



Understanding the Mindset of Adult Learners & Key Market Trends

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Education's Trusted Partner to Help Schools and Students Thrive



Your Imperatives Determine Ours

INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGY

Prepare Your Institution for the Future

Executive guidance rooted in research to support your strategic priorities

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Achieve Your Enrollment and Growth Goals

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Key Graduate Market Trends



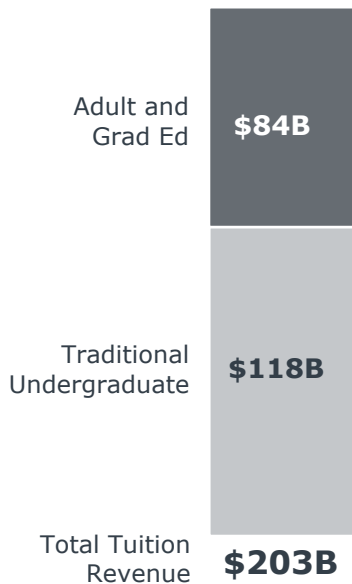
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How Big is the Adult and Grad Ed Market?



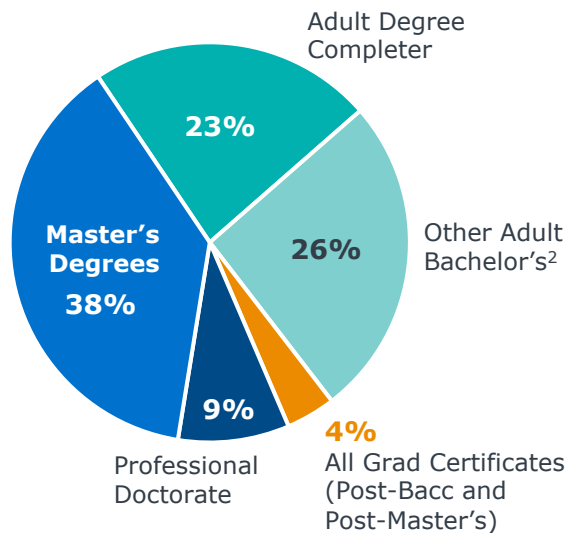
Adult Learners Make Up 42% of Total Higher Ed Tuition Revenue

Estimated Higher Ed Gross Annual Revenue¹, 2021



25+ Undergrad Students Account for Half of All Adult Ed Revenue

Estimated Total Gross Annual Revenue from Adult (25+) Bachelor's, Post-Bac Certificates, and Graduate Enrollment, 20-21



1) Tuition discounts not included in analysis

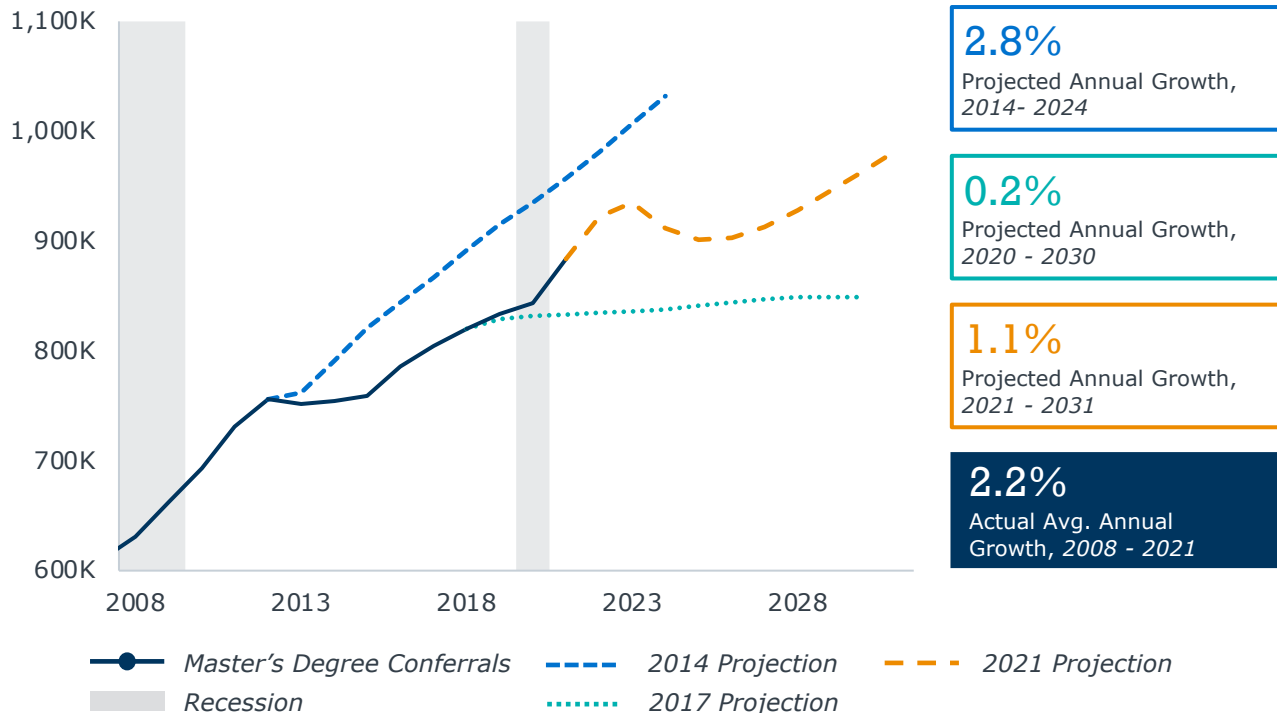
2) Includes first-time adult students, second bachelor's students, and non-degree seekers

Source: National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). Postbaccalaureate Enrollment. *Condition of Education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences ([link](#)); Weissman, S. *Lower completion rates among part-time students*. Inside Higher Ed ([link](#)); National Student Clearinghouse. (2023) *Some College, No Credential Report* ([link](#)); IPEDS Fall 2021 Enrollment Survey Data; IPEDS Spring 2021 Conferrals Survey Data; IPEDS 2021 Student Charges Survey Data; EAB interviews and analysis.

Short-Term Expectations Variable, But Evening Out

6

Master's Degree Conferrals and Projections, 2008-2031



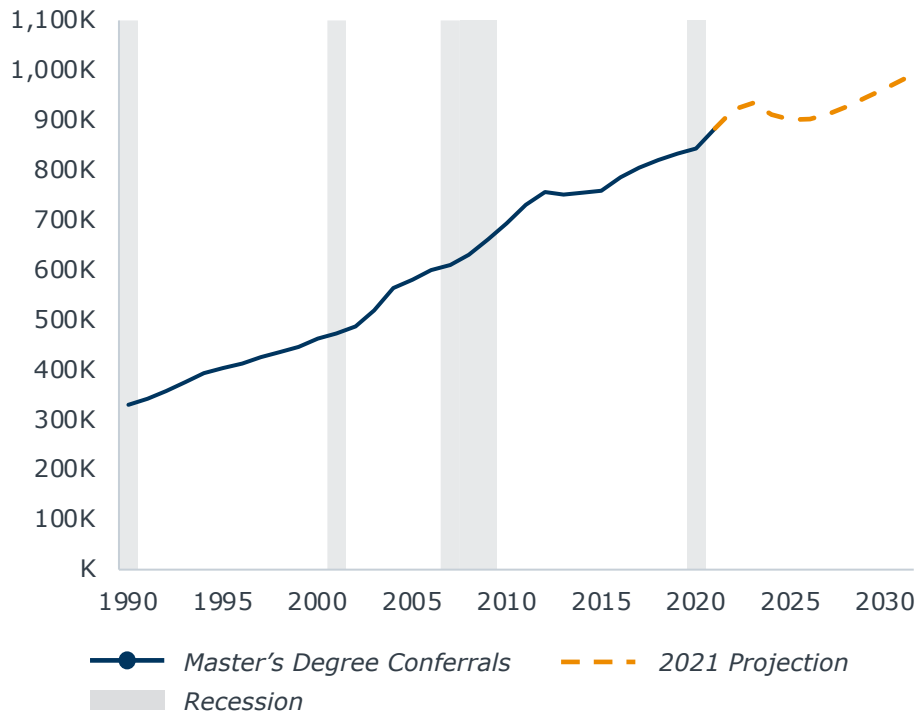
1) The graph includes a 'year 0' for each projection. These 'year 0s' (2013, 2019, and 2021) are actual figures, not projections.

Long-Term Picture Shows Durable, Slower Growth



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Master's Degree Conferrals and Projections, 1990-2031

**1.1%**

Projected Annual Growth,
2021 - 2031

3.2%

Actual Avg. Annual
Growth, 1990 - 2021

1) The graph includes a 'year 0' for each projection. These 'year 0s' (2013, 2019, and 2021) are actual figures, not projections.



Completers Provide Enrollment Opportunity

Population Grows But Institutions Will Face Enrollment Challenges

Only 4% of Some-College, No Credential Students Enrolled in 2021

20.3M

25-65-year-olds with some college, but no credential (SCNC) in AY 2022

691K

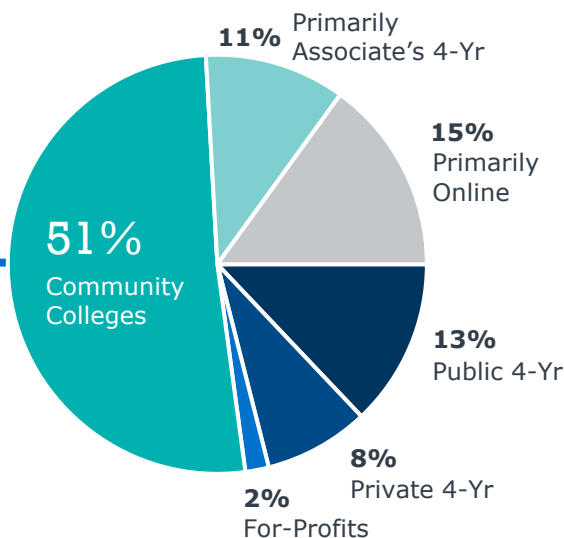
SCNC students re-enrolled in AY 2022

45K

SCNC students completed first credential in AY21

And of Those Re-Enrolling, Many Resume Their Journey at 2-Years

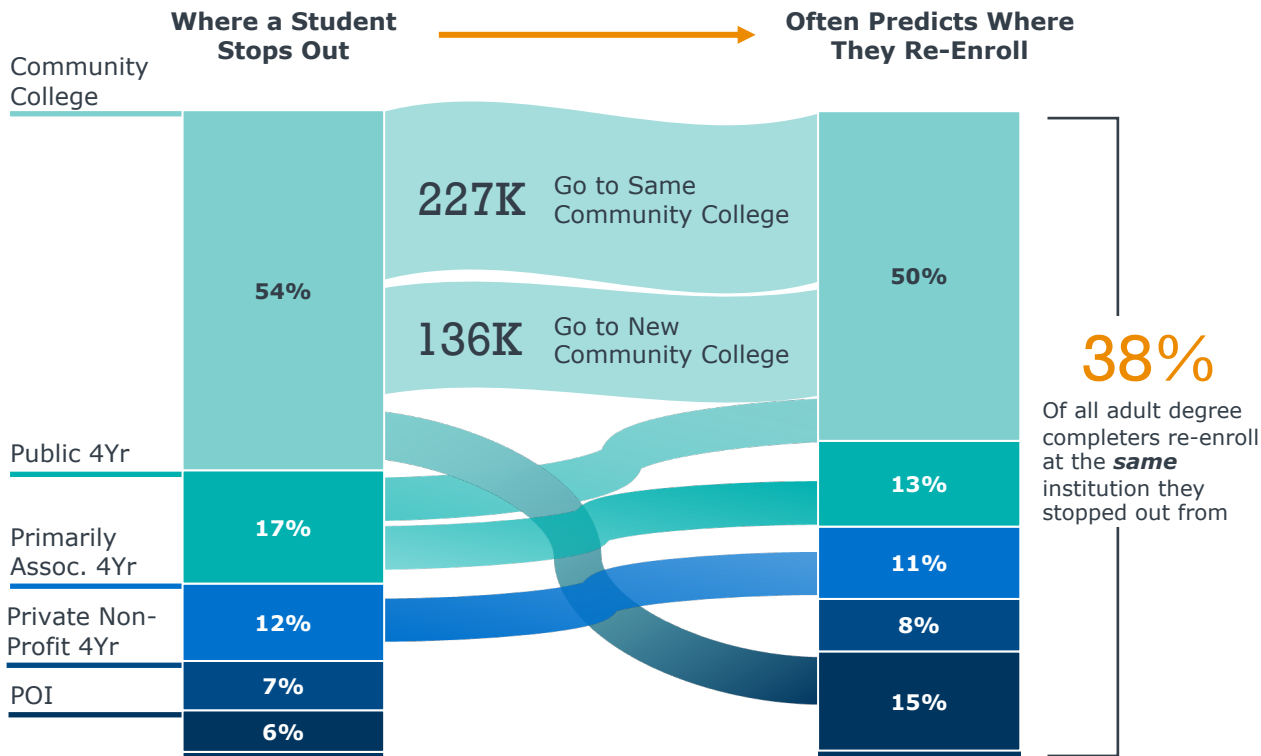
Institution choices of 691K degree completion students, 2021/2022





Your Own Stop-Outs Prove Easiest to Re-Recruit

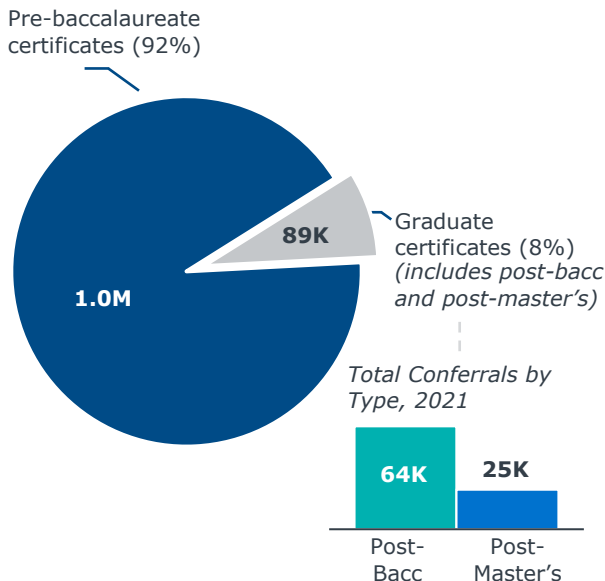
Institutions attended by 744K degree completion students before and after re-enrollment in AY21



Fast Growth, But Small Market at Graduate Level

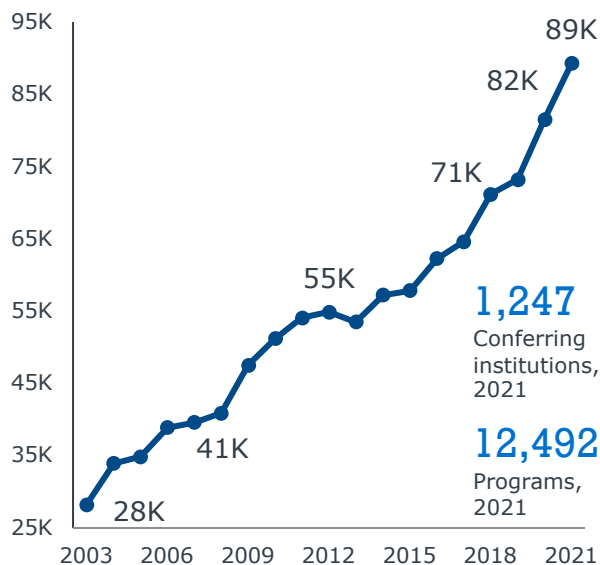
Graduate Certificates a Tiny Slice of Overall For-Credit Market

n= 1,105,547 certificate conferrals, 2021



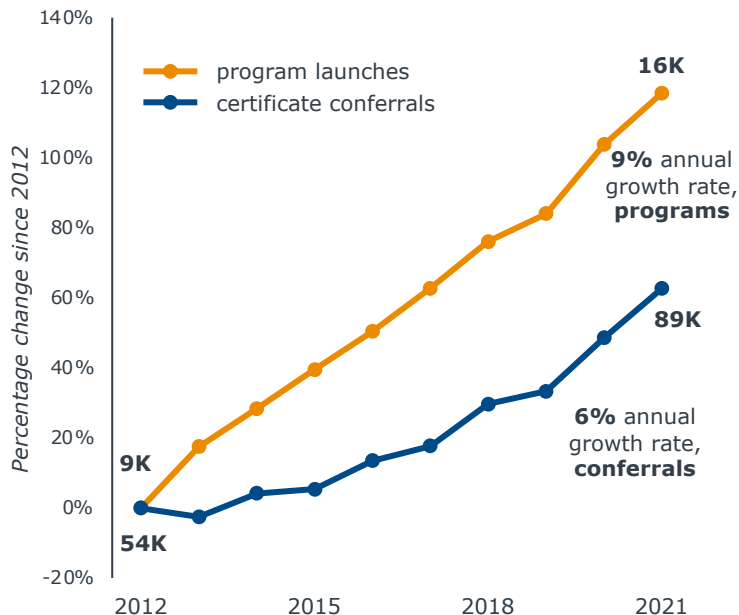
Hype Over Fast, Sustained Growth Masks Small Market Size

Annual Graduate Certificate Conferrals, 2003-2021



Unfettered Certificate Program Proliferation

Launches of New For-Credit Graduate Certificate Programs Far Outpace Conferrals



Many Programs Fail to Take Off (but Also Fail to Close)

44%

For-credit graduate certificate programs reporting zero completions in 2021

5

Median number of annual for-credit graduate certificate conferrals per program, excluding those with zero conferrals, in 2021



Assessing the Mindset of Adult Learners

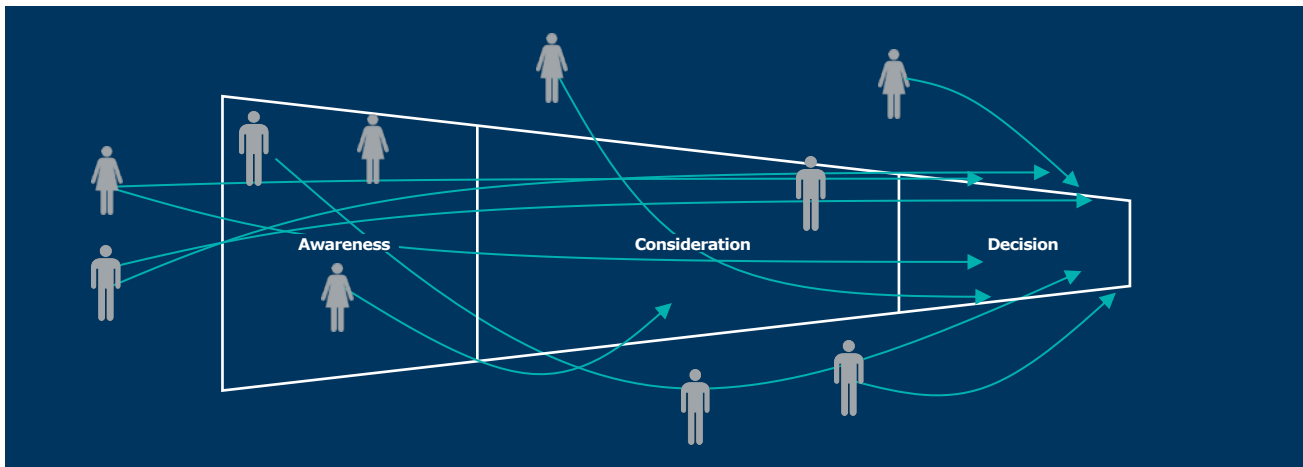


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Navigating the Complexity of Engaging Prospective Adult Learners

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Engaging Prospects at Scale When Path to Enrollment Is Rarely Linear



Key Questions Plague Prospects —and the Answers Determine How They Engage with Your Funnel

What options do I have?



9 out of 10

Don't know which school to attend when they initiate their journey

If I enroll, will it be worth it?



7 out of 10

Cite **outcomes-driven motivations** for earning their degree

How should I spend my time?



6 out of 10

Applying to fewer schools now than before

Adult Learners Are Highly Pragmatic

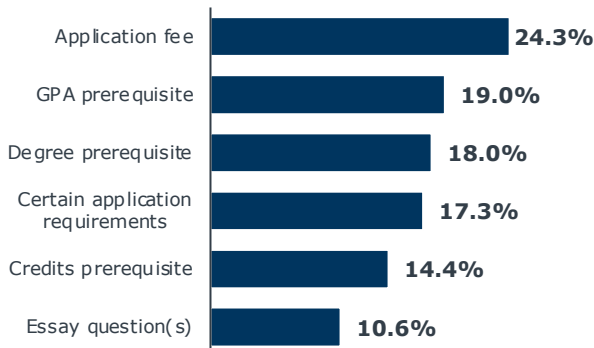


40.9% Applied to two or fewer schools

69.3% Said an application or admissions requirement deterred them from applying



"Which application and admissions requirements (if any) influenced your decision not to apply to a specific school or program?"



Admissions Requirements

4 Key Principles

Accuracy

Do you have enough to make a good decision in most cases?

Speed

Can you respond very quickly to most candidates?

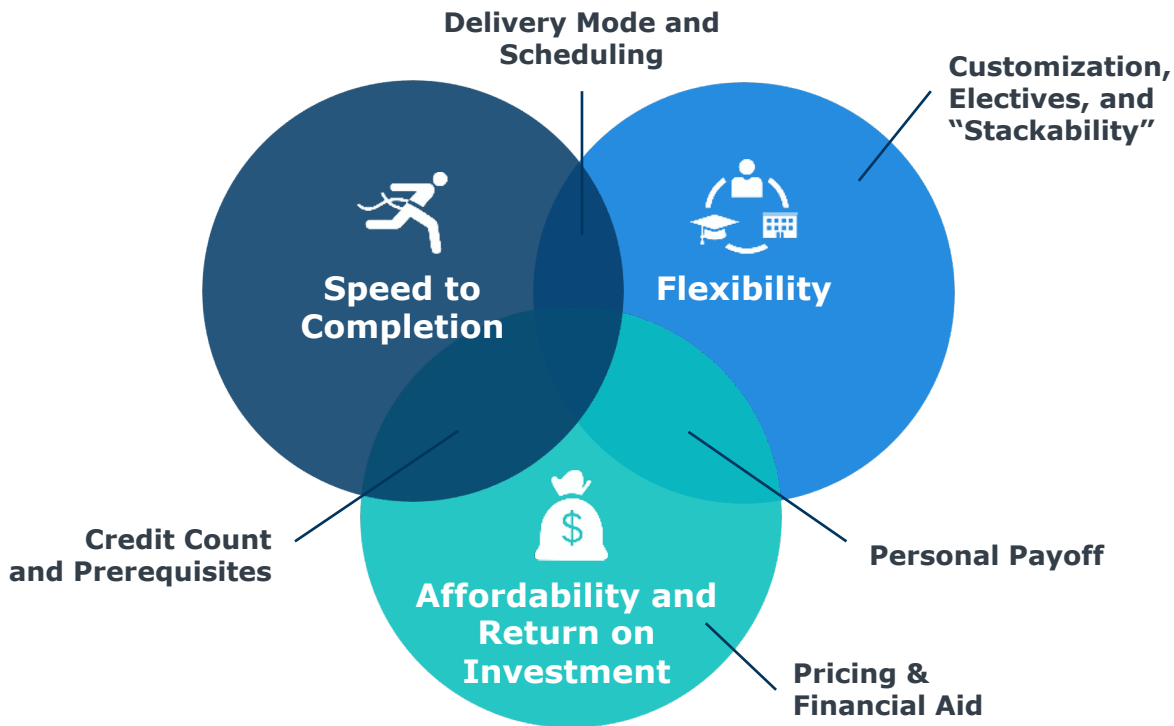
Clarity

Can you communicate your admissions criteria easily?

Access

Have you eliminated unnecessary hurdles?

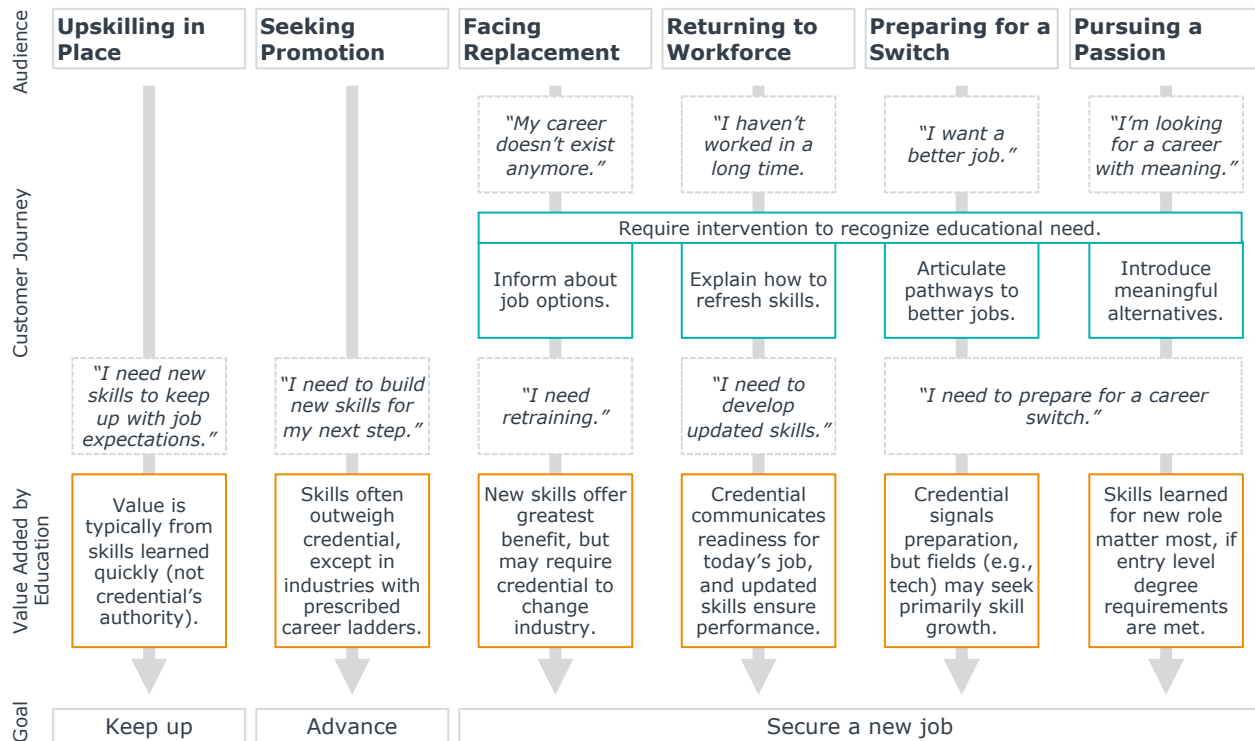
Prospective Students Prioritize 3 Things



Getting Beyond “Working Professionals”

16

Develop Targeted Programs Across a Prospect’s Career Lifecycle



It's All in the Delivery



Format Increasingly Essential for Program Success

A Tour of Emerging Program Design Options



Accelerated

Shorter than a typical academic program

- Microcredentials
- Mini-MBA
- Second Bachelor's
- Bootcamps



Modular

Short modules that combine into credentials

- DIY Programs
- Modular Master's
- Tiered Content Portfolio



Experiential

Integrated opportunities to build skills

- Client-Based Projects
- Team Capstone Projects
- Virtual Internships



Demonstrated Mastery

Progress based on assessment of competencies

- Project Based Master's
- MOOC to Master's
- Course to Assessment
- Competency-Based Education



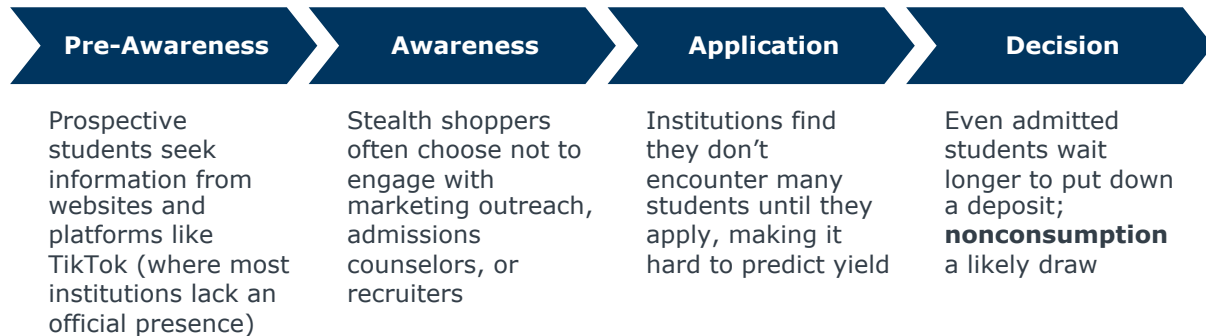
Mega Stealth Shopping is Here



Mega-Stealth Shopping Is Here

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How Mega-Stealth Shopping Manifests Throughout Recruitment Funnel

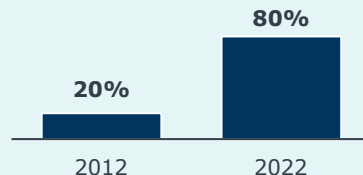


Changing Privacy Behaviors and Preferences

- Consumers eager to protect their identities online as a response to “doxxing” and other threats
- Greater adoption of encrypted messaging apps (e.g., Signal) and private chats (e.g., Discord servers)
- Slow phaseout of third-party cookies; Apple now prompts users to opt into data-sharing with apps

What Qualifies as Mega-Stealth Shopping?

Stealth Shopping Rates for PCO¹ Units²



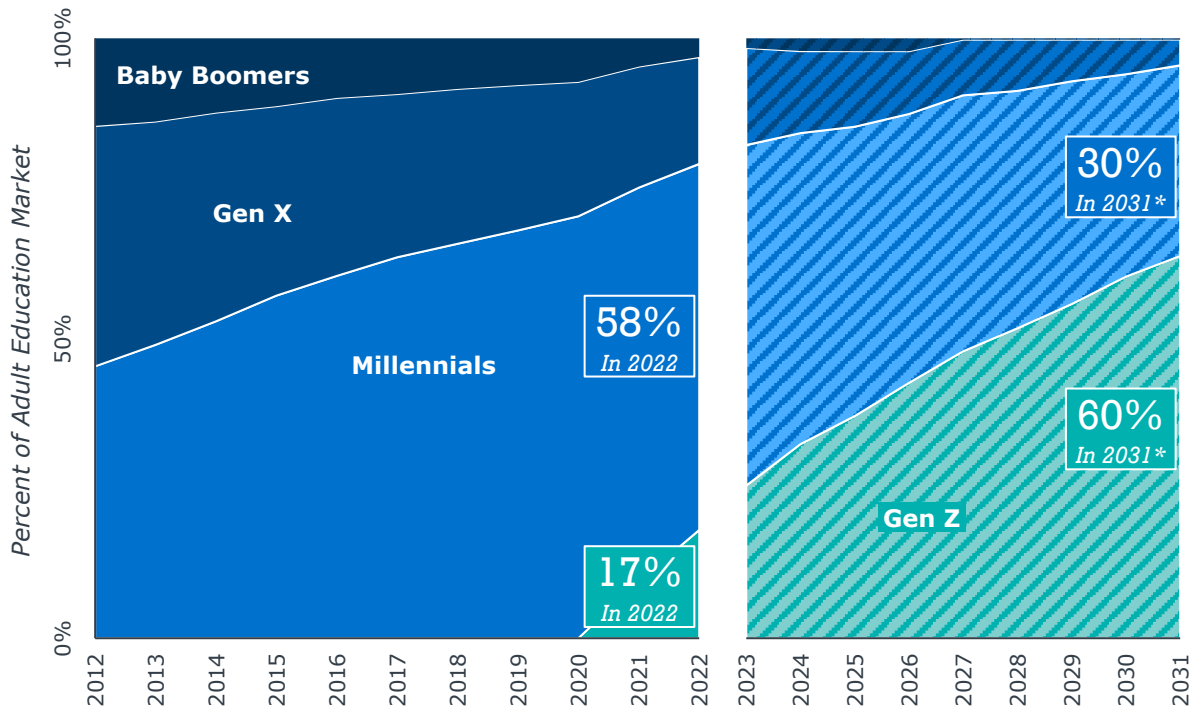
1) Professional, continuing, and online education
2) Based on research interviews conducted by EAB.
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Generational Takeover Swift for Adult Ed



Millennials Dominate the Market Today, Gen Z Right Around the Corner

Real and projected composition of adult learners by generation, 2012-2031



1) * Projected

A Study in Prospect-Centric Design: U of Aberdeen

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MBA Program Webpage Centers Key Info and Student Stories



The screenshot shows the MBA program webpage with the following callouts:

- Easy navigation** without scrolling or using drop-down menus
- Key details** in one location at top of page
- Design and branding** aligns with main university webpage
- Chatbot** appeals to prospects and allows visitors to **access key information fast**
- Student testimonial** attests to the program's quality

Even Beyond the Program Page, Aberdeen's Website is Optimized for Prospect Audiences



Prospects can access adult education in one click from homepage



Visitors can easily browse programs using an extensive range of filters



Clickable contact details on all webpages make asking questions easy

Summary of Key Trends

- 1 Master's market shows durable, stable, and slower growth even with short-term variable shocks.** Growth in the market is linked to the job market outlook for degree holders.
- 2 Adult Degree Completion Market shows significant opportunity in terms of size, but myriad challenges to enroll students.** Community Colleges gaining the most significant share of the market. **The greatest opportunity in degree completion remains in your own stop-out students.**
- 3 Certificates market sees fast growth but remains relatively small – program launches outpace student demand.** Most institutions are seeing lower revenue than projected, and many don't know ROI. Program launches typically more expensive than expected even for 'low-lift' certificates.
- 4 Adult learners prioritize speed to completion, flexibility, and affordability.** With the Mega-Stealth Shopping phenomenon, crucial to make it easy for adult learner prospect to access key program info self-service. **In just eight years, Gen Z expected to make up 60% of adult market.**

Summary of EAB Professional & Adult Education Advisory Services Partnership Benefits

Our areas of expertise- partnering with units that serve adult learners and working professionals

1 Organizational Design

- ✓ Organizational models
- ✓ Budget and planning

2 Marketing and Recruiting

- ✓ Brand and awareness-building
- ✓ Audience identification
- ✓ Lead generation
- ✓ Channel strategy
- ✓ Lifelong learning

3 Program Design

- ✓ Market intelligence
- ✓ Portfolio optimization
- ✓ Online strategy
- ✓ Industry futures

4 Market Innovation

- ✓ Emerging credentials
- ✓ Education technology
- ✓ Alternative providers
- ✓ Employer partnerships
- ✓ Policy landscape

Connect our library to your current initiatives

Offering unparalleled insight, educational support, and practical guidance



Executive Roundtables

Summits focused on latest best practice and strategy research, with discussion and peer networking



Market Insights

Customized data to inform program content, launch, and marketing or to identify offerings that serve local demand



Leadership Summits

Sessions for members of the marketing leadership team to support implementation and build consensus



Benchmarking Surveys

Data collection and customized reports to compare internal operations to similar institutions



Briefings and Working Sessions

Facilitated sessions to educate your team, kick-start taskforce initiatives, and build consensus among campus leaders



Strategy Reports

Detailed studies featuring hundreds of innovative ideas addressing leaders' most pressing challenges



Expert Consultations

Phone and email consultations with researchers to discuss your strategy, provide advice, and offer implementation guidance



Best Practice and Resource Library

EAB.com contains all past studies, recorded webconferences, toolkits



Strategic Leader

Thought partner and single point of contact to provide insight and guidance throughout the partnership

Engage with experts and network with peers

Access turnkey resources to support implementation

A Moment of Opportunity and Threat for PCO¹ Leaders

PCO Education More Essential, and More Competitive, Than Ever Before



Anticipate the Next Wave of Competition

- Evaluate strength of organizational structure against competitors and peers
- Examine shifts in market concentration and innovative emerging models for PCO programs
- Reassess your portfolio mix and strategy
- Prepare for downstream impacts of fewer undergraduate enrollments

Embed AI Skills Across Programs and Curricula

- Examine what adult learners need to reskill/upskill for how AI is changing the workplace
- Explore how to build AI into existing programs and curricula across disciplines

Implement a Financially Viable Microcredential Portfolio

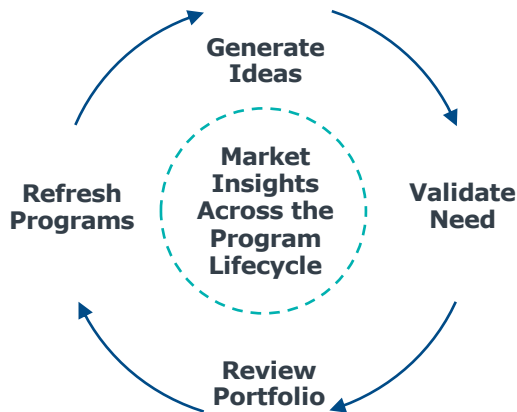
- Develop proposal and evaluation practices that support financially sound microcredentials
- Build for stackability from the start
- Enhance prior learning assessment and admissions policies to better support microcredential offerings

1) Professional, continuing, and online

Activate Data-Informed Growth Decisions: EAB Market Insights

Custom Analysis and Consultation to Strengthen Program and Portfolio Growth Strategy

**EAB Supports Partners
at Every Stage of Growth**



**Rich Data Inputs and Expert
Analysis Comprise Every Answer**

Lightcast

We partner with industry-leader Lightcast for **real-time labor market intelligence** and add analysis of:



Enrollment and
conferral trends



Competitor
program
positioning



Prospect-facing
website and inquiry
process audits



BLS projections
and Census data



Peer program
curricula



Industry trends
and literature

How You Can Partner with EAB in 2024

1

Surface regional market-aligned program ideas with a [Market Opportunity Scan](#)

2

Find your market-aligned existing programs with a [Portfolio Health Check](#)

3

Refresh existing programs with a [360° Program Assessment](#)

Customizing Your EAB.com Experience

Create an Account & Subscribe to Key Emails and Topics



Getting Started With EAB's Website

A partnership with EAB provides colleges and universities with research, insights, and actionable advice in EAB's expert terrain. EAB works closely with leaders within each division and across campus to inform thinking, build consensus, and execute strategy that's right for each campus. In addition, **all staff across campus have access to EAB's website** and can access any practice, tool, or webinar available within their institution's membership.

Step-by-Step Guide for Your First Log-in

The site is protected for members-only access. Use these instructions to obtain your unique password.

1. Go to the EAB's website, located at www.eab.com
2. Select the "Login" link in the upper right-hand corner above the search bar. Select "Create an account."
3. Use the drop-down menus to select the **Country, City, and State** where you is located. This is typically where the institution is headquartered.
4. Choose your **Organization Name** from the drop-down menu. Select "Go."
5. Enter your **Name and Contact Information**. Select "Register Now."
6. You will receive an email to your institutional email address. Click the link **password** and confirm your account.

Note: It is important to use your institution e-mail address when requesting a site. Gmail, Yahoo, and personal email domains will not work.

What You'll Find

Executive Roundtable & Team Summit Logistics and Materials

Collaborative and Insights

Toolkits and Diagnostics

Research & Reports

Studies, Whitepapers, and Webinars

Thinking of launching a certificate program? Avoid these 3 mistakes.

EAB Daily Briefing <EABDailyBriefing@hello.eab.com>
To: Murphy, Lee



Thinking of launching a certificate program? Avoid these 3 mistakes.

The certificate market can be tricky to navigate given data limitations. However, avoiding these three mistakes can better inform decision-making on certificate programming—and counter risky assumptions.

AVOID THESE MISTAKES »

How 104 advancement teams have weathered a bleak start to FY2021

We asked our partners to share how big of a performance change they saw from the start of their fiscal years through December 31, compared to the same period during the previous year.

1

[Subscribe to the Daily Briefing here](#)

2

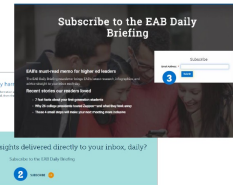
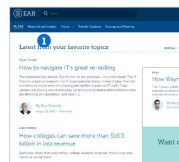
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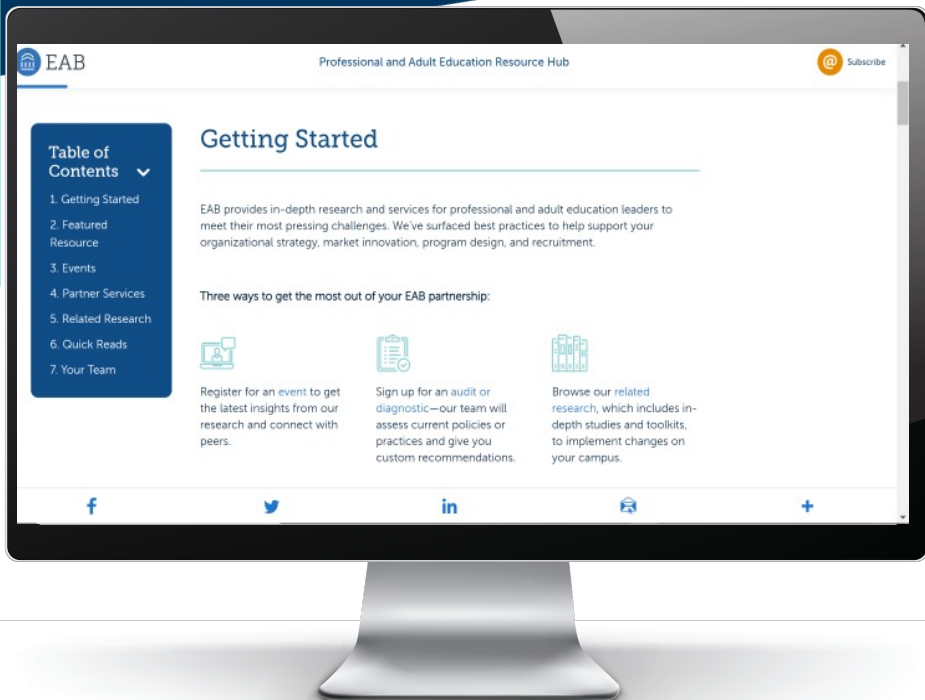
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