarking

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framework that enables institutional leaders, online education administrators, and strategic planners to compare their online education efforts with peer institutions of similar size, type, online unit organization, and budget of the online enterprise. With online education continuing to play a pivotal role in expanding access and improving outcomes for learners, this report provides an essential resource for universities, colleges, and other educational entities committed to the growth of online

learning.

KEY FINDINGS

The benchmarking study revealed several critical findings that highlight both the growth and challenges facing online education in higher education:



- **Financial Resources and Staffing** – On average, online units report a budget of \$8.6 million, with a median budget of \$3.5 million. These units typically employ 32 full-time staff on average, with a median of 15, while also relying on external contracted services, particularly for marketing (71%) and recruiting (61%).
- **Program Portfolios and Focus on Graduate Offerings** – The majority of online education units support graduate-level programs, including graduate degrees (84%) and graduate credit-bearing certificates (80%). However, there is also a notable presence of microcredentials (71%) and undergraduate offerings (68%) in many online unit portfolios, reflecting the diversified growth in online education.
- **Strategic Differentiators in a Competitive Market** – Institutions prioritize program quality (85%), brand strength (74%), faculty expertise (73%), and effective marketing/enrollment (69%) to remain competitive in the online education market. Additionally, there is a growing focus on ensuring accessibility and inclusivity, with 44% of respondents strongly agreeing that their online units have effective strategies in place to support diverse student populations.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The report underscores the need for data-informed decision-making in shaping the future of online education. The findings demonstrate that, while online education has matured in many respects, there is still significant potential for growth, innovation, and improvement.

The study offers several key recommendations to help institutions strategically enhance their online education units: strengthen strategic positioning; advance inclusivity; commit to continuous benchmarking; and leverage AI thoughtfully.

INSIGHTS BEYOND THE REPORT

While the report covers several key areas in depth, it also highlights trends in the broader landscape of online learning that have important implications for institutional leaders:

- **Sustained Demand for Online Education** – Despite a decline in online enrollments from the COVID-19 pandemic peaks, enrollments remain higher than pre-pandemic levels, reflecting a continued and sustained interest in online learning.
- **Adaptability of Online Education** – The increasing frequency of campus shifts to remote or asynchronous learning in response to emergencies demonstrates the critical role that online

education infrastructure plays in ensuring academic continuity. Online education units, supported by robust IT resources, have proven essential in adapting to changing circumstances and continuing to meet student needs.

“As we continue to navigate a rapidly evolving educational landscape, this report offers valuable insights for institutions seeking to enhance their online education programs,” said Robert Hansen, CEO of UPCEA. “It highlights the importance of strategic alignment, resource allocation, and innovation to meet the growing demand for flexible, high-quality learning experiences. The findings also underscore the role of online education in fostering greater access for learners—an area where continued attention and investment will be critical in the years ahead. This is a moment for higher education to leverage these insights and position online learning as a cornerstone of the future of education.”

UPCEA’s Benchmarking Online Enterprises: Insights into Structures, Strategies, and Financial Models in Higher Education provides a valuable reference for higher education leaders looking to advance their online education programs. By benchmarking against peers, measuring progress, and adopting innovative strategies, institutions can position themselves for long-term success in the evolving online education landscape, creating sustainable programs that meet learners’ needs.

REPORT AVAILABILITY & WEBINAR

For more information about the report or to access the full findings, visit <https://upcea.edu/benchmarking-online-enterprises/>.

UPCEA will discuss key findings from the report during a free webinar on January 21, 2025. [Click for details and registration.](#)

ABOUT UPCEA

UPCEA is the online and professional education association. Our members continuously reinvent higher education, positively impacting millions of lives. We proudly lead and support them through cutting edge research, professional development, networking and mentorship, conferences and seminars, and stakeholder advocacy. Our collaborative, entrepreneurial community brings together decision makers and influencers in education, industry, research, and policy interested in improving educational access and outcomes. Learn more about us at UPCEA.edu and follow us on social media @UPCEA.

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