

# Looking Ahead to the Future of Post-Secondary Education

## 2022 Ontario Report

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Association canadienne de recherche sur la formation en ligne



Canadian Digital Learning  
Research Association  
Association canadienne de  
recherche sur la formation en ligne

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The CDLRA's research initiatives are made possible with the support of our sponsors and partners. The primary funding agencies for the 2022 National Surveys were eCampusOntario, BCcampus, Campus Manitoba, Contact North, and D2L. We also thank our partner organizations, Bay View Analytics, Academica Group, and WCET, for their support.

In addition, we acknowledge the work of the CDLRA research team, Dr. Nicole Johnson (Executive Director and research lead) and Dr. Jeff Seaman (Director of Analytics), along with the support of the individuals who served on CDLRA's Board of Directors in 2022 (Dr. Tony Bates, Dr. Brian Desbiens, Dr. Tricia Donovan, Dr. Stephanie McKeown, Cathy Newell-Kelly, Dr. Bruno Poëllhuber, and Dr. George Veletsianos).

We give special thanks to the graduate students from the Master of Educational Technology (MET) program at UBC who contributed to the CDLRA's research efforts in the Spring and Summer of 2022: Michelle Desgroseilliers, Joëlle Ferlatte, Dr. Shelly Ikebuchi, and Sarka Kubelikova. We also thank the MET students who participated in a practicum experience with the CDLRA in the Fall of 2022: Sam Charles, Tamaka Fisher, Dr. Shelly Ikebuchi, Cindy Keung, Su Hyun Kim, Joni Sharkey, and Jenny Zhu. Each student provided our team with new insights and fresh perspectives with regard to the survey findings.

We offer our gratitude to Alison Seaweed, from the Kwakiutl First Nation, who provided feedback on our reports from an Indigenous perspective to help support the CDLRA in our efforts to begin decolonizing our work. The CDLRA acknowledges that, as a remote team, we live and work in many different locations on Turtle Island, on lands taken from Indigenous peoples. As a team, we seek to better understand the ongoing impacts of colonial systems and structures, particularly within the Canadian post-secondary education sector.

We thank the many people who have met with our team to discuss possible survey topics, to give feedback on our findings, and to share insights from the field. These perspectives have been critical in shaping our research initiatives.

We also thank the CDLRA team members and contractors who perform the tasks that support our day-to-day operations and our ability to conduct our research studies.

Most importantly, we thank our survey respondents.



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The 2022 National Surveys were made possible with the support of the following sponsors:

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**CONTACT NORTH** Supporting Rural & Remote Ontario  
**NORD** Soutenant l'Ontario rural et éloigné

The Canadian Digital Learning Research Association (CDLRA) conducted our 2022 research initiatives in partnership with:

 **Bay View Analytics**

 **academica group**  
moving higher ed forward

 **wcet**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As 2022 comes to a close, there is a sense that the “dust is settling” after nearly three years of disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although many students and faculty have returned to in-person learning, an increase in hybrid and online learning is anticipated over the next couple of years. The 2022 Ontario Report explores the impact of the pandemic and provides insights as to what the future may hold for post-secondary education in the province.

Two surveys informed the writing of this report: the 2022 Spring National Survey of Online and Digital Learning (open from May 17 through June 30, 2022) and the 2022 Fall National Survey of Online and Digital Learning (open from September 27 through October 28, 2022). More information is available in the methodology section of this report.

In previous years, the CDLRA gathered a single survey response from each participating institution. In 2022, however, we changed our approach. We began gathering multiple responses per institution to understand better the perspectives of individuals in different roles (e.g., senior administrators, teaching and learning leaders, deans and directors, and faculty). This approach has enabled us to explore perspectives by position.

Contrary to the narrative that students want only in-person learning experiences, the Spring and Fall survey findings revealed a desire among students for more flexibility and choice, including the choice to learn fully or partially online.



## Key Findings:

- Faculty fatigue and burnout is currently the most pressing teaching and learning challenge
- Alternative credential offerings, hybrid course offerings, and online course offerings are expected to increase over the next two years
- Different types of students have different preferences related to modes of learning
- Students want greater choice and flexibility in how they access their courses and more technologies used in their courses
- Faculty professional development for teaching online focuses mainly on LMS use, how to use video-conferencing technologies, online assessment practices, and how to teach in multiple modalities
- Most institutions do not require professional development for faculty prior to teaching online; however, voluntary training is offered at most institutions
- Regardless of learning mode (online, hybrid, or in-person), respondents tended to give their institution a “B” or “C” letter grade for how well their institution incorporates equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) practices into their courses



## INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Digital Learning Research Association (CDLRA) conducts annual pan-Canadian research studies to advance knowledge about digital learning strategies, policies, and practices at post-secondary institutions across the country. The 2022 Ontario Report brings together the Ontario-specific findings, extrapolated from the CDLRA's Spring and Fall National Surveys.

Given the interest in the future of post-secondary education, particularly in the post-pandemic context, the CDLRA focused our research on the following themes:

- Categorizing course offerings by learning mode
- Pandemic challenges
- Anticipated trends in online and hybrid learning
- Student preferences with regard to modes of learning and technology use
- Teaching with technology
- Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)
- Open educational resources (OER)

The report shares the survey findings related to each of these themes, then closes with a discussion on the implications for the future.

### Participants:

Collectively, 147 respondents from 45 institutions in Ontario participated in one or both of the 2022 National Surveys.

	ONTARIO	NATIONAL
SPRING	80 respondents representing 33 institutions	169 respondents representing 91 institutions
FALL	67 respondents representing 36 institutions	287 respondents representing 141 institutions

Most survey respondents were from publicly-funded post-secondary institutions, including Indigenous Institutes; however, the CDLRA also received a small number of responses from private post-secondary institutions across the country, also included in the collective findings.

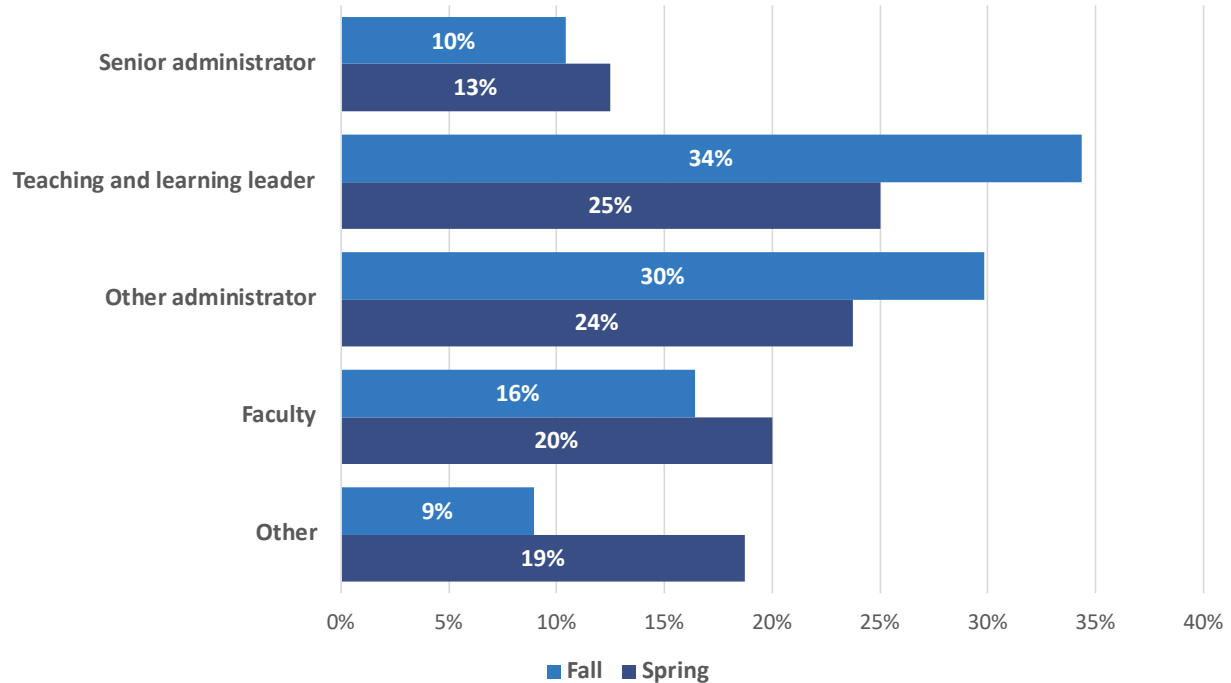
The shift from the one-response-per-institution approach to gathering data meant that multiple people from each institution, representing multiple roles, could respond to the 2022 surveys.



Opening the survey to multiple people at each institution also increases the likelihood that the survey will capture perspectives from individuals with a range of identities and cultural perspectives.

The 2022 survey respondents included senior administrators, teaching and learning leaders (e.g., leaders of teaching and learning centres), other administrators (e.g., deans, directors), and faculty. There were also a minority of respondents who identified as “other” and held roles in curriculum development, instructional design, technology support, faculty support, library services, and academic leadership. The following chart shows a breakdown of the respondents by role for each survey.

### Ontario: Your role at your institution







**Special Note:** *Ontario’s publicly-funded post-secondary institutions include Indigenous Institutes, colleges, and universities. The CDLRA and eCampusOntario have welcomed conversations with representatives from Indigenous Institutions and affirm that the voices, perspectives, and histories of Indigenous Peoples are critical for the understanding of the landscape of online and digital learning. Through ongoing work with Indigenous Institutes, eCampusOntario has identified priorities for Indigenous learners and communities which will continue to inform future programs and services, such as protecting Traditional Knowledge and increasing access to digital fluency training for faculty and staff. eCampusOntario and the CDLRA are working to ensure future reports include Indigenous Institutes as an equal and third pillar in the Ontario postsecondary system.*



## CATEGORIZING COURSE OFFERINGS BY LEARNING MODE

Since the CDLRA began conducting its surveys in 2017, one of the key barriers to measuring online and hybrid learning across the country is the lack of common definitions for these terms.

In 2021, the CDLRA asked Canadian post-secondary institutions to share their definitions for key terms related to digital learning. The CDLRA shared the findings in the following report:

Johnson, N. (2021). Evolving definitions in digital learning: A national framework for categorizing commonly used terms. *Canadian Digital Learning Research Association*.  
<http://www.cdlra-acrfl.ca/2021-cdlra-definitions-report/>

In 2022, the CDLRA built upon our previous work and developed a proposed set of common definitions, which we then tested through two research studies: the CDLRA's 2022 Spring National Survey and a USA-focused survey. The USA-focused definitions survey was sponsored by WCET and conducted by Bay View Analytics. Other partners on the project were the Online Learning Consortium (OLC), Quality Matters (QM), and the University Professionals and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA).

Detailed findings from the USA study on definitions are reported in the following journal article:

Johnson, N., Seaman, J., & Poulin, R. (2022). Defining different modes of learning: Resolving confusion and contention through consensus. *Online Learning*, 26(3), 91-110.  
<https://olj.onlinelearningconsortium.org/index.php/olj/article/view/3565/1193>





**Both the CDLRA and the USA-focused study showed a high level of agreement with the survey definitions, which has led the CDLRA to recommend the adoption of these definitions at Canadian institutions.**

The following table provides the survey definitions and the consensus level within Ontario, Canada, and the USA.

Definition	% agreement		
	Ontario	Canada	USA
ONLINE LEARNING means all instruction and interaction is fully online (synchronous or asynchronous)	92%	90%	91%
HYBRID LEARNING means a blend of online and in-person instruction (online instruction is synchronous or asynchronous)	95%	96%	95%
HYFLEX LEARNING means instruction is available online and in-person and students can move between online and in-person	89%	91%	71%
IN-PERSON LEARNING means all instruction takes place in an in-person setting	86%	88%	92%
SYNCHRONOUS LEARNING means instruction takes place in real-time and requires student presence	99%	99%	96%
ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING means instruction is available for students to access at a time that works best for them	100%	98%	97%

More resources related to the CDLRA's work on definitions are available via the following links:

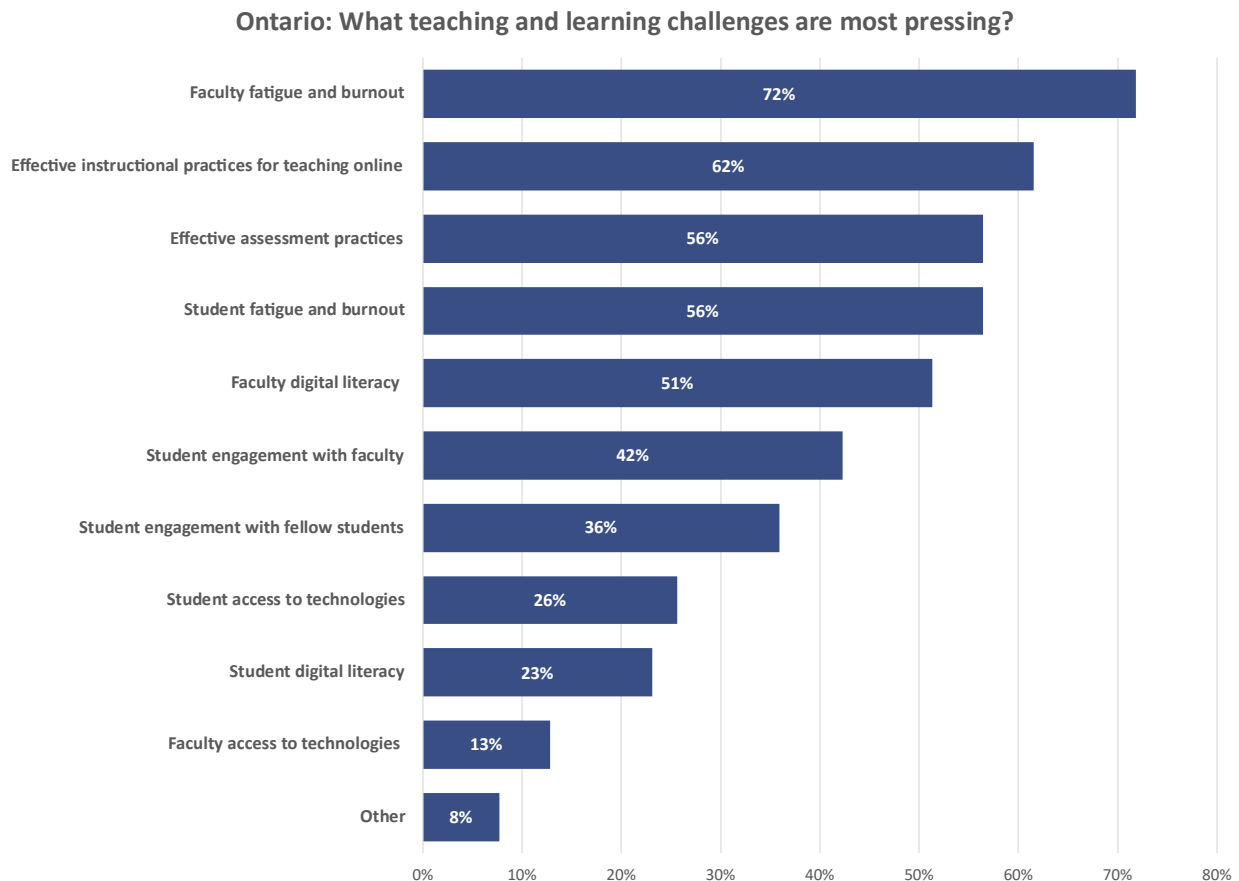
- [https://www.bayviewanalytics.com/digital\\_learning\\_defintions.html](https://www.bayviewanalytics.com/digital_learning_defintions.html)
- <https://wcet.wiche.edu/practice/digital-learning-definitions/>



## PANDEMIC CHALLENGES

Institutions in Ontario continue to face many pandemic-related challenges. The 2022 Spring Survey asked respondents to identify their most pressing challenges related to teaching and learning.

After over two years of unpredictability, new technologies, and changing teaching practices, faculty are understandably exhausted. Faculty fatigue and burnout was the most pressing challenge identified in Ontario (72%) and nationwide (73%). A majority of respondents also reported effective instructional practices for teaching online (62%), student fatigue and burnout (56%), effective assessment practices (56%), and faculty digital literacy (51%) as pressing concerns.



Considering the strong evidence that online and hybrid course offerings will increase going forward (discussed in the next section of this report), these challenges are likely to persist. Further research is needed to explore whether there is improvement in these areas over time, particularly as we move toward a post-pandemic context.



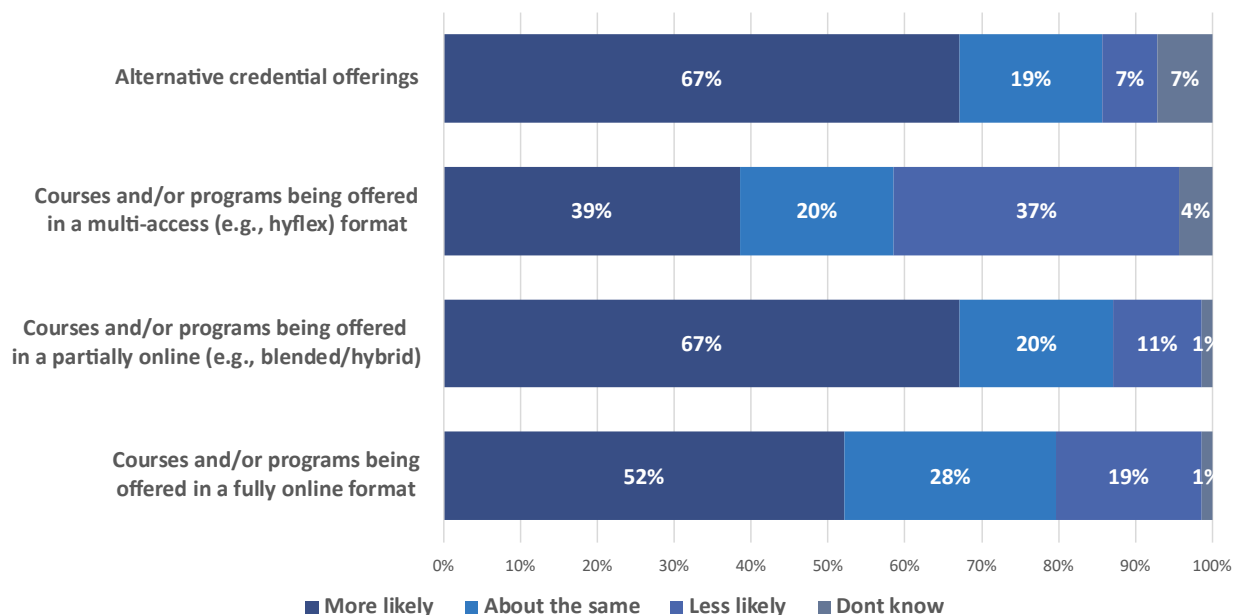
## ANTICIPATED TRENDS IN ONLINE AND HYBRID LEARNING

Earlier in the pandemic, many faculty and students had the opportunity to experience learning in an online context for an extended time. Although some people have been delighted to return to an on-campus learning experience, others have preferred to continue learning online or to have the flexibility of a hybrid learning experience. The 2022 Spring Survey asked respondents to rate whether it was likely that their institution would offer more digital learning experiences over the next 24 months.

The following charts show that respondents at Ontario institutions expect a substantial increase in alternative credential offerings (67%), which include microcredentials and badges, and hybrid offerings (67%) within the next two years. Roughly half of the respondents (52%) also expect an increase in online offerings.

Fewer respondents predicted a rise in multi-access offerings; however, this may be explained by the logistics involved in running courses in a multi-access format. Multi-access learning centres around student preferences and choice: students can typically switch between in-person, online synchronous, and online synchronous learning as they desire throughout the course. Thus, planning for and facilitating a multi-access course is inherently more complex.

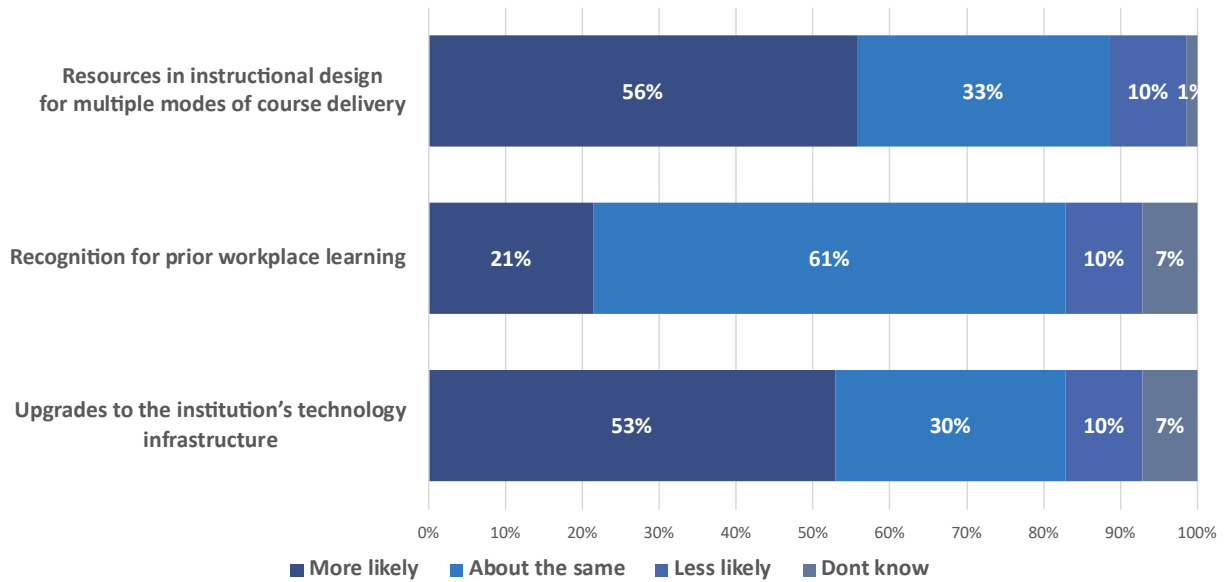
Ontario: Likelihood over next 24 months





Alongside the expected increase in digital offerings, just over half of Ontario respondents also expected to see an increase in instructional design resources for multiple modes of course delivery (56%) and upgrades to the institution's technology infrastructure (53%).

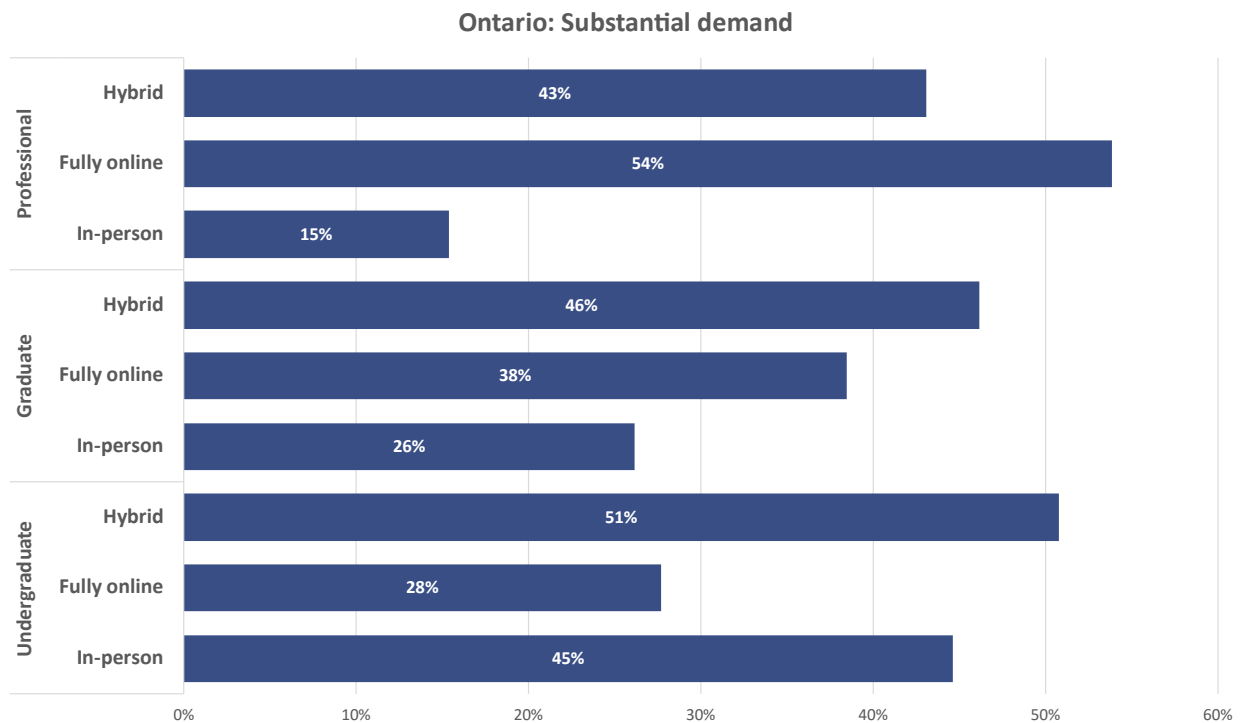
### Ontario: Likelihood over next 24 months





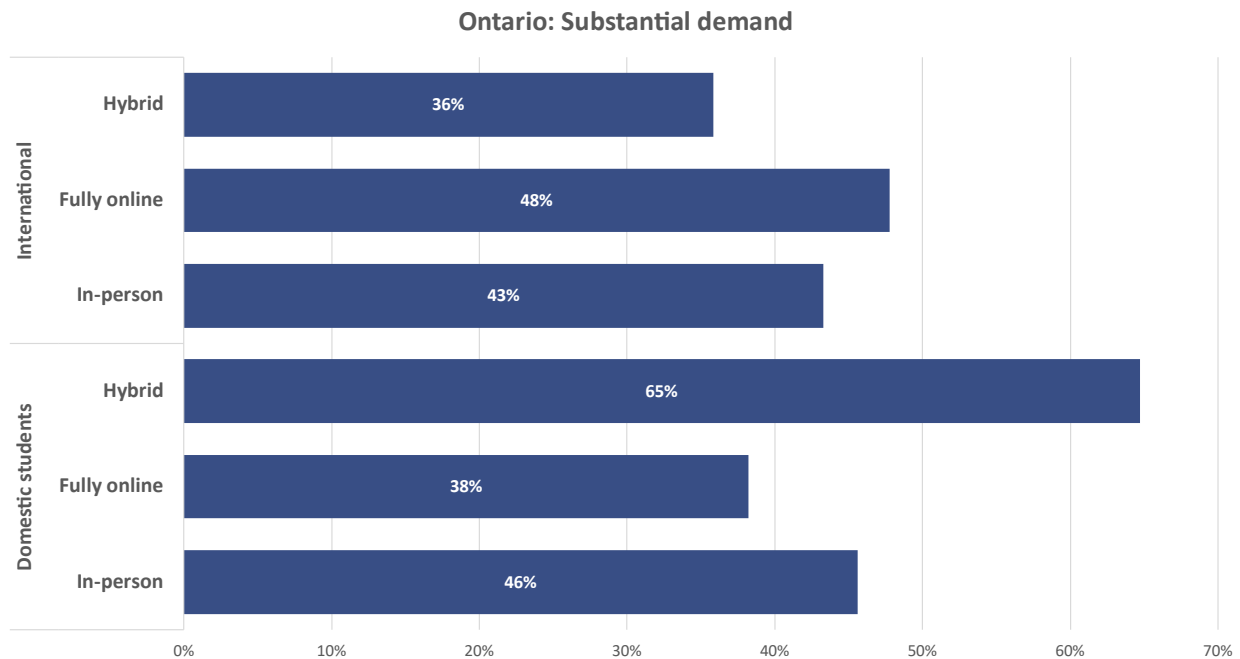
The 2022 Spring Survey also asked respondents whether they had observed different preferences toward online, hybrid, and in-person learning among different types of students.

Respondents in Ontario indicated that students taking professional programs (e.g., programs beyond an undergraduate degree that are not part of a masters or doctorate program) were most likely to choose online offerings and undergraduate students were most likely to choose hybrid offerings.





Respondents also perceived that domestic students were most likely to select hybrid course offerings and international students were most likely to select online course offerings.



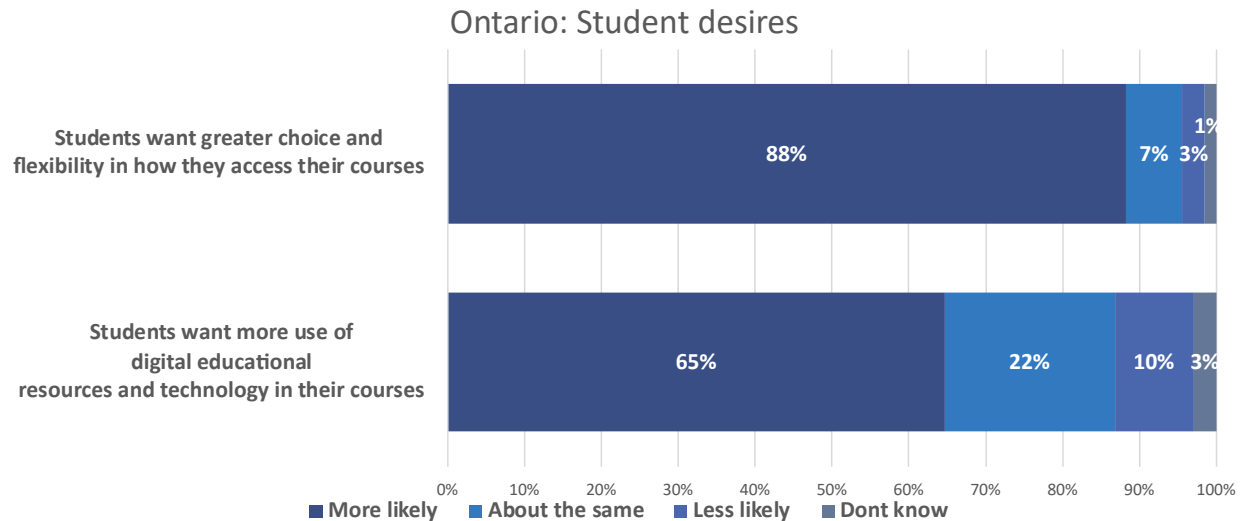
Overall, respondents from Ontario institutions clearly expect to see more digital offerings, especially alternative credentials, and hybrid offerings. Demand for certain types of learning experiences may vary by type of student.





## STUDENT PREFERENCES

The 2022 Spring Survey asked respondents to share their perspectives on student desires related to digital learning. Although the findings do not directly represent student voices, many of the survey respondents hold a role within their institution where they are privy to the findings of institutional student surveys. Over the years, CDLRA researchers and institutional leaders (particularly administrators and teaching and learning leaders) have engaged in many conversations about our surveys. The leaders with whom we have spoken have told us that their responses related to student perspectives are often informed by institutional student surveys, rather than mere opinion. Thus, we have confidence that the findings related to students accurately reflect student desires and preferences.



The Spring Survey also provided an opportunity for respondents to share feedback that they had received from students about student expectations and preferences related to course delivery modes and technology use. Although one respondent noted that, “Students are not happy with online learning at the undergraduate level,” most of the comments ran contrary to the narrative that students exclusively want in-person learning. Instead, the comments suggested that students in Ontario desire flexibility and options related to course delivery.

*“Our graduate students are typically busy, mid-career with family. They want high quality, but the convenience of synchronous or well-produced asynchronous.”*

*“Mature students want to continue to study online.”*



*“Student have indicated they are looking forward to getting back to campus and learning in person, however, they are still expecting to have flexible delivery options. Many students have indicated they would like to take some courses online while attending some in person. Flexibility and choice seems to be what students are asking for.”*

*“Total mixed bag - everyone wants something different.”*

*“I think that the categorization of students in this question is problematic as its assuming that there is a normative 'domestic student'. Students within each of these categories have very distinct needs - some students work full time, some students can't commute to campus, some students have accessibility requirements better addressed in one format or another.”*

*“All students want choice and flexibility in terms of modes of learning / delivery methods. They want standardization in technology platforms so they are not overwhelmed by technology. Some students want course material in multiple formats (accessibility). Some students want to return to an in-person experience.”*

*“They want to choose what works for them. They want options.”*

*“Students now expect to access all material (including lectures) online, even for in-person courses so they can attend or not and catch up if they miss something.”*

*“We have heard students wanting the university experience, especially in undergrad, but international students prefer not needing to leave their country so they are interested in online delivery.”*

In summary, respondents tended to hold the perception that students desire more flexibility and technology use in their post-secondary learning experiences. For many students, it seems that being able to learn fully or partially online helps them to achieve a better work-life-education balance. Students appear to want more options available to them: to choose in-person, online, or hybrid learning experiences according to their needs and preferences.



## TEACHING WITH TECHNOLOGY

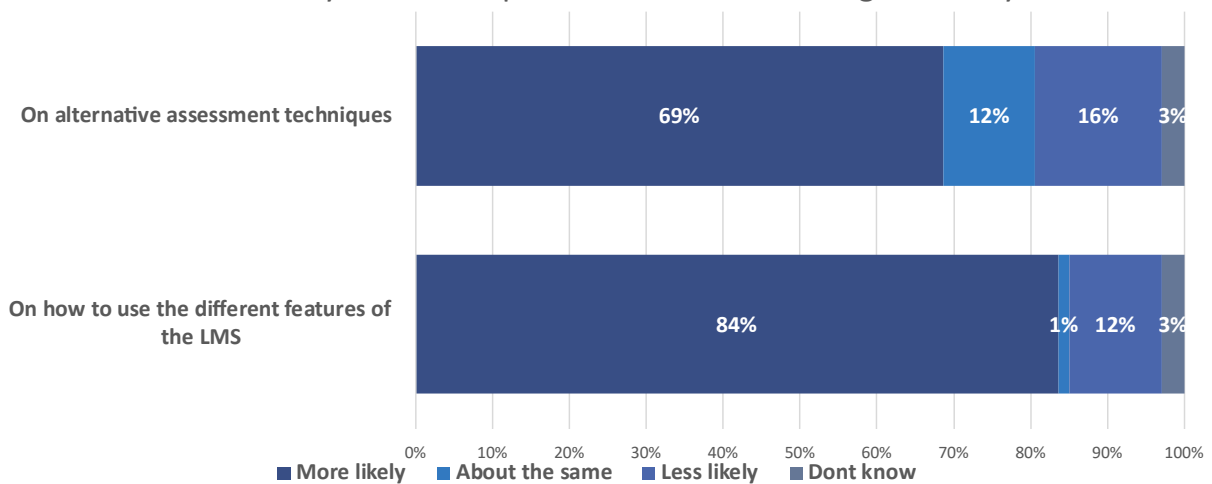
The pandemic provided a unique opportunity for many faculty to gain experience teaching in an online context. With students expressing a desire for more flexible course offerings, it is anticipated that faculty will be expected to become proficient in teaching in multiple modes.

### Spring 2022:

The 2022 Spring Survey asked several questions about the support institutions provide for teaching with technology. Topics included training and support for technological innovation.

With regard to training, the survey asked respondents to state the extent to which they agreed that their institution provides effective training for faculty on alternative assessment techniques and how to use the different features of the institution's learning management system (LMS). Most participants (84%) agreed that faculty received effective training on how to use the different features of the LMS and approximately two-thirds (69%) agreed that faculty received effective training on alternative assessment techniques.

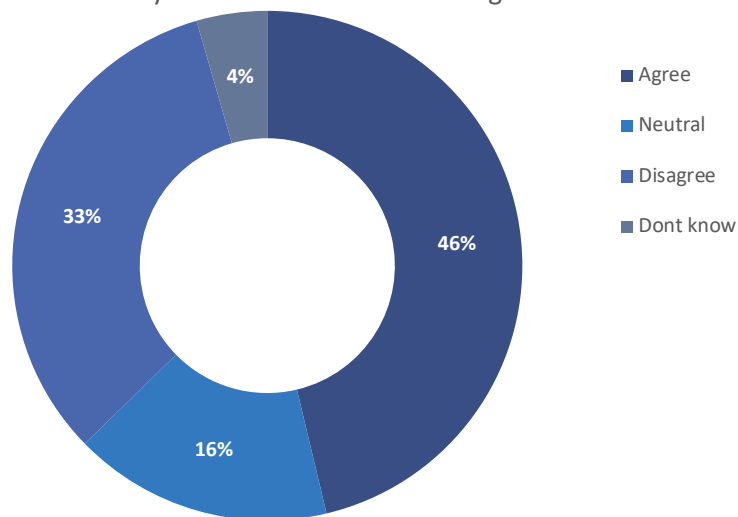
Ontario: My institution provides effective training to faculty





The 2022 Spring Survey also asked respondents to report whether they agreed with the statement that their institution provides funding and resources to use innovative technologies in their courses. Just under half of respondents (46%) agreed with the statement and nearly the same proportion (49%) reported neutrality or disagreement. This finding indicates that, if technological innovation in post-secondary education is a goal within the province, then more funding may be needed at the institutional and provincial level to support innovative practices.

Ontario: My institution provides funding and resources for faculty to use innovative technologies in their courses



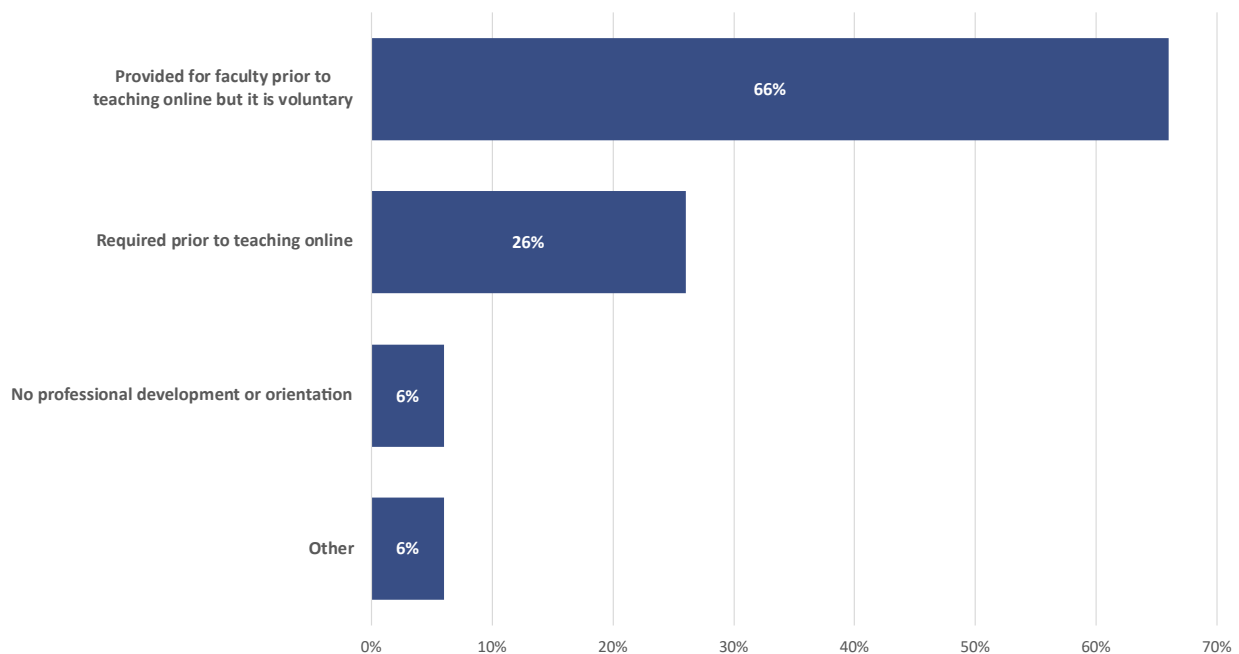


## Fall 2022:

The 2022 Fall Survey probed the issue of training in more depth. The survey asked respondents about professional development expectations at their institution and the topics typically covered in the trainings provided to faculty.

In Ontario, most respondents reported that professional development is provided for faculty at their institution prior to teaching online for the first time, but it is mostly voluntary. Roughly one-quarter (26%) of respondents noted that their institution required professional development prior to teaching online and very few respondents (6%) stated that there was no professional development or orientation before teaching online at their institution.

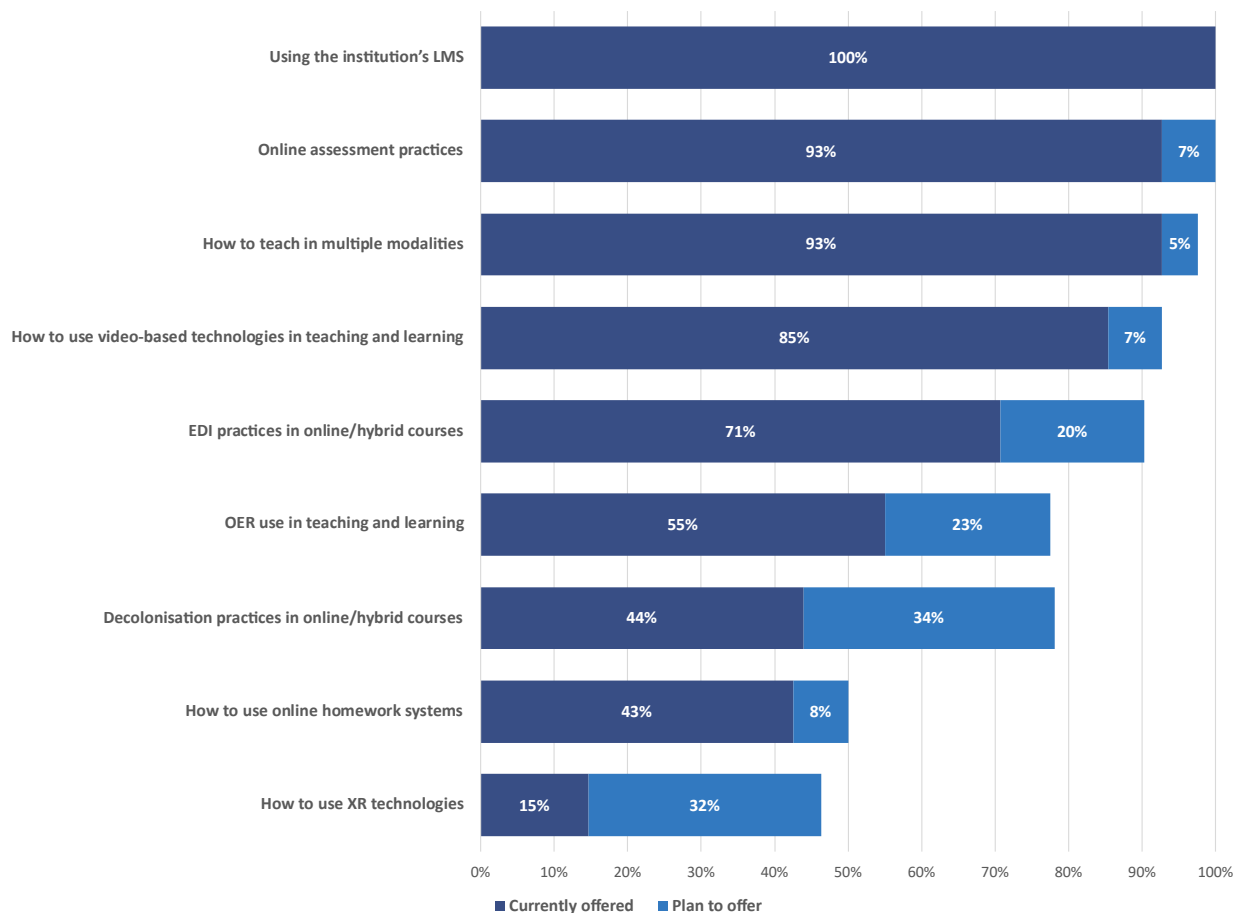
**Ontario: What are the professional development or orientation expectations for your faculty prior to their teaching their first online course at your institution?**





In terms of professional development topics, all respondents reported that their institution provided professional development for using the institutions LMS. Additionally, most respondents reported professional development for using video-based technologies (85%), online assessment practices (93%), and how to teach in multiple modalities (93%). Half to two-thirds of respondents also reported that their institution offers training related to EDI practices in online and hybrid courses (71%) and open educational resource (OER) use (55%), with decolonization practices in online and hybrid courses mentioned by 44 percent of the respondents.

Ontario: My institution provides professional development on the following topics related to digital learning





## EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION (EDI)

Throughout the pandemic, the issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) have been at the forefront of conversations about online and hybrid learning. Whereas online course delivery during the pandemic created barriers to learning for some, it also broke down barriers to learning for others.

### Spring 2022:

The 2022 Spring Survey asked respondents to comment on how online and/or hybrid learning supported EDI practices at their institution and, conversely, how these learning modes presented EDI-related challenges.

Below are the questions that were posed and a collection of responses that illustrate the key themes that emerged at the intersection of digital learning and EDI.

### ***In what ways, if any, has online and/or hybrid learning supported EDI practices at your institutions?***

*“Moving courses online and provided many students with more flexibility and with different ways to engage with course content. It has also sparked conversations on accessibility of course materials and inclusive design.”*

*“Online learning removes the barriers to accessing post-secondary education for many students who would otherwise be prevented due to financial, geographic, or physical challenges.”*

*“We have lots of students with work and family duties and long commutes. Flexibility improves their ability to manage though it may also degrade their experience.”*

*“Our online offerings reach a lot of audiences who were not able to access traditional formats.”*

*“There is growing awareness of how hybrid / online can benefit students who have limited resources, work a lot of hours, are older, have some types of learning differences, deal with mental health issues like anxiety, etc.”*

*“Hyflex affords students control of their health and safety.”*



*“Many temporary changes during the pandemic supported EDI practices - changes to better forms of assessment, pedagogies of care, flexibility, recording lectures/classes (a significant impact for many groups), transcripts of recordings, automatic captions, changes to policies that humanised them, availability and accessibility of education to learners who have been excluded in the past.”*

*“It can sometimes, when managed well, provide an environment where all students are more likely to participate and contribute.”*

*“More students get access to learning spaces and content. Thanks to technology.”*

*“Students have greater access to their courses. They can be on-campus with paper and pen, or online anywhere in the country.”*

*“We have been able to deliver more remote programs internationally.”*

***In what ways, if any, has online and/or hybrid learning presented EDI-related challenges?***

*“Some students do not have access to the required technology or Internet access to be able to access online courses.”*

*“Challenges with access to the internet (speed and reliability) in rural settings. Although fibre is now being installed in rural areas. It may still be a problem with international students. For example, some countries block certain video streaming services.”*

*“Low socio-economic status students struggle with access to current, reliable technology options. Internet access is expensive and still not readily available in some areas.”*

*“While many people had better access than before, limited access to Broadband in Canada and other parts of the world where students are located was a limitation for many (especially early on in the pandemic). Online learning is not ideal for all learners - choice is a much better option to allow learners to choose the mode that works best for them. There are also increased privacy and other concerns with many of the tools that were implemented rapidly at institutions (e.g. remote AI-based proctoring can be extremely harmful).”*

*“Students have complained that force-submit options on tests or preventing backtracking on tests is anxiety-provoking and wish instructors would not use it.”*





*“Often instructors try to mimic on-campus classroom teaching in the design and delivery of their virtual courses, which has led to an over-zealousness with regards to surveillance technologies (proctoring for example) and other issues. I feel in some ways instructors trying to replicate their old ways of teaching are struggling with a lack of control, resulting in worse relationship building with students. Racialized and other marginalized groups tend to also be disproportionately impacted by these technologies.”*

*“Access to technology is an ongoing concern.”*

*“Students who don't have access to tech / internet, some who have learning differences, students who need consistency from their teachers can suffer with only online courses.”*

*“Online does not work well for remote or rural communities where bandwidth is a problem. We had to defer a rural program because of the lack of bandwidth. This was the only deferred program in the institution. Similar problems exist for lower income students who cannot afford high-speed internet or appropriate hardware.”*

*“We have many students on the wrong side of the digital divide, with no quiet study space at home. These are also the students that may gain most from exposure to on campus experiences and networks.”*

*“Online might have created less equity for some groups with limited access to bandwidth, hardware, or software. Students in rural areas were affected as well as international students.”*

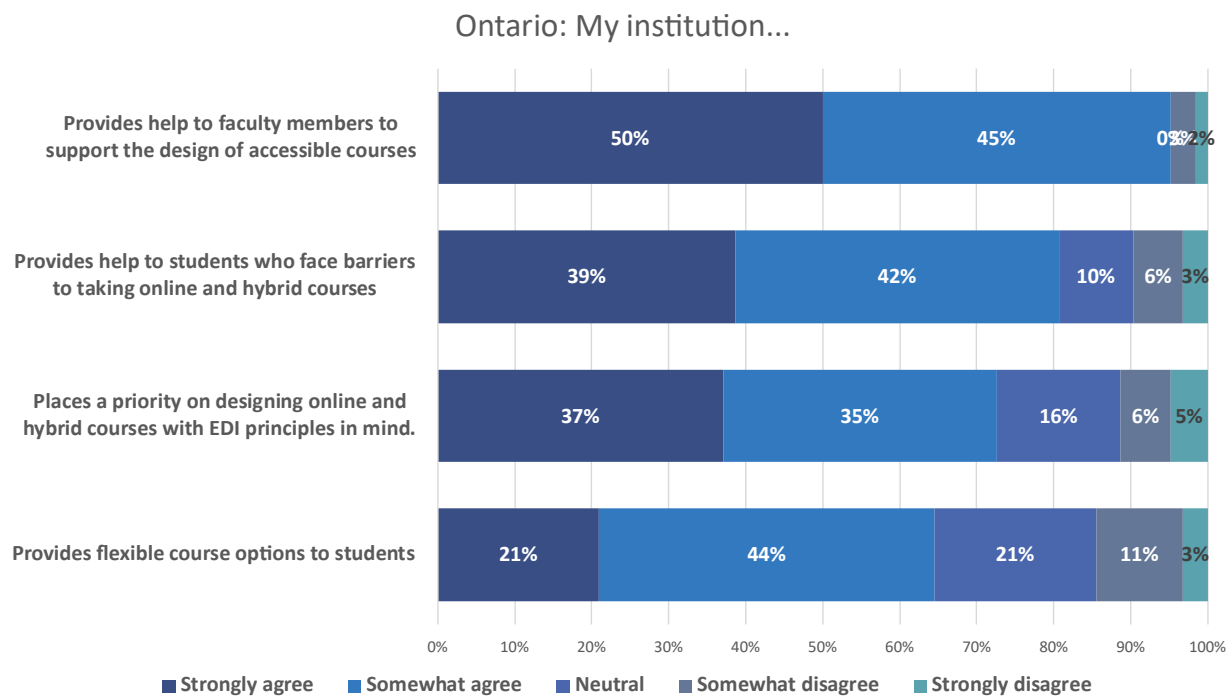
Based on the responses to the two questions, one can argue that offering online and hybrid courses facilitates a more inclusive post-secondary experience. However, a counterargument can be made that having on-campus offerings is equally important from an EDI perspective. While digital learning experiences provide students with flexibility in terms of location and timing, they also require Internet connectivity and devices suitable for completing the course assignments. In particular, lack of access to broadband Internet is a barrier for those in under-served Indigenous communities. More research is needed to better understand the EDI-related benefits and barriers associated with digital learning, especially in light of the anticipated increases in online and hybrid offerings.



## Fall 2022:

The 2022 Fall Survey also explored the issue of EDI and digital learning. The survey asked respondents to report the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements about their institution's EDI practices.

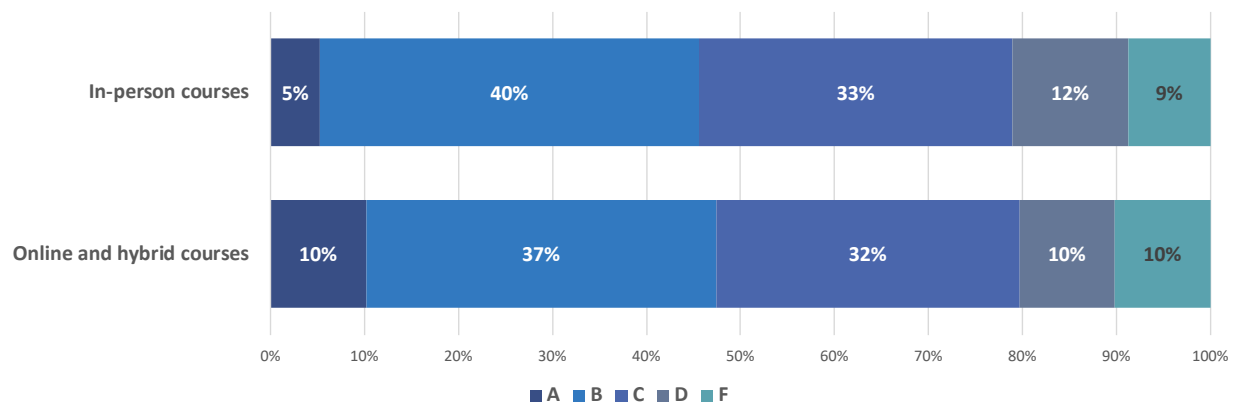
The vast majority of respondents (95%) agreed to some extent that their institution provides help to faculty members to support the design of accessible courses. Most respondents (81%) also agreed that their institution provides help to students who face barriers to taking online and hybrid courses. Roughly three-quarters of respondents (72%) agreed that their institution places a priority on designing online and hybrid courses with EDI principles in mind, and two-thirds of respondents (65%) agreed that their institution provides flexible course options to students.





The 2022 Fall Survey also asked respondents to select a letter grade to rate how well their institution does at incorporating EDI principles into in-person courses and into online and hybrid courses. Interestingly, there was very little different in the letter grades assigned to in-person learning compared to online and hybrid learning. Regardless of learning mode, respondents in Ontario tended to give their institution a “B” or “C” letter grade for how well they incorporate EDI practices.

Ontario: How well my institution does at incorporating EDI principles into:





## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The Ontario survey findings from 2022 point to a future that involves widespread use of digital technologies in teaching and learning. At the same time, in-person learning will continue to play a critical role.

Driving the anticipated increase in online and hybrid learning is an underlying desire for flexibility. The expectation that there will also be an increase in alternative credential offerings indicates that the desire for flexibility may extend beyond learning modalities and into learning pathways. **Exploring how to best deliver flexible learning experiences is likely to be an important issue for institutions over the next few years.**

Flexibility also plays an important role in accessibility. Online and hybrid offerings open educational doors for students who may not otherwise be able to participate in a post-secondary program. Yet, as seen in the findings, online offerings bring a different set of accessibility issues, especially in terms of access to reliable Internet service and access to suitable learning devices.

The ultimate goal of the research that the CDLRA conducts is to better understand issues surrounding the use of digital technologies in learning contexts in order to improve post-secondary education. **Better incorporating EDI principles into learning experiences, in all modalities is one area where there is ample room for improvement.** It is encouraging to see that most institutions provide or plan to provide professional development at the intersections of EDI and digital learning and decolonization and digital learning. Further research is needed to learn more about the nature of these types of professional development and whether they are positively impacting student learning experiences and outcomes.

In conclusion, it is clear that digital learning will play an increasingly large role in the future of post-secondary education in Ontario. From courses being offered in multiple modalities to technology integration in on-campus learning experiences, this is an opportune time for institutions to experiment with new strategies to enhance and provide learning experiences for a (hopefully) increasingly diverse student body. **At the same time, the finding that faculty fatigue and burnout is a prevalent issue at institutions across Ontario should also lead decision-makers to take pause and develop strategies to support instructors as they learn to teach in new ways for our digital age.**



## METHODOLOGY

Information for this report comes from the 2022 National Surveys of Online and Digital Learning conducted in Spring and Fall. The CDLRA research team surveyed participants from post-secondary institutions across Canada from May 17 through June 30, 2022 (Spring National Survey) and from September 27 through October 28, 2022 (Fall National Survey).

The universe of interest for the 2022 Spring National Survey consists of all post-secondary institutions in Canada. The CDLRA maintains a roster, which is an email list of key contacts at publicly-funded post-secondary institutions in Canada

The 2022 roster includes:

- 82 universities (including Francophone colleges of Anglophone universities)
- 80 colleges outside Québec
- 51 CEGEPs
- 21 private subsidized colleges in Québec

Additionally, CDLRA sponsors and partners shared the Fall and Spring survey links with their networks, which reached institutions beyond the CDLRA roster, including private post-secondary institutions and Indigenous Institutes. Responses from any Canadian post-secondary institution were included in the results.

The CDLRA research team designed the questionnaires based on prior CDLRA surveys from 2017 to 2021. The findings from the Spring 2022 survey also informed the questions posed in the Fall 2022 survey. Potential respondents on the roster received an email invitation to participate in the National Survey. Each survey invitation included a link to the online survey form. The outreach email and questionnaire content were identical in both the English and French versions. The survey invitation was also shared by CDLRA's sponsors and partners to their respective networks.



## 2022 Spring Survey

The survey included twelve questions, one of which was displayed only if the respondent was a senior administrator and one which was displayed only for teaching and learning leaders. Several questions had a potential follow-up, which were only displayed if the respondent made specific choices to the primary question. The survey also included three optional open-ended questions, where respondents were invited to provide an in-depth response.

The Spring survey received responses from 169 individuals, representing 91 different institutions across Canada. Of these, Ontario responses represented 80 individuals and 33 institutions.

## 2022 Fall Survey

The Fall survey included twelve topic-specific questions plus several demographic questions (e.g., name of institution, role of respondent, permission to quote responses, etc.). Three of the topic-specific questions were displayed only for faculty, and two were only displayed to academic administrators. All multiple choice questions included an “Other” write-in option where the respondent could enter their own choice. The survey also included one optional open-ended question, where respondents were invited to provide an in-depth response.

The Fall survey received responses from 287 individuals (67 in Ontario), representing 141 different Canadian institutions (36 from Ontario).

The combined responses from the Spring and Fall rounds of the survey had 456 total individuals representing 163 institutions. Of these, 45 of the institutions and 147 of the individuals were from Ontario.



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