# Delivering Alternative Credentials
# in a Transformed Economy

UPCEA

Blackboard
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## Abstract

Disruptions of the global economy along with demographic changes in the U.S. and new learning preferences have produced a crossroad for many institutions of higher education. UPCEA and Blackboard, now part of Anthology, conducted a research study to better understand the value of a degree compared to alternative and stackable credentials and the role each plays in the current economic climate. The study measured modality/delivery and credential preference by field of study, as well as the role alternative and stackable credentials play in the decision-making process. Other issues tackled include the impact of the pandemic on decision-making and generational differences of the adult learner as to their goals of maintaining and strengthening job security, improving job skills to re-enter the workplace, or seek better opportunities as a result of a changing economy. The role of alternative and stackable credentials and upskilling or reskilling were also measured by generation. In the study, participants were asked to gauge their interest in various credential types and delivery methods.

## Methodology

The UPCEA and Blackboard research focused on many factors impacting purchase decisions related to the creation and delivery of various credentials including degrees, certificates and badges and the value they may hold in a new economy and for one's career goals. Using an internet panel, the survey targeted 23–40-year-old part-time students who were somewhat, very, or extremely interested in continuing their education/training or gaining additional skills. In total, 2,154 individuals participated in the research, of which 1,220 met all qualifications. The survey took place between April 30 and May 28, 2021. The margin of error was plus or minus 2.8% at 95% confidence.

## Executive Summary

As the economy continues to transition at a rapid pace, the needs of students have evolved. Changes in the economy have led to a newly desired skillset, one that is not always satisfied by traditional higher education. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on education decision-making, as well as perceptions on access to education. This white paper examines individuals' preferred delivery formats, as well as the perceived value of higher education providers and credentials.

**Flexibility and convenience are no longer a luxury but rather a requirement for many higher education programs.** Respondents to the UPCEA/Blackboard study indicated that they were most often interested in a fully online delivery format (64%). They generally preferred a synchronous format for an online or hybrid program (54%), though a third of respondents did not have a preference between synchronous or asynchronous. Learners ages 30-34 were most likely to prefer synchronous delivery formats (43%) followed by learners ages 23-26 (41%). Among nearly all subject areas, respondents were more interested in fully online delivery. Arts, foreign language, and philosophy, religion, and theology were the only subject areas with individuals more interested in hybrid delivery format. Only engineers preferred a face-to-face delivery.

**While higher education has been slow to adapt in many cases, individuals generally still find colleges and universities much more or more valuable (58%) than private providers** such as LinkedIn, Coursera, Udemy and others (8%). However, younger learners were slightly more likely than older ones to consider higher education providers and private providers equally valuable. Master's degrees (79%), doctoral or professional degrees (77%), and bachelor's degrees (71%) were seen as the most valuable credentials. Older respondents placed more value on certificates, both credit and non-credit, than those younger.

**Though individuals viewed a stackable education model as valuable, the model suffered from a lack of awareness.** Almost half of respondents (48%) said they were not very (27%) or not at all familiar (21%) with a stackable education model. Those who were extremely familiar and very familiar with stackable credentials placed significantly greater value on them than those who were not (91% and 69%, respectively). A higher percentage of all age groups found a stackable model to be extremely or very valuable than the percentage that were extremely or very familiar with the model. In general, females were less familiar with the model than males.

Additionally, **as interest in various delivery formats increased, so too did the perceived value of a stackable credential model.** Individuals want to know that their program will provide value for them in both the short and long term and would be more likely to enroll if they knew this. It is imperative for institutions to increase both the awareness of the stackable model and the value of credentials for existing and future students.

## Learner Persona Segments

To best represent and understand the generational and demographic differences of survey respondents, six personas were created and tracked to present six segments. These were utilized to demonstrate how generational and gender markers influence the behaviors, motivations, and preferences of new learners. Personas were created to provide a more understandable representation of the sample.

The analysis resulted in six personas, divided into three generations: Generation Z/Young Millennial age range 23-26 (19%); Mid-Millennial age range 27-34 (41%); and Millennial+ age range 35-40 (31%). Personas were then further divided into gender: 62% female, 37% male, and 1% gender-variant, non-conforming, non-binary, or prefer not to say. A summary is provided in Figure 1. The highest education level was bachelor's degree, and most respondents were employed and in mid-level type positions.

### Figure 1: Learner Personas

| | Sarah (23)<br>*Gen Z/Young M Female* | Jonah (25)<br>*Gen Z/Young M Male* | Lisa (28)<br>*Mid-Millennial Female* | Steve (31)<br>*Mid-Millennial Male* | Sue (40)<br>*Millennial+ Female* | Tom (37)<br>*Millennial+ Male* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Highest Education** | Bachelor's Degree | High School/GED | Bachelor's Degree | Bachelor's Degree | Didn't complete college | Bachelor's Degree |
| **Employment** | R&D pharmaceutical chemist | Full-time restaurant manager | Licensed health insurance agent | Manufacturing plant manager | Substitute teacher for high school algebra | Electrician |
| **Motivation for Learners** | Sarah wants to be promoted to lead chemist so she can earn more money. | Jonah is considering changing career paths. | Lisa wants to get a raise in her current position. | Steve is interested in a different sector and is seeking out higher salary opportunities. | Sue wants to learn new skills so she can teach other academic subjects. | Tom wants to advance his career and hold a leadership position. |

## Detailed Findings

> 🔑 **Key Insight:** *Individuals who are interested in continuing their education, receiving additional training, or gaining additional skills are most interested in doing so through online and hybrid deliveries. Older age groups are more interested in an online delivery than younger age groups.*

Respondents were most interested in a fully online delivery format (64% extremely or very interested), followed by hybrid delivery (54%), and face-to-face delivery (41%).

## Figure 2: Interest in Delivery of Educational Credentials

Please rate your interest in the following delivery formats for educational credentials. (n=1,145)

| Format | Extremely Interested | Very Interested | Somewhat Interested | Not Very Interested | Not at all Interested |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fully Online | 38% | 26% | 26% | 6% | 4% |
| Hybrid (some online, some face-to-face) | 20% | 34% | 33% | 8% | 6% |
| Face-to-Face | 19% | 22% | 33% | 15% | 11% |

- ■ Extremely Interested  ■ Very Interested  ■ Somewhat Interested  ■ Not Very Interested  ■ Not at all Interested
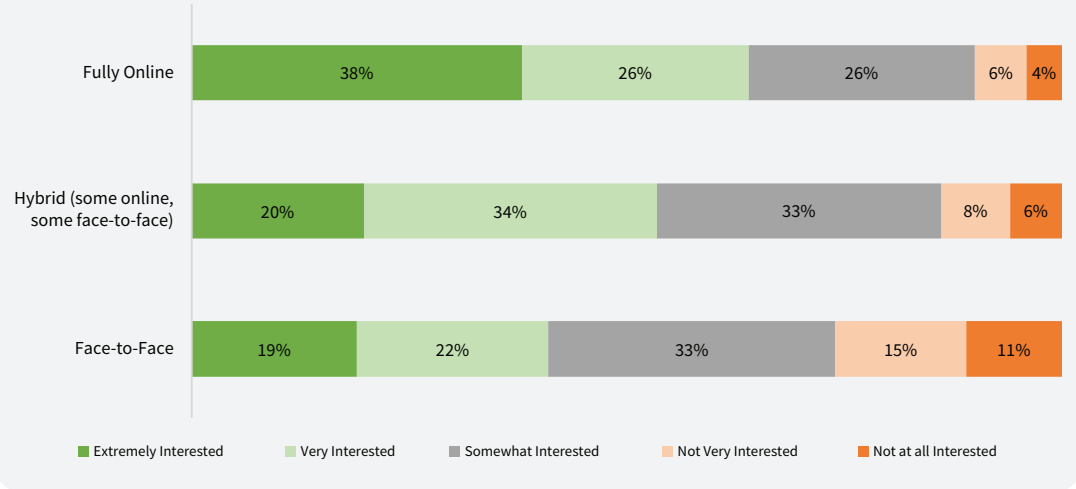
In general, as age increased, the interest in a fully online delivery format also increased.

## Figure 3: Interest in Delivery of Educational Credentials by Age

Please rate your interest in the following delivery formats for educational credentials.

| Age | Format | Extremely Interested | Very Interested | Somewhat Interested | Not Very Interested | Not at all Interested |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 23 to 26 (n=207) | Fully Online | 32% | 29% | 28% | 8% | 4% |
| | Hybrid (Some online, some face-to-face) | 22% | 38% | 27% | 7% | 6% |
| | Face-to-face | 21% | 25% | 31% | 13% | 10% |
| 27 to 29 (n=180) | Fully Online | 32% | 24% | 31% | 7% | 7% |
| | Hybrid (Some online, some face-to-face) | 18% | 32% | 32% | 11% | 7% |
| | Face-to-face | 16% | 24% | 37% | 11% | 13% |
| 30 to 34 (n=356) | Fully Online | 41% | 24% | 26% | 7% | 2% |
| | Hybrid (Some online, some face-to-face) | 22% | 33% | 33% | 6% | 6% |
| | Face-to-face | 22% | 23% | 32% | 14% | 10% |
| 35 to 40 (n=402) | Fully Online | 42% | 27% | 24% | 4% | 3% |
| | Hybrid (Some online, some face-to-face) | 18% | 33% | 36% | 9% | 5% |
| | Face-to-face | 18% | 19% | 33% | 20% | 10% |

- ■ Extremely Interested  ■ Very Interested  ■ Somewhat Interested  ■ Not Very Interested  ■ Not at all Interested

**Key Insight:** *Among nearly all subject areas, respondents were more interested in a fully online delivery of educational credentials than any other delivery type. Arts, foreign language, and philosophy, religion, and theology were the only subject areas in which individuals were more interested in a hybrid delivery format. Only engineers preferred face-to-face delivery.*

Figure 4 shows that respondents studying in the field of law were most likely to be extremely interested (58%) in fully online delivery format. Those who said they were studying a foreign language were most likely to say they were not very interested in a fully online delivery format (33%), though the sample size was small (n=3).

## Figure 4: Field of Study – by Interest in Fully Online Delivery of Credentials

What field or subject area did you most recently study?

| Field | Extremely Interested | Very Interested | Somewhat Interested | Not Very Interested | Not at all Interested |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Law (n=31) | 58% | 10% | 29% | | 3% |
| Community, Family, & Personal Services (n=8) | 50% | 13% | 38% | | |
| Sciences - Biological & Physical (n=44) | 48% | 25% | 14% | 11% | 2% |
| Social Sciences (n=62) | 45% | 18% | 26% | 8% | 3% |
| English (n=26) | 42% | 19% | 35% | | 4% |
| Business (n=208) | 41% | 35% | 19% | 2% | 3% |
| Communications (n=38) | 40% | 24% | 26% | 8% | 3% |
| Other (n=69) | 38% | 20% | 23% | 13% | 6% |
| Education (n=73) | 37% | 29% | 25% | 7% | 3% |
| Engineering (n=39) | 36% | 26% | 26% | 10% | 3% |
| Healthcare (n=121) | 34% | 22% | 33% | 5% | 7% |
| Computer Science & Mathematics (n=77) | 34% | 42% | 21% | 3% | 1% |
| Architecture (n=10) | 30% | 40% | 20% | 10% | |
| Arts (n=56) | 25% | 25% | 34% | 14% | 2% |
| Agriculture & Natural Resources (n=10) | 20% | 60% | 20% | | |
| Area, Ethnic & Multidisciplinary Studies (n=2) | 50% | | 50% | | |
| Philosophy, Religion, & Theology (n=5) | 40% | | 40% | | 20% |
| Foreign Language (n=3) | 67% | | | 33% | |

■ Extremely Interested  ■ Very Interested  ■ Somewhat Interested  ■ Not Very Interested  ■ Not at all Interested
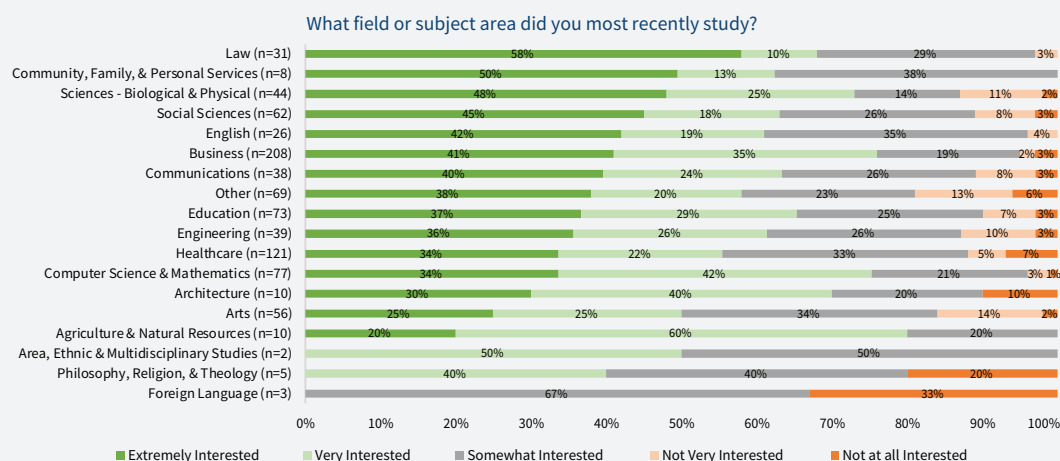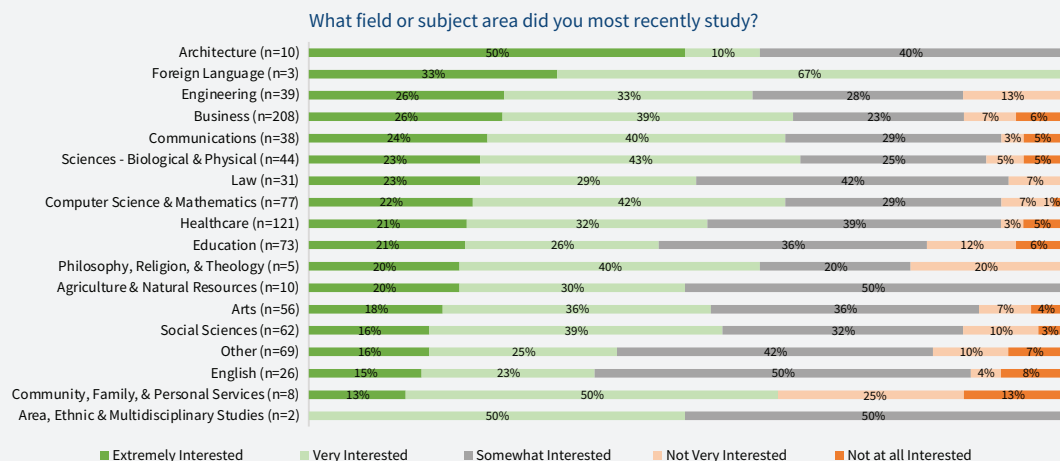
Figure 5 shows respondents' interest in hybrid delivery by their subject area. Those in architecture had the highest percentage who were extremely interested (50%), while those studying community, family, and personal services had the highest percentage of not at all interested (13%).

## Figure 5: Field of Study – by Interest in Hybrid Delivery of Credentials

What field or subject area did you most recently study?

| Field | Extremely Interested | Very Interested | Somewhat Interested | Not Very Interested | Not at all Interested |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Architecture (n=10) | 50% | 10% | 40% | | |
| Foreign Language (n=3) | 33% | | 67% | | |
| Engineering (n=39) | 26% | 33% | 28% | 13% | |
| Business (n=208) | 26% | 39% | 23% | 7% | 6% |
| Communications (n=38) | 24% | 40% | 29% | 3% | 5% |
| Sciences - Biological & Physical (n=44) | 23% | 43% | 25% | 5% | 5% |
| Law (n=31) | 23% | 29% | 42% | | 7% |
| Computer Science & Mathematics (n=77) | 22% | 42% | 29% | 7% | 1% |
| Healthcare (n=121) | 21% | 32% | 39% | 3% | 5% |
| Education (n=73) | 21% | 26% | 36% | 12% | 6% |
| Philosophy, Religion, & Theology (n=5) | 20% | 40% | 20% | | 20% |
| Agriculture & Natural Resources (n=10) | 20% | 30% | 50% | | |
| Arts (n=56) | 18% | 36% | 36% | 7% | 4% |
| Social Sciences (n=62) | 16% | 39% | 32% | 10% | 3% |
| Other (n=69) | 16% | 25% | 42% | 10% | 7% |
| English (n=26) | 15% | 23% | 50% | 4% | 8% |
| Community, Family, & Personal Services (n=8) | 13% | 50% | 25% | | 13% |
| Area, Ethnic & Multidisciplinary Studies (n=2) | | 50% | 50% | | |

■ Extremely Interested  ■ Very Interested  ■ Somewhat Interested  ■ Not Very Interested  ■ Not at all Interested

Respondents in area, ethnic, or multidisciplinary studies were extremely interested in face-to-face delivery (50%), followed by engineering (31%), and architecture (30%).

## Figure 6: Field of Study – by Face-to-Face Delivery Credentials
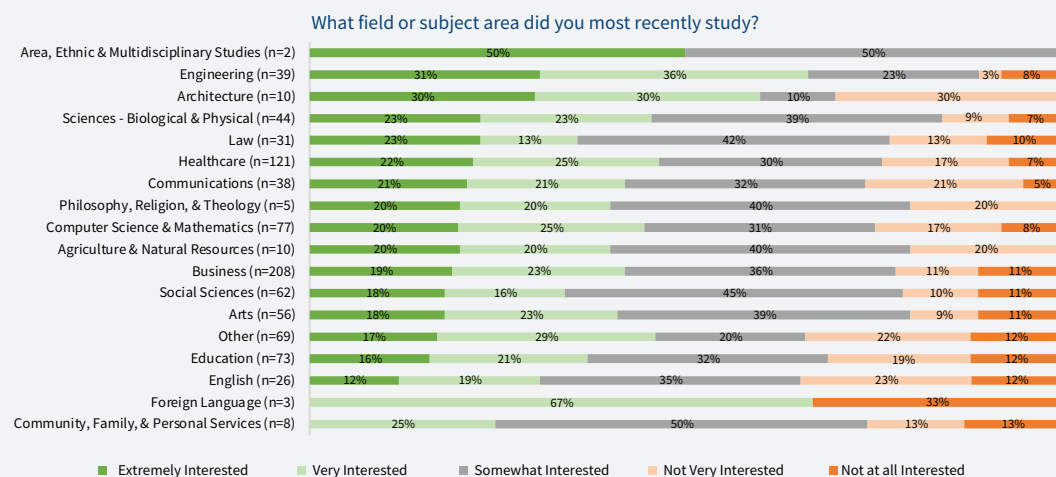
What field or subject area did you most recently study?



Legend: ■ Extremely Interested ■ Very Interested ■ Somewhat Interested ■ Not Very Interested ■ Not at all Interested

Among nearly all subject areas, respondents were more interested in fully online delivery. Arts, foreign language, and philosophy, religion, and theology were the only subject areas with individuals more interested in hybrid delivery format. Only engineers preferred a face-to-face delivery.

## Figure 7: Percent Extremely or Very Interested in Delivery Format – By Subject



Legend: ■ Online ■ Hybrid ■ Face-to-Face
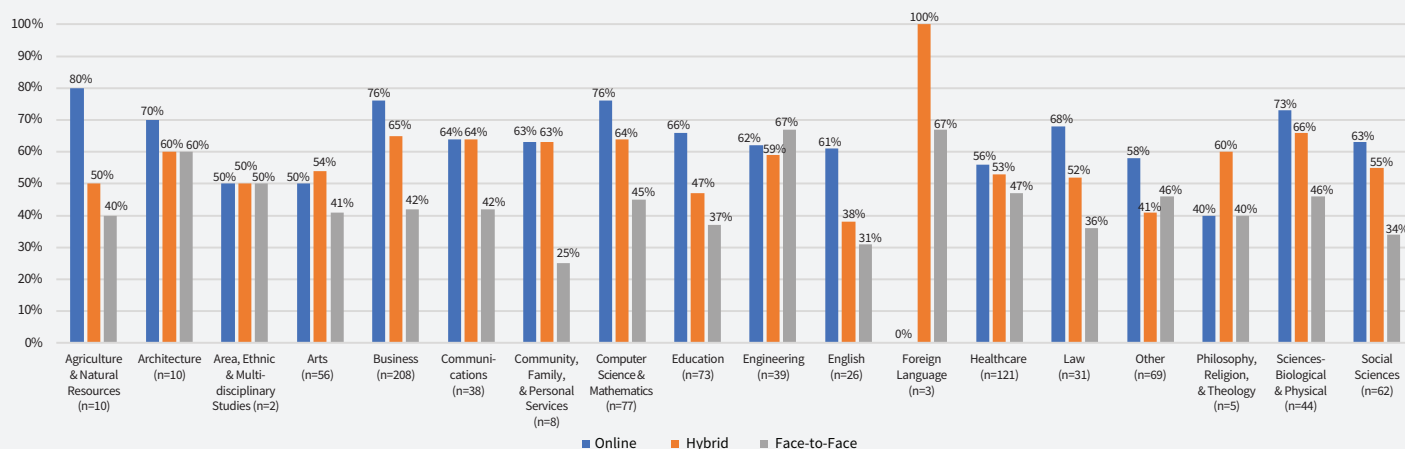
**Key Insight:** *Respondents preferred an online format that was synchronous over asynchronous for an online or hybrid program, though a third did not have a preference. Younger age groups greatly preferred a synchronous format than older age groups.*

While 38% said they greatly prefer (17%) or prefer (21%) a live synchronous format, 29% would prefer (18%) or greatly prefer (11%) an asynchronous format.

## Figure 8: Online or Hybrid Program Format Preference
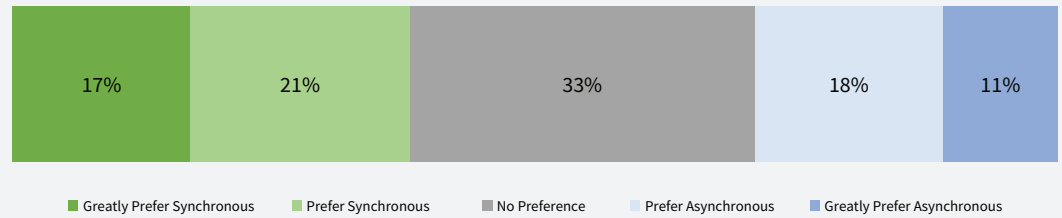
For an online or hybrid program, would you prefer a synchronous format in which courses are taught in real time, or an asynchronous format where you can access course topics on demand? (n=1,126)

| Greatly Prefer Synchronous | Prefer Synchronous | No Preference | Prefer Asynchronous | Greatly Prefer Asynchronous |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 17% | 21% | 33% | 18% | 11% |

■ Greatly Prefer Synchronous  ■ Prefer Synchronous  ■ No Preference  ■ Prefer Asynchronous  ■ Greatly Prefer Asynchronous

Those ages 30-34 had the highest percentage of respondents (43%) who greatly prefer or prefer a synchronous format.

## Figure 9: Online or Hybrid Program Format Preference by Age

For an online or hybrid program, would you prefer a synchronous format in which courses are taught in real time, or an asynchronous format where you can access course topics on demand?

| Age Range of Respondents | Greatly Prefer Synchronous | Prefer Synchronous | No Preference | Prefer Asynchronous | Greatly Prefer Asynchronous |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 23 to 26 (n=206) | 14% | 27% | 31% | 19% | 10% |
| 27 to 29 (n=175) | 14% | 18% | 41% | 17% | 11% |
| 30 to 34 (n=351) | 21% | 22% | 31% | 17% | 10% |
| 35 to 40 (n=394) | 18% | 20% | 32% | 19% | 11% |
| Overall (n=1,126) | 17% | 21% | 33% | 18% | 11% |

■ Greatly Prefer Synchronous  ■ Prefer Synchronous  ■ No Preference  ■ Prefer Asynchronous  ■ Greatly Prefer Asynchronous
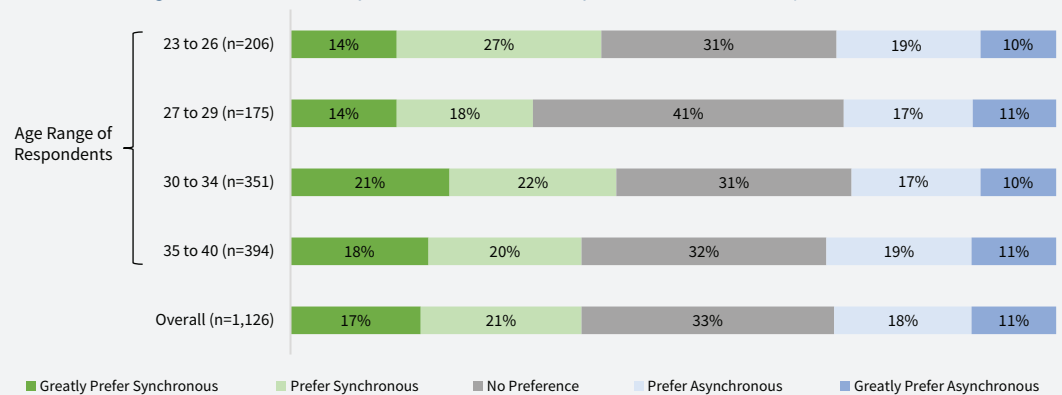
## Product Value and Familiarity

**Key Insight:** *The majority of respondents felt that a college or university was much more or more valuable than a private provider, though a third of respondents (35%) felt they were equally valuable. A slightly higher percentage of younger age groups said private providers and higher education providers were equally valuable.*

Fifty-eight percent of respondents felt that higher education is more valuable (29%) or much more valuable (29%) than a private provider.

### Figure 10: Value of Education Providers

Which do you feel provides greater value, a higher education provider, such as a college or university, or a private provider, such as online corporate training through LinkedIn, Coursera, Udemy, and others? (n=1,126)

| 29% | 29% | 35% | 5% | 3% |
|---|---|---|---|---|

- ■ Higher Education is Much More Valuable than a Private Provider
- ■ Higher Education is More Valuable than a Private Provider
- ■ Higher Education and Private Providers are Equally Valuable
- ■ Higher Education Provider is Less Valuable than a Private Provider
- ■ Higher Education is Much Less Valuable than a Private Provider
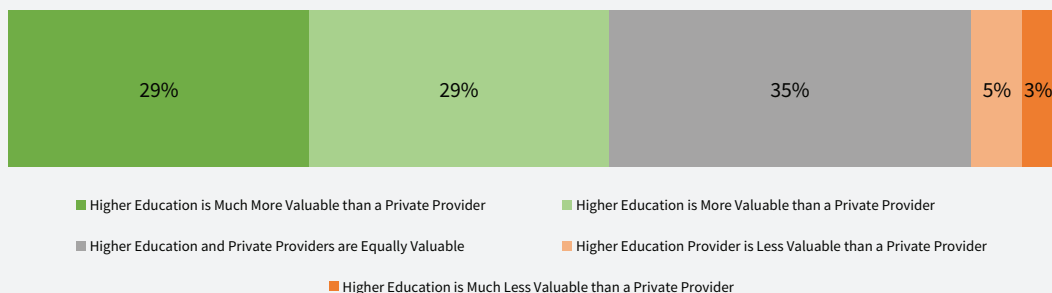
Although 30-34-year-olds were slightly more likely to consider a higher education provider, such as a college or university, much more valuable than a private provider, there was little overall difference among age groups. Younger respondents (23-29-year-olds) said that both provider types are equally valuable. Overall, only a small percentage (8%) found higher education providers less or much less valuable than private providers.

### Figure 11: Value of Education Providers by Age

Which do you feel provides greater value, a higher education provider, such as a college or university, or a private provider, such as online corporate training through LinkedIn, Coursera, Udemy, and others?

Age Range of Respondents

| | Much More Valuable | More Valuable | Equally Valuable | Less Valuable | Much Less Valuable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 23 to 26 (n=206) | 26% | 30% | 36% | 4% | 3% |
| 27 to 29 (n=175) | 29% | 27% | 36% | 5% | 3% |
| 30 to 34 (n=351) | 31% | 29% | 33% | 5% | 2% |
| 35 to 40 (n=394) | 29% | 28% | 35% | 5% | 2% |
| Overall (n=1,126) | 29% | 29% | 35% | 5% | 3% |

- ■ Higher Education is Much More Valuable than a Private Provider
- ■ Higher Education is More Valuable than a Private Provider
- ■ Higher Education and Private Providers are Equally Valuable
- ■ Higher Education Provider is Less Valuable than a Private Provider
- ■ Higher Education is Much Less Valuable than a Private Provider
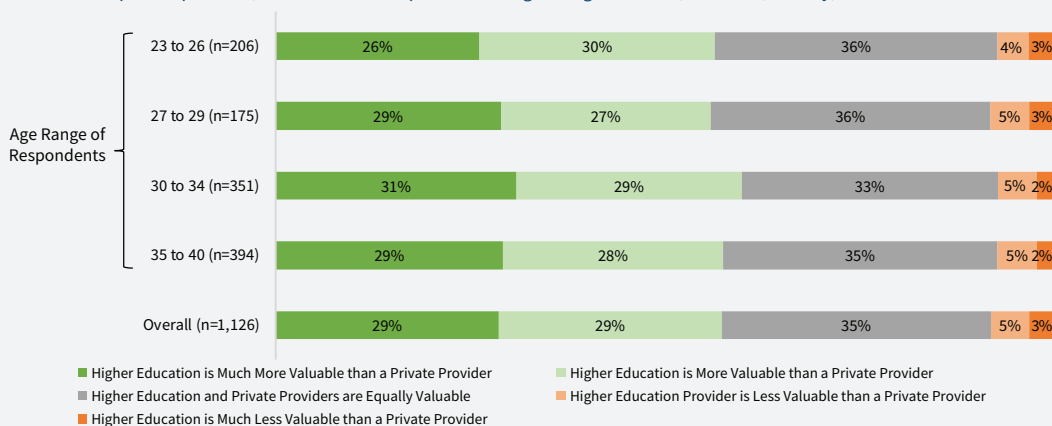
Gen Z males and Millennial+ females believe that higher education and private providers are equally valuable (41%). Mid-Millennial males, more likely than any other group, said that higher education providers are much more valuable than private providers.

## Figure 12: Value of Higher Education Providers Versus Private Providers

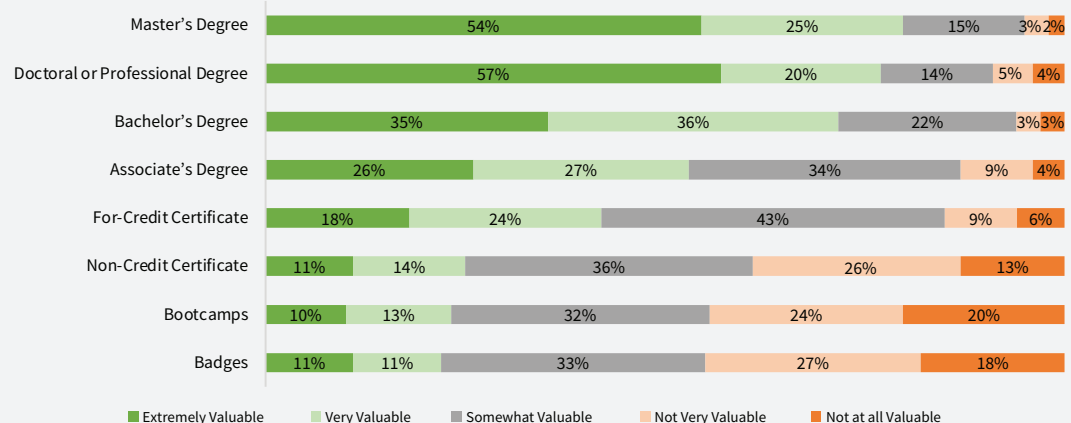| | Higher education provider is **much more valuable** than private provider | Higher education provider is **more valuable** than private provider | Higher education and private providers are **equally valuable** | Higher education provider is **less valuable** than a private provider | Higher education provider is **much less valuable** than private provider |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Sarah (23)** *Gen Z Female* | 29% | 31% | **34%** | 4% | 3% |
| **Jonah (25)** *Gen Z Male* | 19% | 32% | **41%** | 6% | 4% |
| **Lisa (28)** *Mid-Millennial Female* | 26% | 28% | **39%** | 5% | 2% |
| **Steve (31)** *Mid-Millennial Male* | **36%** | 29% | 26% | 5% | 3% |
| **Sue (40)** *Millennial+ Female* | 29% | 25% | **41%** | 5% | <1% |
| **Tom (37)** *Millennial+ Male* | 30% | **32%** | 29% | 6% | 3% |

**Key Insight:** *Respondents placed the highest value on bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, doctoral and professional degrees.*

While doctoral or professional degrees had the highest percentage of respondents who found the credential extremely valuable (57%), master's degrees had the highest combined percentage (79%) of extremely valuable (54%) and very valuable (25%). While badges had the lowest perceived value, 22% still found them to be extremely (11%) or very valuable (11%).

## Figure 13: Value of Various Educational Credentials

Please rate the value of the following credentials… (n=1,145)

| Credential | Extremely Valuable | Very Valuable | Somewhat Valuable | Not Very Valuable | Not at all Valuable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Master's Degree | 54% | 25% | 15% | 3% | 2% |
| Doctoral or Professional Degree | 57% | 20% | 14% | 5% | 4% |
| Bachelor's Degree | 35% | 36% | 22% | 3% | 3% |
| Associate's Degree | 26% | 27% | 34% | 9% | 4% |
| For-Credit Certificate | 18% | 24% | 43% | 9% | 6% |
| Non-Credit Certificate | 11% | 14% | 36% | 26% | 13% |
| Bootcamps | 10% | 13% | 32% | 24% | 20% |
| Badges | 11% | 11% | 33% | 27% | 18% |

■ Extremely Valuable ■ Very Valuable ■ Somewhat Valuable ■ Not Very Valuable ■ Not at all Valuable

Master's degrees, doctoral or professional degrees, and bachelor's degrees were the highest valued credentials among all age groups. For alternative credentials, for-credit certificates ranked highest across the board. Thirty- to thirty-four-year-olds placed the highest value on badges.

## Figure 14: Value of Various Credentials by Age

Please rate the value of the following credentials…



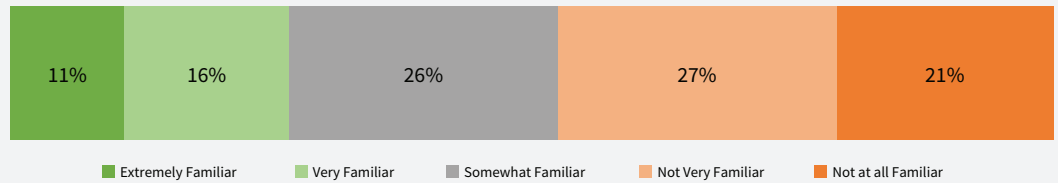Legend: Extremely Valuable | Very Valuable | Somewhat Valuable | Not Very Valuable | Not at all Valuable

**23 to 26 (n=207)**
- Master's Degree: 56%, 22%, 16%, 5%, 1%
- Doctoral or Professional Degree: 56%, 20%, 16%, 4%, 4%
- Bachelor's Degree: 40%, 34%, 22%, 3%, 1%
- Associate's Degree: 26%, 29%, 35%, 7%, 3%
- For-Credit Certificate: 15%, 25%, 43%, 12%, 6%
- Bootcamps: 11%, 14%, 30%, 29%, 17%
- Non-Credit Certificate: 9%, 15%, 33%, 31%, 13%
- Badges: 8%, 13%, 37%, 26%, 16%

**27 to 29 (n=180)**
- Master's Degree: 54%, 24%, 15%, 3%, 4%
- Doctoral or Professional Degree: 53%, 23%, 14%, 4%, 6%
- Bachelor's Degree: 29%, 42%, 23%, 2%, 4%
- Associate's Degree: 23%, 27%, 36%, 11%, 4%
- For-Credit Certificate: 14%, 21%, 46%, 11%, 8%
- Non-Credit Certificate: 9%, 13%, 33%, 27%, 18%
- Badges: 8%, 14%, 29%, 30%, 18%
- Bootcamps: 7%, 11%, 36%, 22%, 25%

**30 to 34 (n=356)**
- Master's Degree: 54%, 27%, 15%, 3%, 2%
- Doctoral or Professional Degree: 61%, 18%, 12%, 6%, 3%
- Bachelor's Degree: 37%, 34%, 24%, 4%, 2%
- Associate's Degree: 28%, 24%, 35%, 10%, 3%
- For-Credit Certificate: 22%, 22%, 44%, 8%, 5%
- Bootcamps: 14%, 16%, 32%, 22%, 17%
- Non-Credit Certificate: 14%, 14%, 37%, 23%, 12%
- Badges: 16%, 10%, 33%, 25%, 16%

**35 to 40 (n=402)**
- Doctoral or Professional Degree: 56%, 22%, 14%, 5%, 3%
- Master's Degree: 53%, 26%, 16%, 3%, 3%
- Bachelor's Degree: 34%, 38%, 21%, 3%, 4%
- Associate's Degree: 26%, 14, 27%, 34%, 8%, 5%
- For-Credit Certificate: 17%, 25%, 42%, 9%, 6%
- Non-Credit Certificate: 10%, 15%, 38%, 24%, 12%
- Badges: 10%, 11%, 31%, 28%, 19%
- Bootcamps: 9%, 12%, 32%, 24%, 23%

Almost half of respondents (48%) said they were not very (27%) or not at all familiar (21%) with a stackable education model and 26% were somewhat familiar.

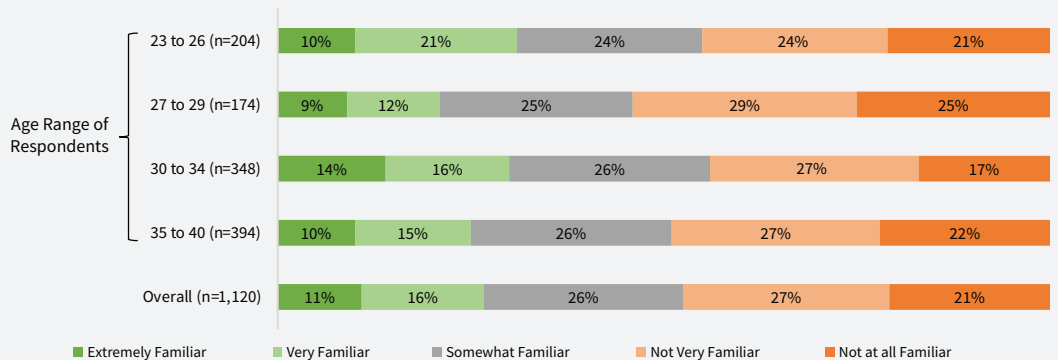## Figure 15: Familiarity with Stackable Education Model

How familiar are you with a stackable education model? A stackable model
allows you to apply your learning to earn a for-credit certificate or badge,
which could also be "stacked" together toward a full college degree. (n=1,120)

| Extremely Familiar | Very Familiar | Somewhat Familiar | Not Very Familiar | Not at all Familiar |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11% | 16% | 26% | 27% | 21% |

Those who studied engineering (18%) or computer science and mathematics (18%) were extremely familiar with a stackable model among those subject areas with at least 10 respondents.

## Figure 16: Familiarity with Stackable Education Model by Subject Area

How familiar are you with a stackable education model?
A stackable model allows you to apply your learning to earn a for-credit certificate or badge,
which could also be "stacked" together toward a full college degree.

Age Range of Respondents

| | Extremely Familiar | Very Familiar | Somewhat Familiar | Not Very Familiar | Not at all Familiar |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 23 to 26 (n=204) | 10% | 21% | 24% | 24% | 21% |
| 27 to 29 (n=174) | 9% | 12% | 25% | 29% | 25% |
| 30 to 34 (n=348) | 14% | 16% | 26% | 27% | 17% |
| 35 to 40 (n=394) | 10% | 15% | 26% | 27% | 22% |
| Overall (n=1,120) | 11% | 16% | 26% | 27% | 21% |

Most respondents (88%) said a stackable credential model was at least somewhat valuable, with 15% considering it extremely valuable and 29% very valuable.

## Figure 17: Value of a Stackable Credential Model

What level of value would you place on a stackable credential model? (n=1,120)

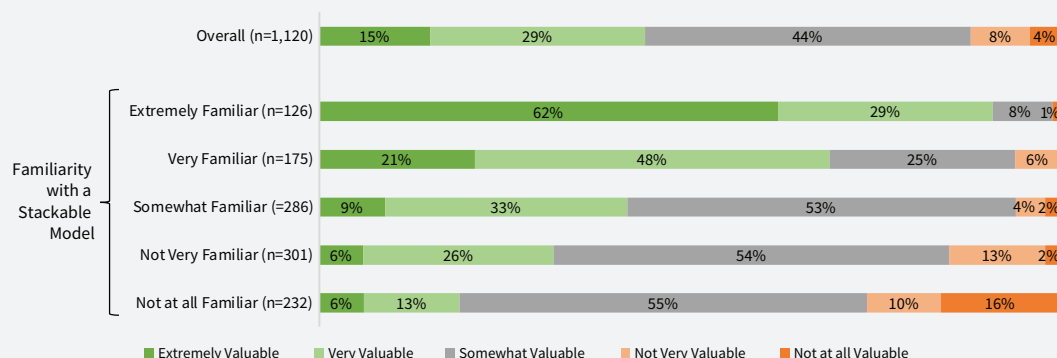| Extremely Valuable | Very Valuable | Somewhat Valuable | Not Very Valuable | Not at all Valuable |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15% | 29% | 44% | 8% | 4% |
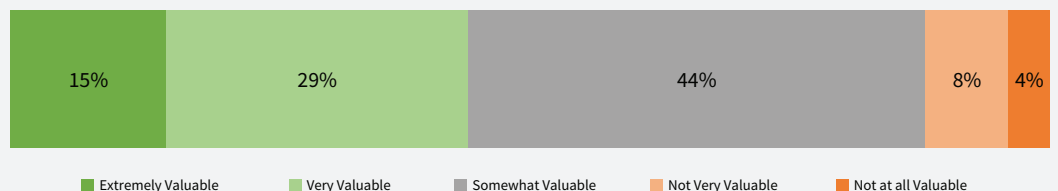
**Key Insight:** *Those who were aware of stackable models placed great value on them. As interest in various delivery formats increased, so too did the perceived value of a stackable credential model.*

Ninety-one percent of respondents who were extremely familiar with a stackable model felt it was extremely or very valuable. As familiarity with a stackable model decreased, so too did its perceived value.

**Figure 18: Value of a Stackable Credential Model by Familiarity with a Stackable Credential Model**
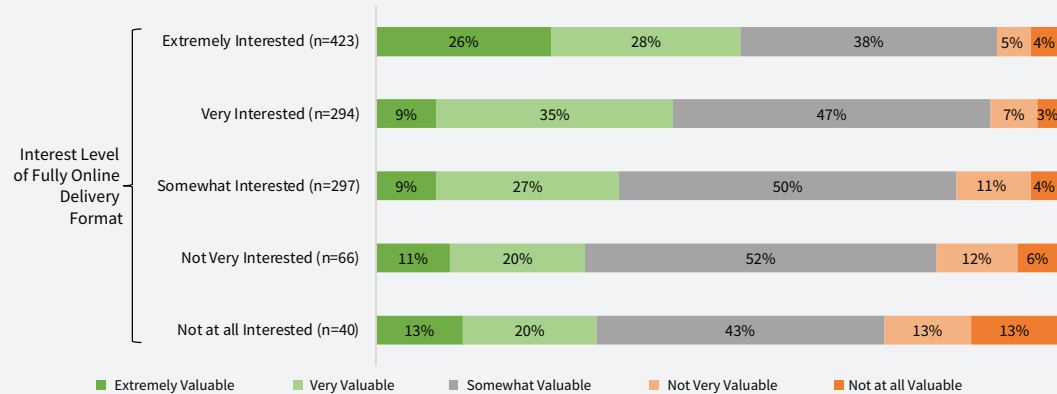
What level of value would you place on a stackable credential model?

| | Extremely Valuable | Very Valuable | Somewhat Valuable | Not Very Valuable | Not at all Valuable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Overall (n=1,120) | 15% | 29% | 44% | 8% | 4% |
| Extremely Familiar (n=126) | 62% | 29% | 8% | | 1% |
| Very Familiar (n=175) | 21% | 48% | 25% | 6% | |
| Somewhat Familiar (=286) | 9% | 33% | 53% | 4% | 2% |
| Not Very Familiar (n=301) | 6% | 26% | 54% | 13% | 2% |
| Not at all Familiar (n=232) | 6% | 13% | 55% | 10% | 16% |

Familiarity with a Stackable Model

Those extremely interested in online delivery placed the highest value on a stackable credential model, and as interest decreased, so too did the perceived value of a stackable credential.
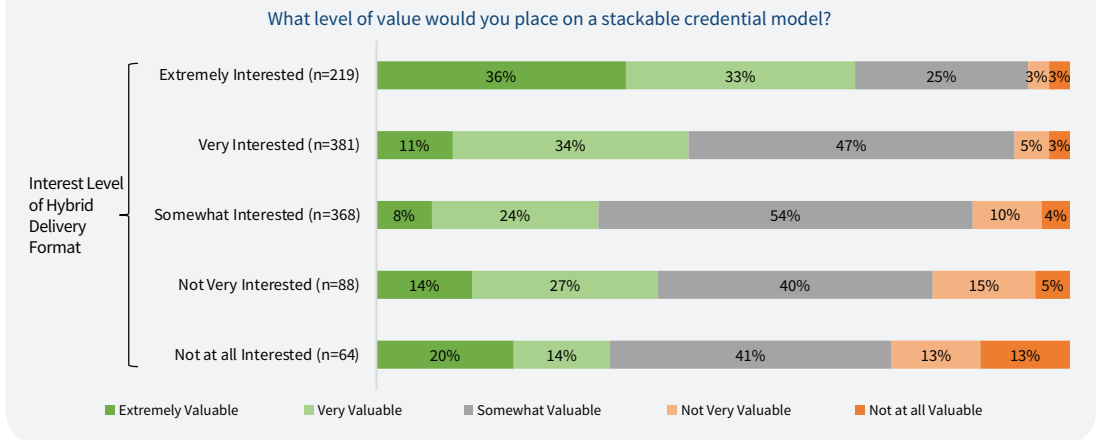
**Figure 19: Value of Stackable Credential Education Model by Interest in Online Delivery**

What level of value would you place on a stackable credential model?

| | Extremely Valuable | Very Valuable | Somewhat Valuable | Not Very Valuable | Not at all Valuable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Extremely Interested (n=423) | 26% | 28% | 38% | 5% | 4% |
| Very Interested (n=294) | 9% | 35% | 47% | 7% | 3% |
| Somewhat Interested (n=297) | 9% | 27% | 50% | 11% | 4% |
| Not Very Interested (n=66) | 11% | 20% | 52% | 12% | 6% |
| Not at all Interested (n=40) | 13% | 20% | 43% | 13% | 13% |

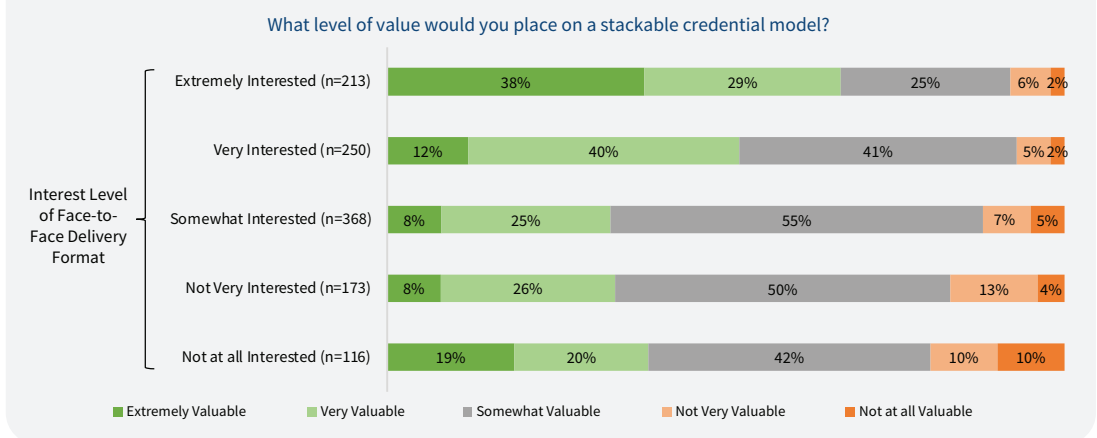Interest Level of Fully Online Delivery Format

Those extremely interested in hybrid delivery also placed the highest value on a stackable credential model, and as with online, value decreased as delivery interest decreased.

## Figure 20: Value of Stackable Credential Education Model by Interest in Hybrid Delivery

What level of value would you place on a stackable credential model?

| Interest Level of Hybrid Delivery Format | Extremely Valuable | Very Valuable | Somewhat Valuable | Not Very Valuable | Not at all Valuable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Extremely Interested (n=219) | 36% | 33% | 25% | 3% | 3% |
| Very Interested (n=381) | 11% | 34% | 47% | 5% | 3% |
| Somewhat Interested (n=368) | 8% | 24% | 54% | 10% | 4% |
| Not Very Interested (n=88) | 14% | 27% | 40% | 15% | 5% |
| Not at all Interested (n=64) | 20% | 14% | 41% | 13% | 13% |

Those extremely interested in face-to-face delivery also placed the highest value on a stackable credential model and as with the other delivery methods, value decreased as delivery interest dropped.
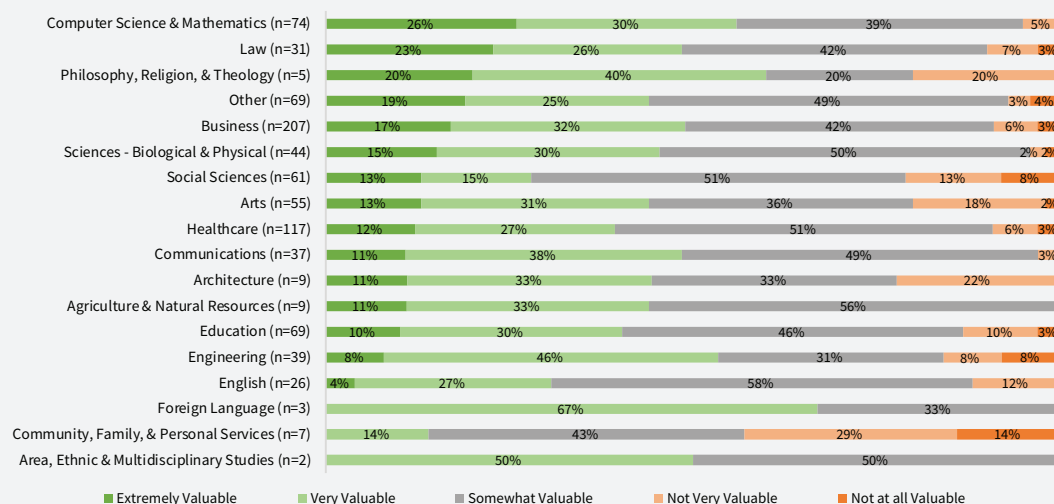
## Figure 21: Value of Stackable Credential Education Model by Interest in a Face-to-Face Delivery

What level of value would you place on a stackable credential model?

| Interest Level of Face-to-Face Delivery Format | Extremely Valuable | Very Valuable | Somewhat Valuable | Not Very Valuable | Not at all Valuable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Extremely Interested (n=213) | 38% | 29% | 25% | 6% | 2% |
| Very Interested (n=250) | 12% | 40% | 41% | 5% | 2% |
| Somewhat Interested (n=368) | 8% | 25% | 55% | 7% | 5% |
| Not Very Interested (n=173) | 8% | 26% | 50% | 13% | 4% |
| Not at all Interested (n=116) | 19% | 20% | 42% | 10% | 10% |

A quarter of respondents in computer science and mathematics (26%) felt that a stackable model would be extremely valuable, the most of any subject area.
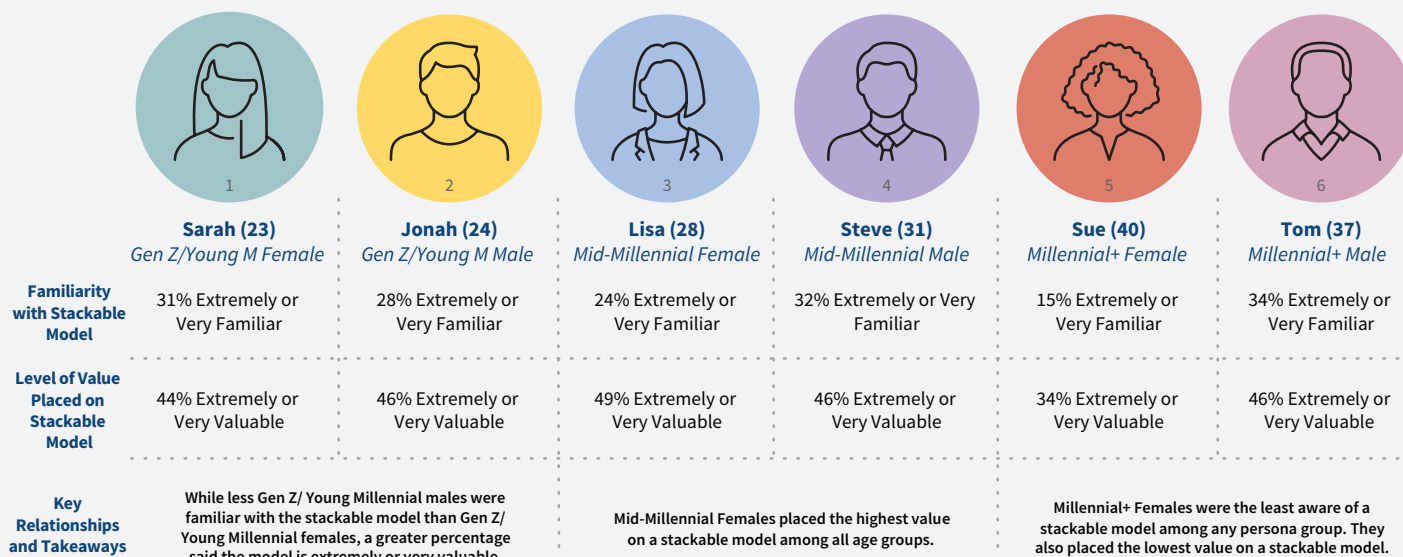
## Figure 22: Value of Stackable Model by Subject Area

| Subject Area | Extremely Valuable | Very Valuable | Somewhat Valuable | Not Very Valuable | Not at all Valuable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Computer Science & Mathematics (n=74) | 26% | 30% | 39% | 5% | |
| Law (n=31) | 23% | 26% | 42% | 7% | 3% |
| Philosophy, Religion, & Theology (n=5) | 20% | 40% | 20% | 20% | |
| Other (n=69) | 19% | 25% | 49% | 3% | 4% |
| Business (n=207) | 17% | 32% | 42% | 6% | 3% |
| Sciences - Biological & Physical (n=44) | 15% | 30% | 50% | 2% | 2% |
| Social Sciences (n=61) | 13% | 15% | 51% | 13% | 8% |
| Arts (n=55) | 13% | 31% | 36% | 18% | 2% |
| Healthcare (n=117) | 12% | 27% | 51% | 6% | 3% |
| Communications (n=37) | 11% | 38% | 49% | 3% | |
| Architecture (n=9) | 11% | 33% | 33% | 22% | |
| Agriculture & Natural Resources (n=9) | 11% | 33% | 56% | | |
| Education (n=69) | 10% | 30% | 46% | 10% | 3% |
| Engineering (n=39) | 8% | 46% | 31% | 8% | 8% |
| English (n=26) | 4% | 27% | 58% | 12% | |
| Foreign Language (n=3) | | 67% | 33% | | |
| Community, Family, & Personal Services (n=7) | | 14% | 43% | 29% | 14% |
| Area, Ethnic & Multidisciplinary Studies (n=2) | | 50% | 50% | | |

A higher percentage of all age groups found a stackable model to be extremely or very valuable than the percentage that were extremely or very familiar with the model. In general, females were less familiar with the model than males.

## Figure 23: Stackable Model Awareness and Value by Personas

| | Sarah (23)<br>Gen Z/Young M Female | Jonah (24)<br>Gen Z/Young M Male | Lisa (28)<br>Mid-Millennial Female | Steve (31)<br>Mid-Millennial Male | Sue (40)<br>Millennial+ Female | Tom (37)<br>Millennial+ Male |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Familiarity with Stackable Model** | 31% Extremely or Very Familiar | 28% Extremely or Very Familiar | 24% Extremely or Very Familiar | 32% Extremely or Very Familiar | 15% Extremely or Very Familiar | 34% Extremely or Very Familiar |
| **Level of Value Placed on Stackable Model** | 44% Extremely or Very Valuable | 46% Extremely or Very Valuable | 49% Extremely or Very Valuable | 46% Extremely or Very Valuable | 34% Extremely or Very Valuable | 46% Extremely or Very Valuable |
| **Key Relationships and Takeaways** | While less Gen Z/ Young Millennial males were familiar with the stackable model than Gen Z/ Young Millennial females, a greater percentage said the model is extremely or very valuable. | | Mid-Millennial Females placed the highest value on a stackable model among all age groups. | | Millennial+ Females were the least aware of a stackable model among any persona group. They also placed the lowest value on a stackable model. | |

A higher percentage of all age groups found a stackable model to be extremely or very valuable than were extremely or very familiar with the model. In General, females were less familiar with the model than males.
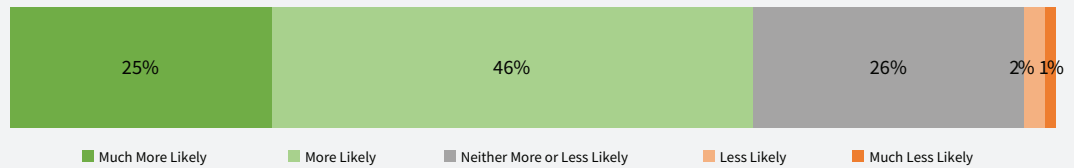
**Key Insight:** *Individuals want to know that their program will provide value for them in both short and long term and would be more likely to enroll if they knew this.*

Seventy-one percent of respondents were more (46%) or much more likely (25%) to enroll in a program if they knew their investment would hold greater value toward a future credential.
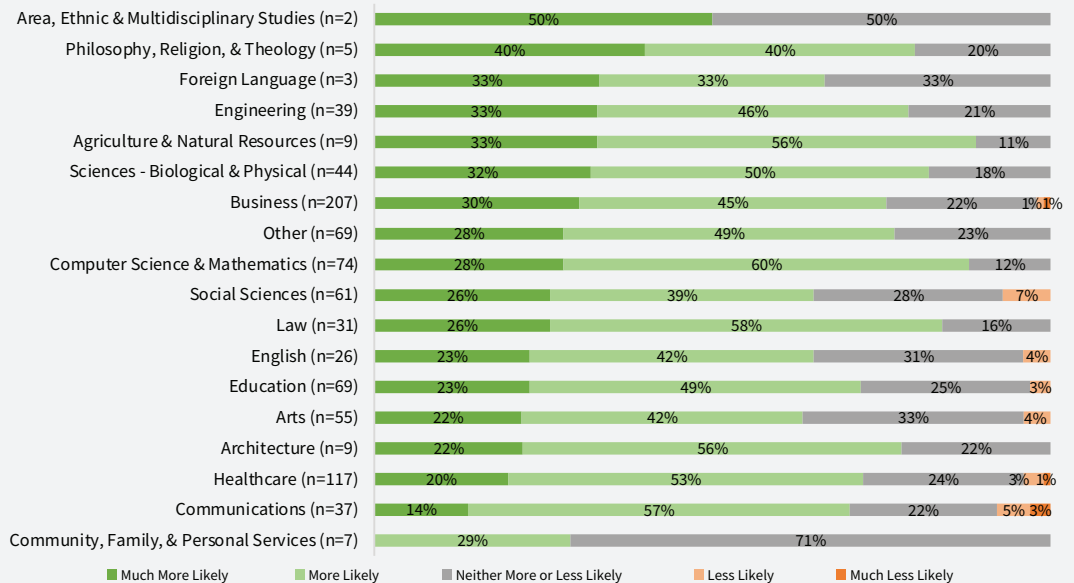
## Figure 24: Likelihood of Program Enrollment for a Stackable Program

If you knew that your investment in education, such as a workshop or class,
would hold greater value toward a future credential, would you be more likely to
enroll in a program? (n=1,120)

| Much More Likely | More Likely | Neither More or Less Likely | Less Likely | Much Less Likely |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 25% | 46% | 26% | 2% | 1% |

■ Much More Likely   ■ More Likely   ■ Neither More or Less Likely   ■ Less Likely   ■ Much Less Likely

A stackable model had a positive effect on program enrollment likelihood for all subject areas. Nine subject areas had at least 75% of respondents say the model would make them much more likely or more likely. The model proved most appealing to those studying agriculture and natural resources (89% much more or more likely), computer science and mathematics (88%), and law (84%).

## Figure 25: Likelihood of Program Enrollment for a Stackable Program by Subject Area

| Subject Area | Much More Likely | More Likely | Neither More or Less Likely | Less Likely | Much Less Likely |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Area, Ethnic & Multidisciplinary Studies (n=2) | 50% | | 50% | | |
| Philosophy, Religion, & Theology (n=5) | 40% | 40% | 20% | | |
| Foreign Language (n=3) | 33% | 33% | 33% | | |
| Engineering (n=39) | 33% | 46% | 21% | | |
| Agriculture & Natural Resources (n=9) | 33% | 56% | 11% | | |
| Sciences - Biological & Physical (n=44) | 32% | 50% | 18% | | |
| Business (n=207) | 30% | 45% | 22% | 1% | 1% |
| Other (n=69) | 28% | 49% | 23% | | |
| Computer Science & Mathematics (n=74) | 28% | 60% | 12% | | |
| Social Sciences (n=61) | 26% | 39% | 28% | 7% | |
| Law (n=31) | 26% | 58% | 16% | | |
| English (n=26) | 23% | 42% | 31% | 4% | |
| Education (n=69) | 23% | 49% | 25% | 3% | |
| Arts (n=55) | 22% | 42% | 33% | 4% | |
| Architecture (n=9) | 22% | 56% | 22% | | |
| Healthcare (n=117) | 20% | 53% | 24% | 3% | 1% |
| Communications (n=37) | 14% | 57% | 22% | 5% | 3% |
| Community, Family, & Personal Services (n=7) | 29% | 71% | | | |

■ Much More Likely   ■ More Likely   ■ Neither More or Less Likely   ■ Less Likely   ■ Much Less Likely

A stackable model would make at least two-thirds of each generation's gender segment much more likely or more likely to enroll in a program.

## Figure 26: Likelihood of Program Enrollment for a Stackable Program by Persona

If you knew that your investment in higher education would hold greater value
towards a future credential, would you be more likely to enroll in a program?

| Persona | | Much More Likely | More Likely | Neither more or less likely | Less Likely | Much Less Likely |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Sarah (23)** *Gen Z Female* | 1 | 20% | **51%** | 26% | 2% | <1% |
| **Jonah (25)** *Gen Z Male* | 2 | 20% | **56%** | 19% | 6% | 0% |
| **Lisa (28)** *Mid-Millennial Female* | 3 | 28% | **44%** | 25% | 1% | 2% |
| **Steve (31)** *Mid-Millennial Male* | 4 | 28% | **40%** | 29% | 3% | <1% |
| **Sue (40)** *Millennial+ Female* | 5 | 24% | **51%** | 23% | 2% | 0% |
| **Tom (37)** *Millennial+ Male* | 6 | 26% | **47%** | 27% | 1% | 0% |

Roughly **50%** of all respondents in each age and generational group believed that if they knew their investment would hold a greater value, they would be **more likely** to enroll in a program.

The other 50% are split into **much more likely** and **neither more or less likely** (roughly **25% split each**), indicating that respondents have **other reasons for not enrolling** in a program regardless of a high ROI or **they greatly value a high ROI** in education.

## Actionable Insights

While higher education has long been viewed as the standard, or even sole source, of postsecondary education, private providers are beginning to challenge this notion. When asked to compare the value of higher education institutions to that of private providers, the majority of respondents felt that a college or university was much more or more valuable than a private provider, though a third of respondents (35%) felt they were equally valuable. A slightly higher percentage of younger age groups said private providers and higher education providers were equally valuable. This indicates that attitudes toward higher education are shifting.

Higher education is struggling from a value perspective in the eyes of the modern learner. Today's learner has a vast menu of options to pursue in both program content and delivery. While learners are far from a homogenized group, they all demand value and flexibility from education providers. The preceding charts and figures reinforce the reality that students of all types want to know that their program will provide value for them in both the short and long term and would be more likely to enroll if they knew this. The analysis conducted illustrates that there are differences among various demographic groups as well as subject areas. Institutions should closely examine this information to better inform their strategies moving forward. Institutions must be more deliberate to improve value, especially when they have a history of increasing tuition costs without providing added value. Improving value while maintaining tuition costs will be essential to compete in the future.

A confluence of factors demands that higher education adjusts its status quo. As institutional budgets become tighter, the marketplace continues to remain hyper competitive, and demographic trends produce less traditional age college students, it is essential that institutions of higher education can attract as many students as possible. It is imperative for institutions to increase both the awareness of the stackable model and the value of credentials for existing and future students to remain competitive.

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