



Welcome to Today's WCET Webcast



JUNE 11, 2026

The webcast will begin shortly. No audio is being broadcast at this time.

A recording of this webcast will be available on the WCET website next week.

WCET events may not be recorded or rebroadcast without our written consent.

Due to previous issues with repurposed content, AI notetakers will be removed.

We apologize for any inconvenience.



Welcome!



Megan Raymond

Senior Director, Membership and
Programs, WCET

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- Slides can be downloaded via the link in chat.
- Please use the Question box for questions and Chat for other information exchange.
- Slides, recording, and shared resources will be emailed to attendees.

Accessibility Commitment

WCET is committed to creating inclusive and accessible materials. Our slides are designed with high-contrast visuals, large text, and descriptive alt text for images.

You can scan the QR code to download the slides on your phone if you prefer.

If you need the slides in an alternative format or additional accommodations, please let us know. We value your feedback to make our content accessible for everyone.





Designing for Demand: Online Students Want Flexibility and AI Guidance

June 11, 2026



Hosted in partnership with:



Risepoint



● ● ● Today's Moderator

Van Davis

Executive Director, WCET

Vice President, Digital
Learning, WICHE

vdavis@wiche.edu



Speakers



TEKOYA BOYKINS

Director, Academic Program Strategy
Risepoint



MARYBETH "MB" MITCHAM

Assistant Professor
Director of the Online MPH Program
George Mason University

Agenda

- About Risepoint & George Mason University
- 2026 Voice of the Online Learner
 - Emerging findings
 - Central themes
 - Takeaways for university leadership
- Online Education & AI: George Mason University
- Q & A



Risepoint helps universities grow by expanding access to affordable, workforce-focused programs that deliver high ROI for students.



About Risepoint

Since inception, we have supported over 825,000 students, worked alongside over 22K instructors, and launched over 25K programs. Currently, we:



serve **100 university partners**



will talk to over **1,000,000** prospective students this year



in 2025, we supported over **107,000 students**



worked alongside over **2,100 faculty members**



supported over **2,300 programs**

We have supported

825k+

students as they earned
their online degrees



About George Mason University (GMU)

Our Mission

A public, comprehensive, research university established by the Commonwealth of Virginia in the National Capital Region, we are an innovative and inclusive academic community committed to creating a more just, free, and prosperous world.



R1 in VA

One of the youngest R1 ranked universities with primary campus in Fairfax, VA

Large Reach

40,000+ enrollment
50+ online and hybrid programs

High Student ROI

85% of graduates report positive career outcomes in six months



About GMU Online MPH Program



Online Master of Public Health

Earn a Nationally Recognized MPH Degree from Virginia's First College of Public Health

Located in Virginia. Serving the World.

Drive public health change at the social, environmental, and community levels using evidence-based approaches with George Mason University's online Master of Public Health.

This flexible degree is grounded in experiential, hands-on learning. Throughout your program, you'll work in diverse public health spaces, gain experience through applied fieldwork, and make professional connections with alumni and other public health experts.

George Mason's MPH was recognized in the 2023 U.S. News & World Report rankings of graduate and public health programs.¹ Students benefit from courses led by renowned faculty and a legacy of excellence from Virginia's first College of Public Health.

Our program is accredited by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH), so you'll graduate eligible to sit for the Certified in Public Health (CPH) examination. You will also be qualified to pursue rewarding careers in a variety of public health settings.

Discover the rich online learning experiences available exclusively from Virginia's largest research university.

Download a Program Brochure

The brochure includes program details, course information, and more. Get your copy and connect with an admissions representative by completing the following form.

* REQUIRED FIELD

FIRST NAME*	LAST NAME*
<input type="text" value="First Name"/>	<input type="text" value="Last Name"/>
EMAIL*	PHONE NUMBER*
<input type="text" value="Email"/>	<input type="text" value="+1 Phone Number"/>
ZIP CODE*	
<input type="text" value="Zip Code"/>	

REQUEST INFO

OR CALL 844-851-0923

By submitting this form, I am providing my digital signature agreeing that George Mason University and its agent, Risepoint, may email me or contact me regarding educational services by telephone and/or text message utilizing automated technology or a pre-recorded message at the telephone number(s) provided above.

Concentrations

Community Health Promotion (CMHP)

Epidemiology (EPID)

Food Security and Nutrition (FSN)

Global Health (GLOH)

Health Equity and Social Justice (HESJ)

Health Policy (HTHP)

Public Health Practice (PHP)

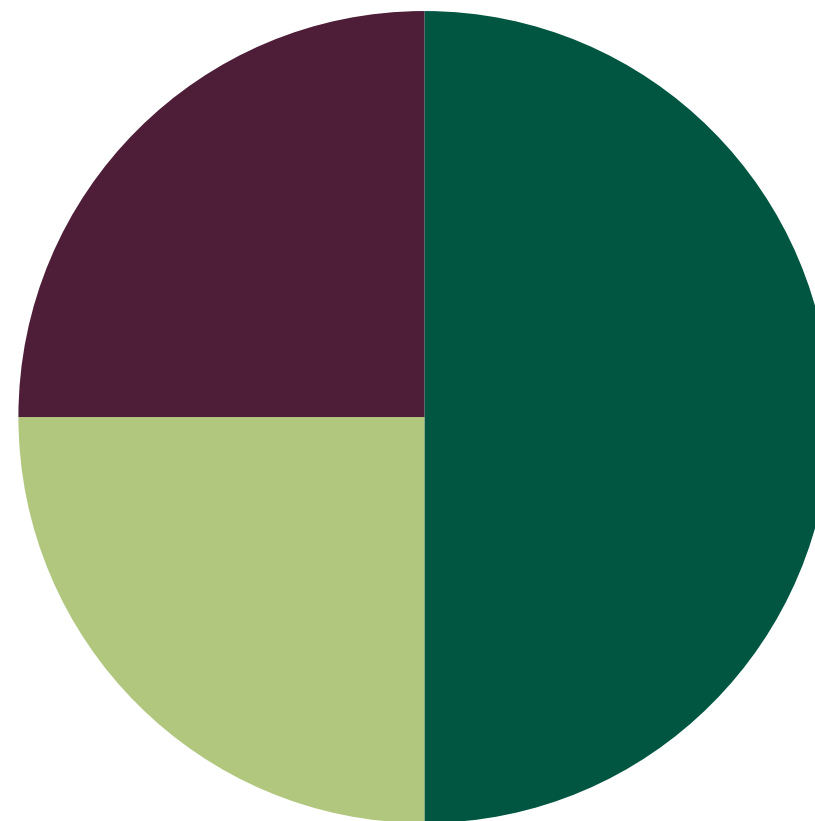


2026 Voice of the Online Learner



Introduction

Based on insights from 4,002 students across the U.S., the *Voice of the Online Learner* findings point to a modern learner who is an increasingly self-directed, digitally fluent, and career-anchored adult, expecting institutions to deliver flexibility, relevance, and guidance in a world being actively reshaped by AI.



- 50% currently enrolled in an online program
- 25% currently looking for and have firm plans to enroll in an online program in the next 12 months
- 25% graduated from an online program within the last 12 months



Who are online learners?

Juggling multiple personal and professional responsibilities, online learners are hard-working adults who are determined to advance in their careers.

89%

work while pursuing degree
(77% full-time,
12% part-time)

54%

are working parents or
parents seeking
employment

56%

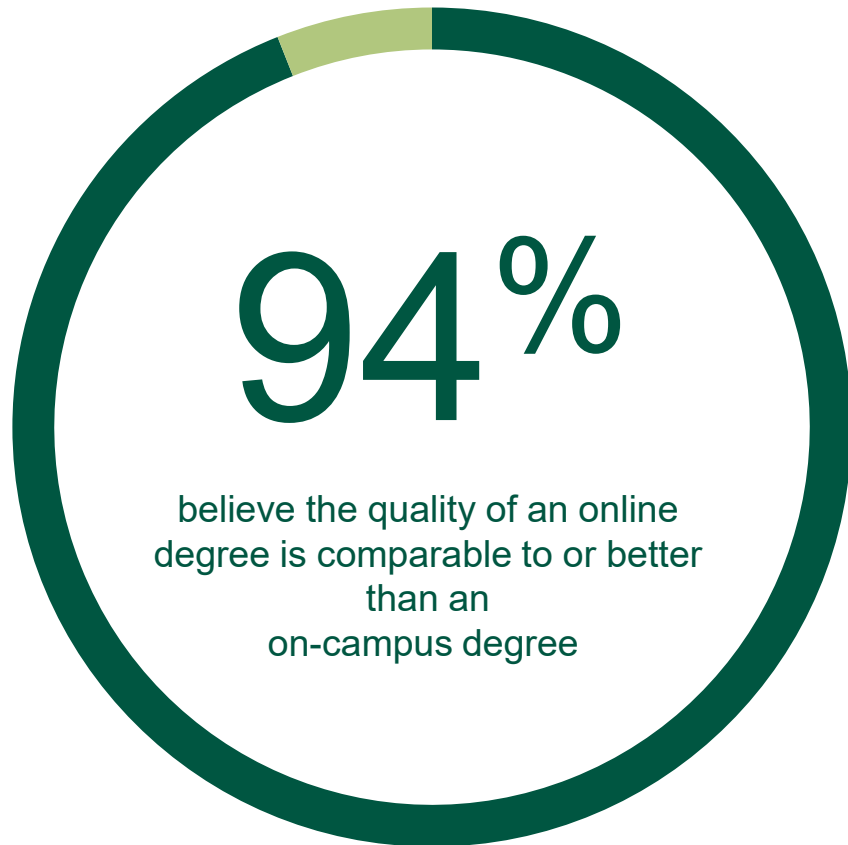
have one or more
children under the age
of 18

38%

of online
undergraduate
students are the first
in their family to
attend college



Quality and value of online degree programs



AI-related findings



Discovery is becoming more digital and more AI-assisted

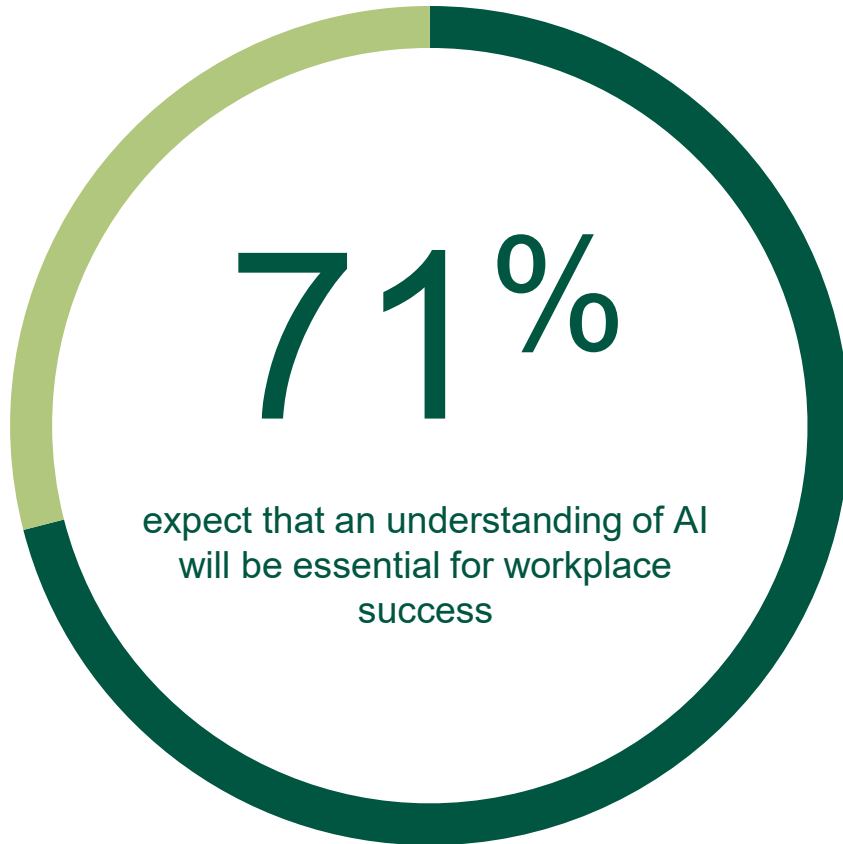
When asked, *"How did you learn about the schools you researched or considered?"*, digital channels showed **upticks of 5 percentage points or more** in student usage during the discovery process.

Particularly notable is the increase in use of AI from 6% in 2025 to 17% in 2026.

Digital channels	2025	2026	Change
Artificial intelligence website or app	6%	17%	+11
Program review websites	11%	18%	+7
Web advertisements	11%	17%	+7
Ads on college search sites	11%	16%	+5



Gen AI is a reality, not a future concept



"As an educator and inspiring leader, I want guidance that moves beyond theory and provides structured, real-world applications that support both student achievement and responsible innovation."

Laquita, Post-Graduate Education Specialist
in Educational Leadership, Principalship



Learners are expecting guidance on Gen AI

What type of guidance do you seek from your university around AI?

How to use AI responsibly and ethically in coursework

42%

Clear guidelines on when AI use is allowed or not allowed

41%

How to use AI to improve productivity
(e.g., brainstorming, drafting, data analysis)

38%

Examples of how AI is being used in real-world
professional settings

37%

How AI may impact future jobs and required skills

35%

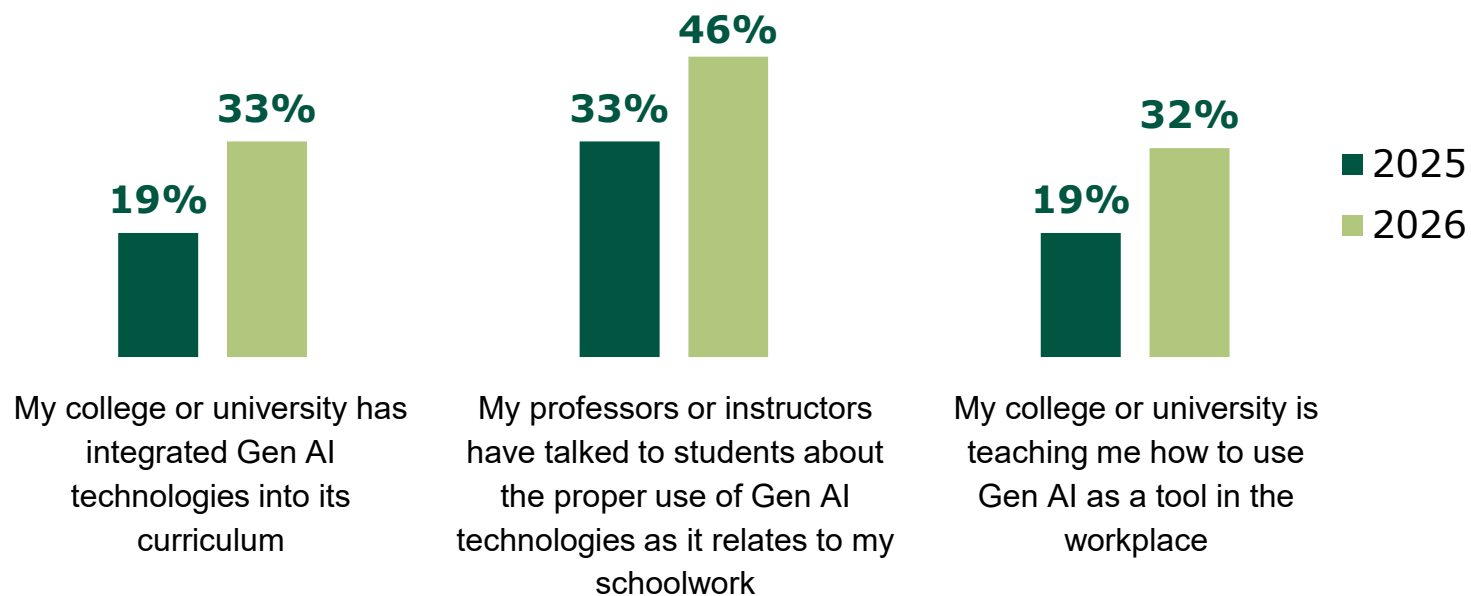


Institutions are racing to meet the demand for guidance around Gen AI

Even with significant gains, there is still a disparity between what learners are asking for and the guidance they're receiving on new technology.

University leaders and instructors need to move faster to provide what students are seeking.

How often have you had the following experiences with Gen AI technologies in your online program at your college or university?



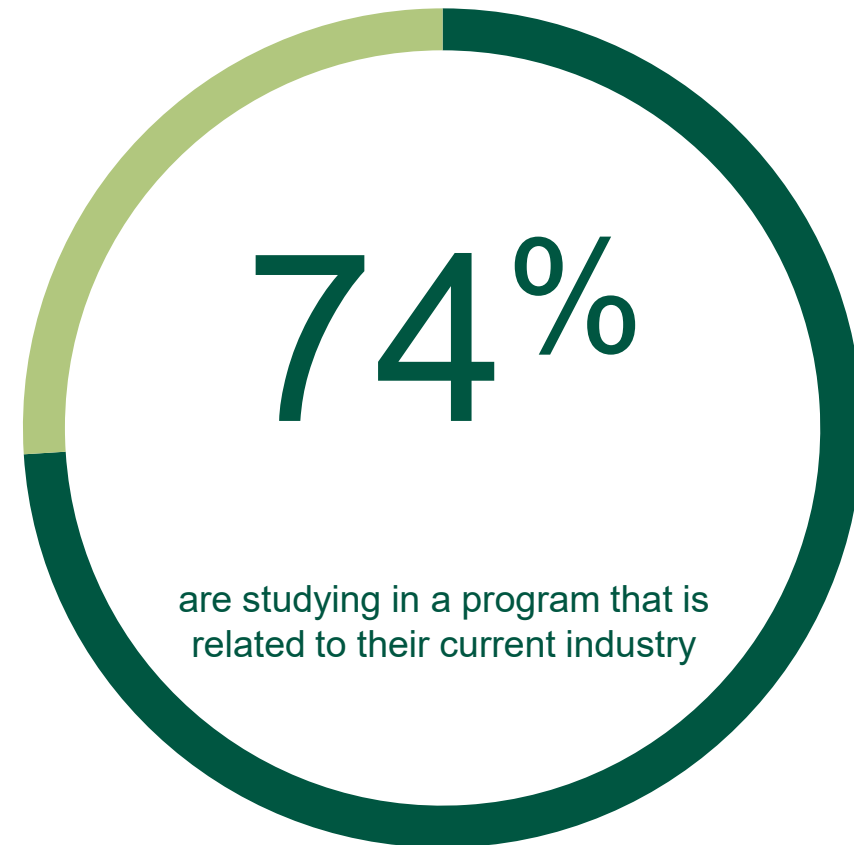
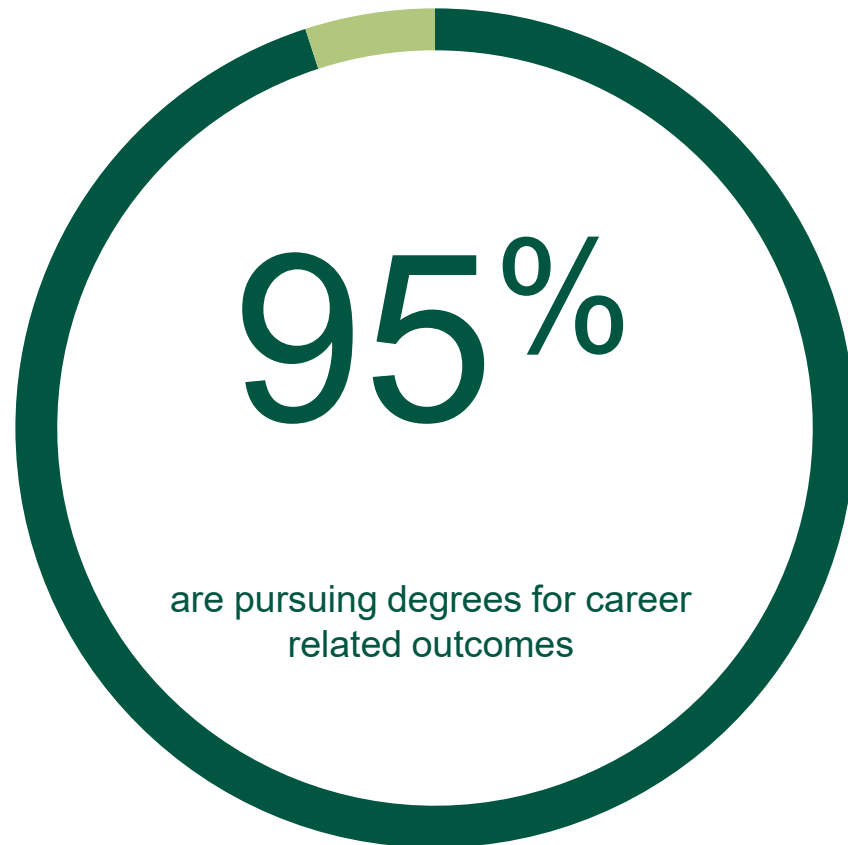
(Percentage who answered Always or Most of the Time)



Other central themes



Career advancement is the primary motivator



Affordability is the top decision factor

Affordability has been the top decision factor for the past 13 years.

As such, regional universities are well positioned to support working adults through affordable online programs with a high return on investment.

Top five sources of funding:

Household income and/or savings

45%

Federal loans

39%

Federal grants

29%

Employer tuition assistance or reimbursement program

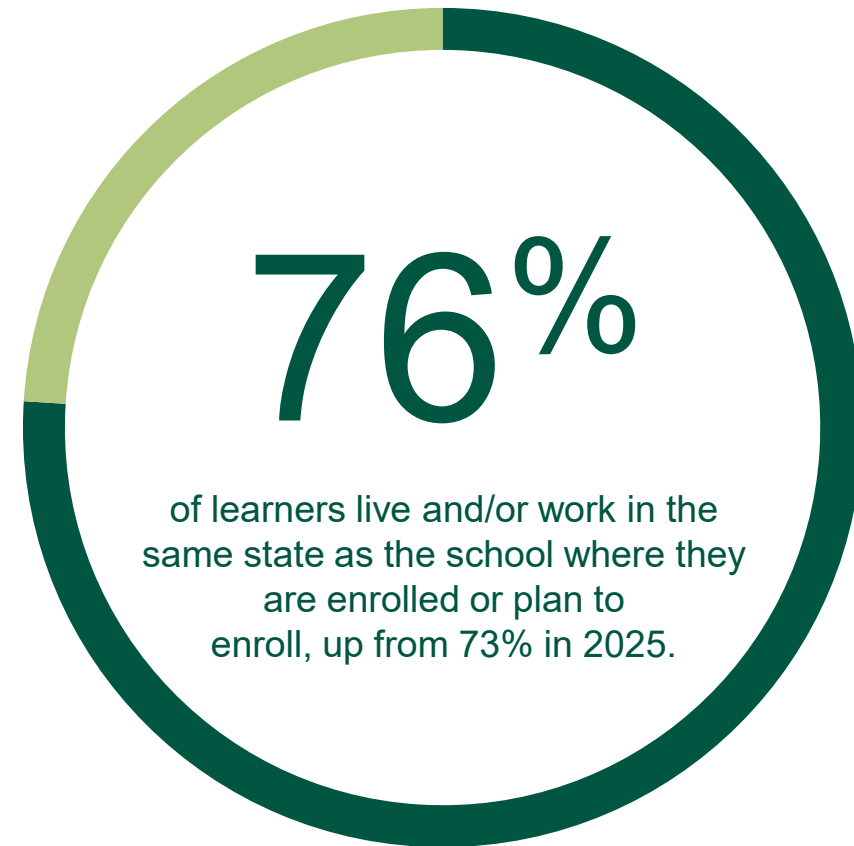
28%

Scholarships

25%



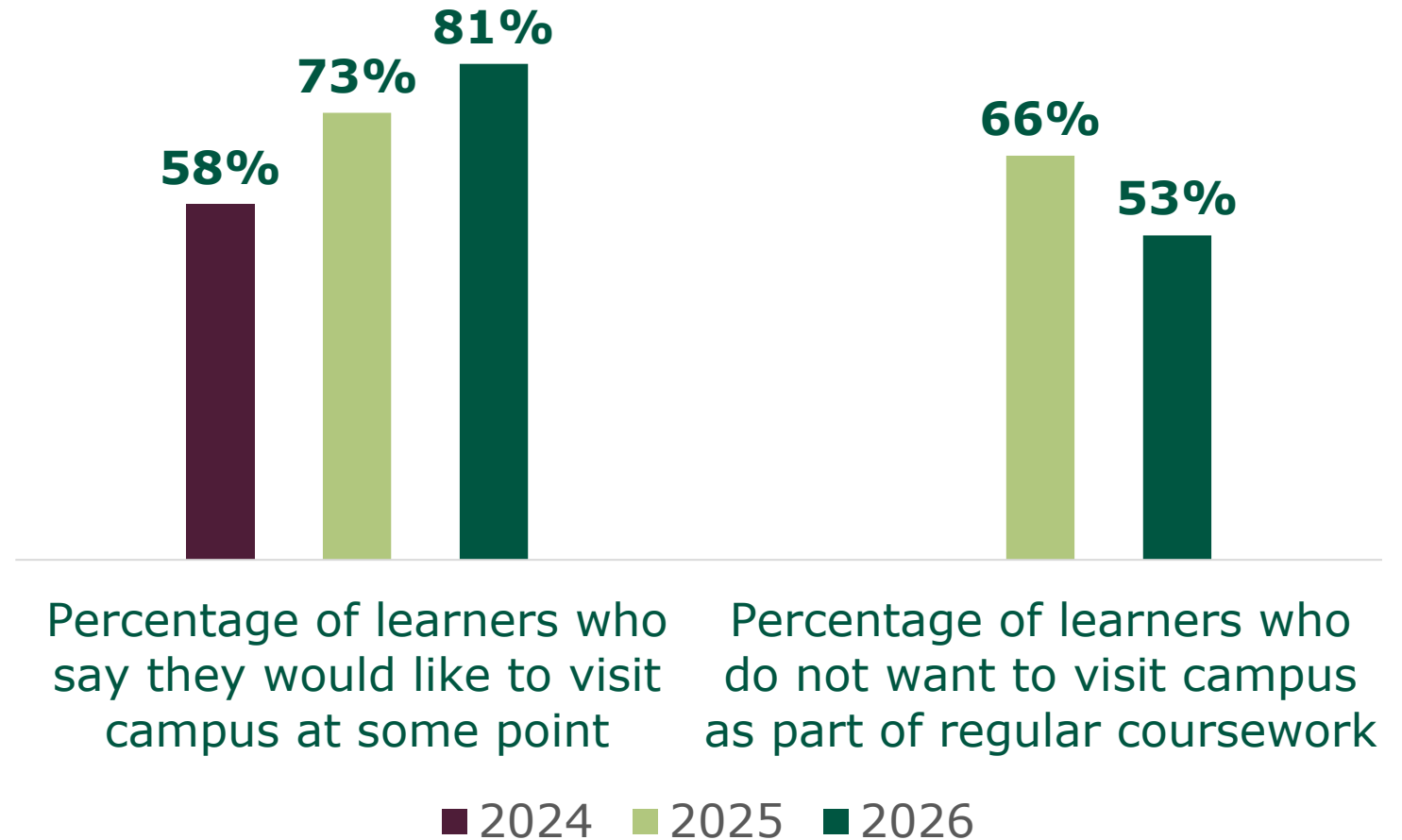
Learners choose modality *and* locality



Flexibility is non-negotiable, but desire for connection is rising

60%

choose to pursue an online degree for the flexibility of taking classes wherever they want



Takeaways for university leadership



Takeaways for university leadership

1. Evolving program discovery
2. Guidance and urgency around Gen AI
3. Career advancement
4. Affordability
5. Flexibility in programming
6. Purpose-driven connection



Conclusion

For the past 15 years, online students have shared what matters most to them—affordability, flexibility, and career advancement.

Yet, change is also a constant. As AI rapidly impacts their lives and careers, students are expecting to leverage new technology in all areas of their educational journeys, starting with program discovery and continuing into their careers.



Online Education & AI: George Mason University



Why I Fell in Love with Online Education (and Still Love It)

- Life plot twists
- Online education AAS-PhD
- The Good, the Bad and the Ugly
- First-hand knowledge of many students' experiences
- Online bridges the gap
- Place-based stewardship through online education
- Creativity and personality can still shine (students and faculty)



Evolving Online Education: Tools

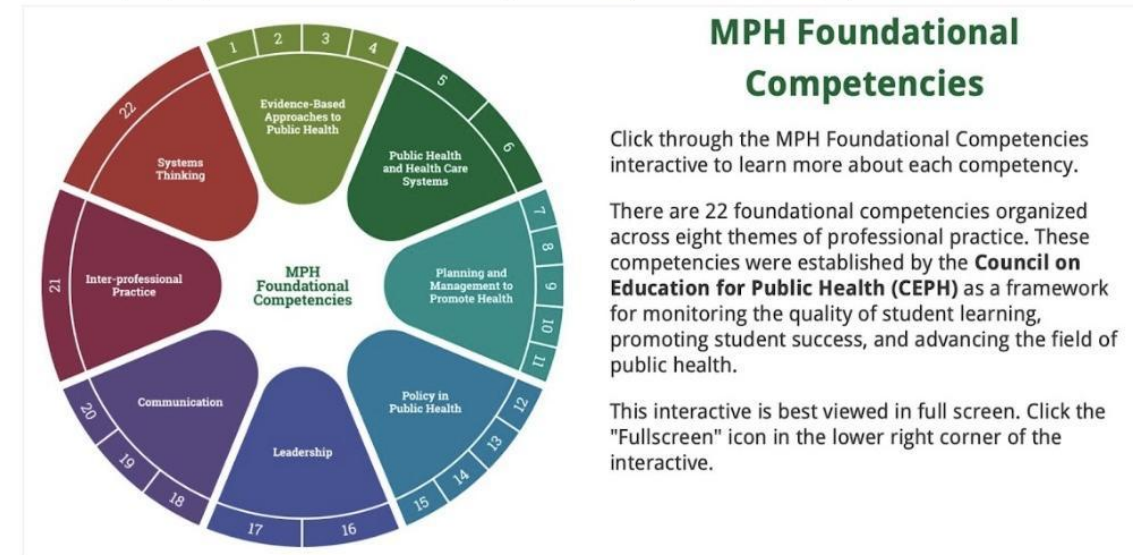
Most of the content in this activity is from the following resources:

- [10 Great Public Health Achievements US 1900-1999](#)
- [10 Great Public Health Achievements US 2000-2010](#)
- [10 Great Public Health Achievements Worldwide 2000-2010](#)



These MPH Foundational Competencies, updated in August 2021, were established by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH). The courses in this program are designed to help you develop competency in all the areas displayed in the chart. In this course, you will develop knowledge and skill in the following competencies:

- 18. Select communication strategies for different audiences and sectors.
- 19a. Communicate audience-appropriate (i.e., non-academic, non-peer audience) public health content, in writing.
- 20. Describe the importance of cultural competence in communicating public health content.
- 21. Integrate perspectives from other sectors and/or professions to promote and advance population health.



MPH Foundational Competencies

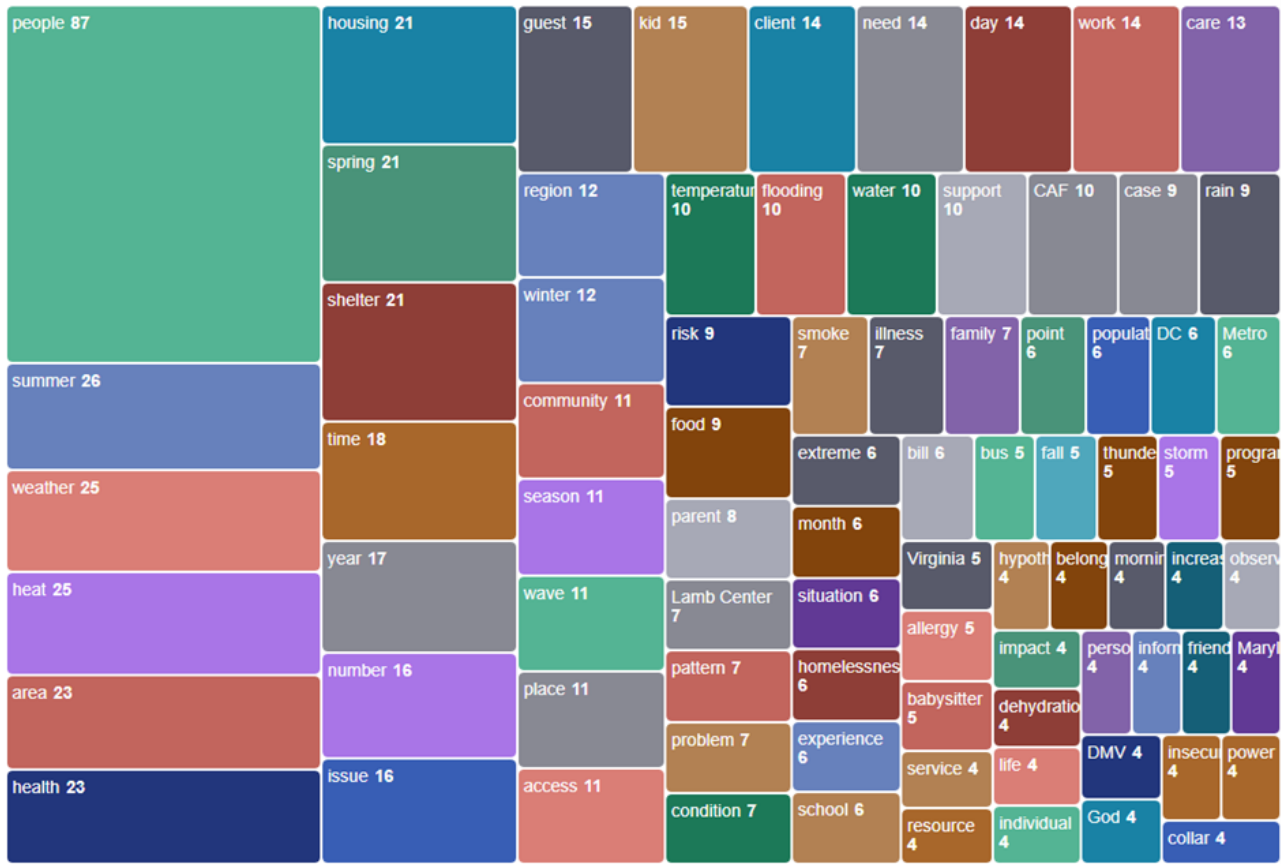
Click through the MPH Foundational Competencies interactive to learn more about each competency.

There are 22 foundational competencies organized across eight themes of professional practice. These competencies were established by the **Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH)** as a framework for monitoring the quality of student learning, promoting student success, and advancing the field of public health.

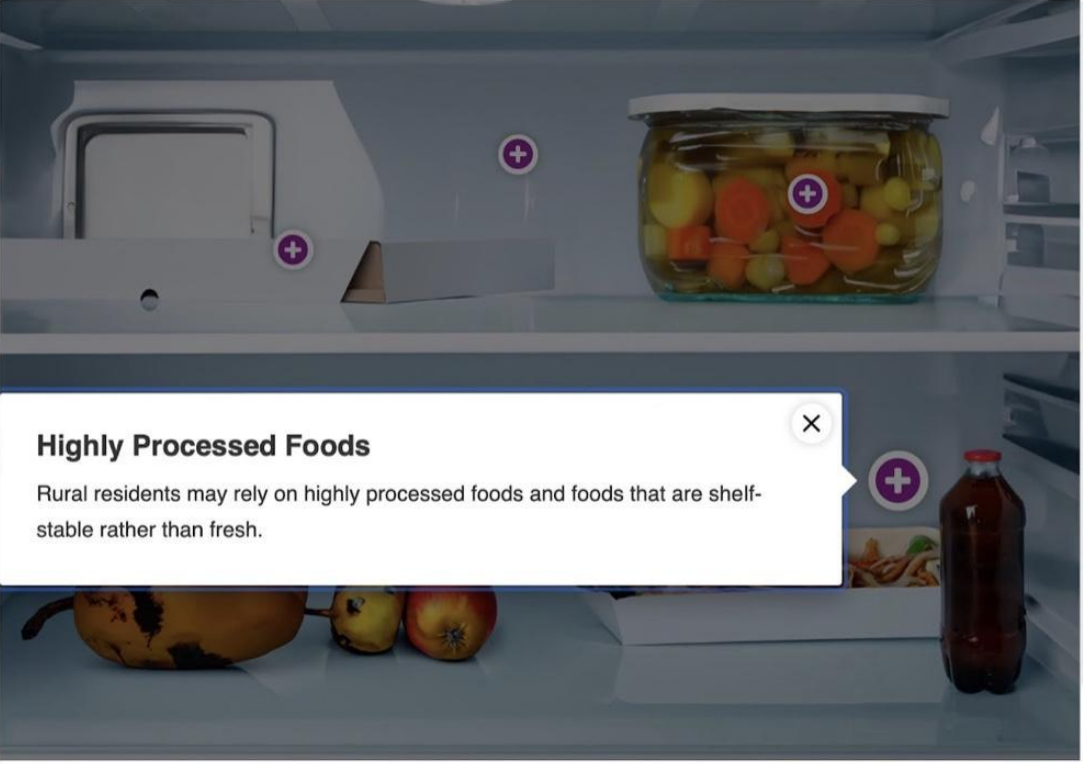
This interactive is best viewed in full screen. Click the "Fullscreen" icon in the lower right corner of the interactive.



Evolving Online Education: Technology



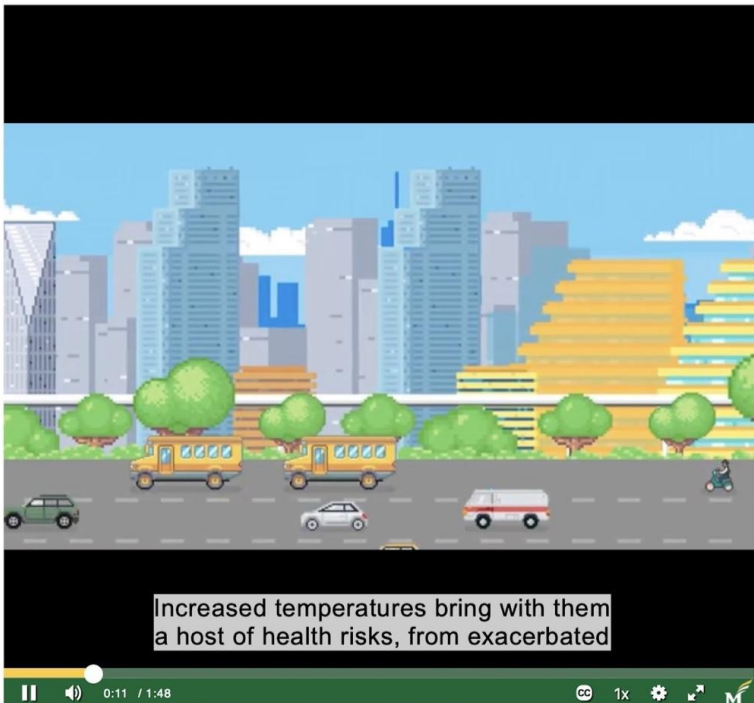
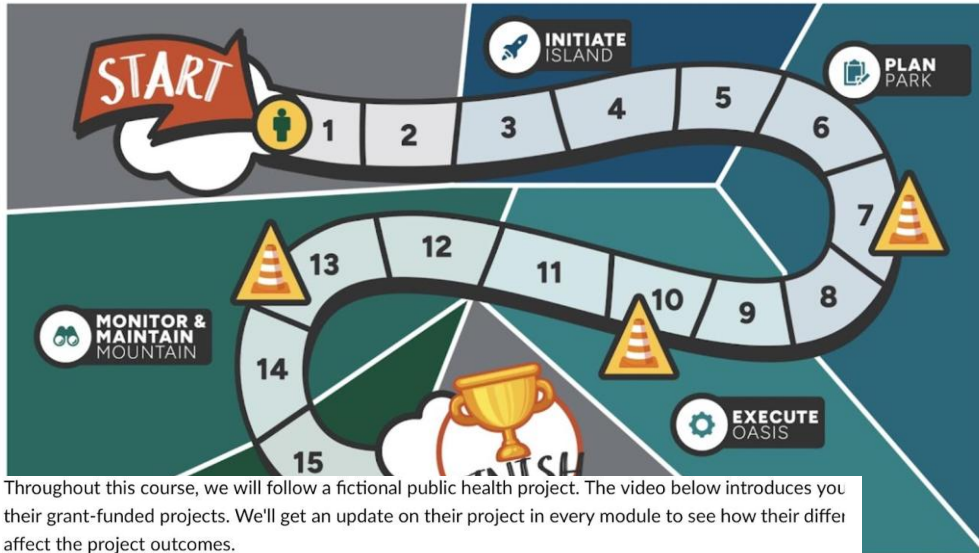
These hotspot interactives point out some food factors in a rural home.



It's Your Turn!

As you progress through this course and the "game" of project management, you'll see a page like this in every learning module, showing where you are on the game board and directing you toward the finish line.

As you can see, there will be some challenges along the way, marked by the hazard cones. As with any game, expect some surprises.



Overview

This assignment will assess your progress on the following learning objectives:

- Differentiate between programs and projects.
- List the steps in the project lifecycle.
- Describe different tools and methods used in project management.

In this module, we learned about the project life cycle, which can be used to create a project (point-in-time effort with a measurable output), which can lead to the creation of a program (ongoing measurable outcomes).

Discussion Prompt

For your discussion board post, please brainstorm and identify one public health project that you would like to create, if time, effort, finances, and feasibility were not an issue. Write a one-paragraph summary of why you have chosen this project. In it, include the identified problem, any policies or funding issues that affect the problem, why this problem is a problem (how is it impacting the local community/environment/resources), and how your proposed project should address that problem. Using the project life cycle model, identify the project life cycle phases and the potential steps that you would need to take in each of those phases to make your proposed project a reality (hint – a SWOT analysis can be a good place to start!).

Initial/Original Post

Please post what you view as the appropriate response to the above prompts. Your initial post should be 150-300 words. Please respond with a clear, well-formulated thesis, sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling count. Support all posts with appropriate rationale and citations from readings; appropriately document sources.

Responding to Others

Response to at least one classmate's posting should be ~200 words and be thoughtful, substantial, polite, and more extensive than a simple "well done" phrase or "I agree." Consider points of agreement, disagreement, assumptions, and value judgments.

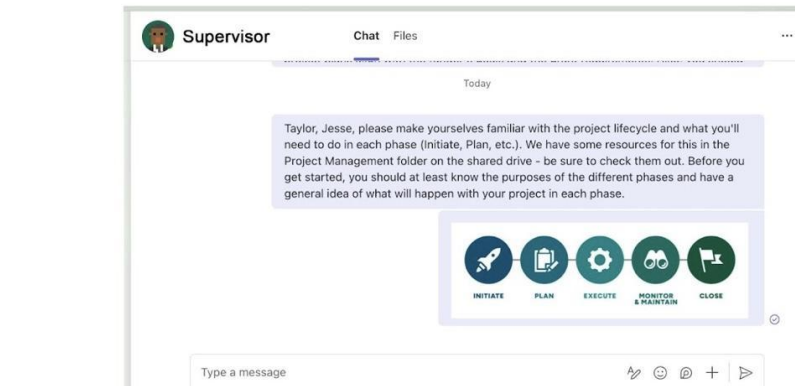
Due Dates and Grading

Please see the [Course Schedule](#) for all course due dates.

To view the rubric for this assignment, click the three vertical dots in the upper-right of this discussion page and choose **Show Rubric**.



As part of their preparation, the project managers are encouraged by their supervisor to review the different stages of their project life cycles, so that they can proactively plan their design. Do they or don't they?



Evolving Online Education: Stories

This interactive contains a story with reflection points. You are not required to save your work; this activity is ungraded.

WELCOME TO FRANKLIN

POPULATION 4,879

This is a story of two women who both live in the small rural community of Franklin. Franklin has fewer than 5,000 residents, many of whom are obese and overweight. The local health department is county-based and chronically understaffed.

Both of the women in our story have health issues related to obesity and poor nutrition. Let's see what can be done to help them.

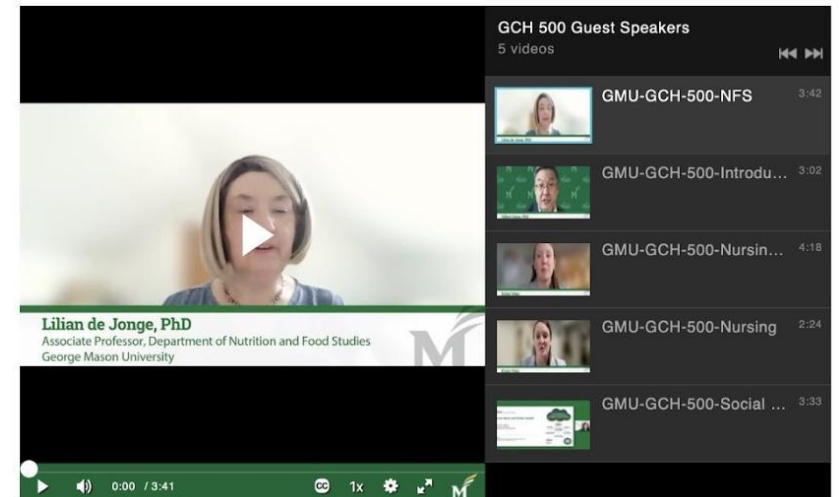


Use the buttons beneath the presentation to advance to the next page.

◀ 2 / 15 ▶

In this series of videos, Mason faculty and other stakeholders introduce several disciplines in Global Community Health (GCH). The following list displays the names of the speakers and their topics.

1. Dr. Lilian de Jonge, Nutrition and Food Studies (NFS)
2. Dr. Gilbert Gimm, Master's in Health Administration (MHA)
3. Ms. Kristy Vitter, School Health Coordinator
4. Ms. Kristy Vitter, School of Nursing Alum
5. Dr. Emily Ihara, Master's of Social Work (MSW)



GCH 500 Guest Speakers
5 videos

- GMU-GCH-500-NFS 3:42
- GMU-GCH-500-Intro... 3:02
- GMU-GCH-500-Nursin... 4:18
- GMU-GCH-500-Nursing 2:24
- GMU-GCH-500-Social ... 3:33

Lilian de Jonge, PhD
Associate Professor, Department of Nutrition and Food Studies
George Mason University

0:00 / 3:41



AI and Public Health

Concerns if NOT Used

- Students will be left behind (workforce concern)
- Appearance of programmatic irrelevance
- Missed learning opportunity
- Perceived lack of consistency with other institutions
- Lost value in technological advancement
- Additional work for faculty

Concerns if Used

Misinformation and disinformation
Environmental impact
Loss of unique human voice
Privacy concerns
Sourcing concerns
Reduced impact from the learning process
Reliance on aids
Unfair grading
Irrelevance of online education



AI and Public Health

Policy Decisions

Technology was evolving very quickly, and faculty members had diverse opinions and concerns, making it challenging to decide on a 'one-size-fits-all' policy for the department.

Current Policy

No standardized policy (at the institutional or department level); every faculty member has academic freedom to choose what works best for their classroom. However, the AI policy must clearly be stated in the syllabus.



AI and My Classes: Example Language

Generative-AI and Academic Integrity

When explicitly stated by the instructor, Generative AI tools are allowed on the named assignment. Students will be directed if and when citation or statement-of-usage direction is required. If AI is allowed, it must always be cited ([ChatGPT Citations | Formats & Examples](#)). Use of these tools on any assignment not specified will be considered a violation of the academic integrity policy. All academic integrity violations will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.



AI and My Classes: Example Assignment Forbidden



Instructions

This assignment is an opportunity for you to practice interviewing (qualitative) and performing initial coding of responses.

Steps for this assignment:

1. Using the interview, survey, and focus group questions you developed in week 9, interview one person, and record their responses to those questions. You should ask them ALL of the questions you developed, regardless of whether those questions are survey, interview, or focus group questions.
2. Generate your transcript from that interview. Transcripts can be generated using a notes app, the transcript option in Zoom/Teams, or using other transcript apps. **Your transcript must show time-stamping and differentiate between the different voices (this step helps to validate that the interview actually took place).**
3. Using the coding strategies presented in this lesson, identify (code) the top three themes that emerged from your responses.
 - You must illustrate your coding by highlighting those phrases/sentences in the responses, using color coding to differentiate the different coded areas.
 - You must also share your top three themes/terms in a codebook (for this assignment, a simple graphic or chart will work).

A few things to note this week:

You DO need a cover page, but you do NOT need to cite any information or have any references/reference pages.

You can interview anyone, regardless of whether they are related to you (an excellent opportunity to pester a loved one!). However, your best (most valid) responses would come from interviewing someone from the community or exhibiting the health issue you identified.

You do NOT need to explain your findings yet.

A reminder of what must be included for this assignment: Your transcript, coding



AI and My Classes: Example Assignment Allowed

Module 02 Extra Credit Assignment (Optional)

Create Your Character

Identify someone in a leadership role. This role does not have to be in public health—it could be in education, fabrication, sales, medicine, non-profit work, the care of others (whether those others are small humans, other-abled humans, elderly humans, vulnerable humans, or non-human animals), or others.

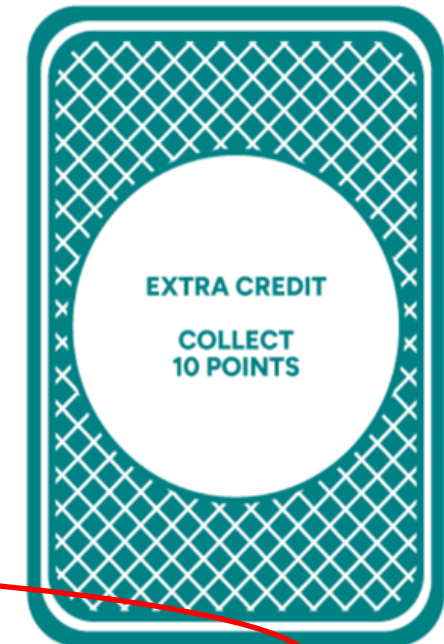
Using what you know about this person, create a descriptive background of an avatar or NPC (non-player character). This descriptive background should include ethnicity, approximate age, family status (children/relationships/friends, etc.), an overview of their educational/work backgrounds, and any descriptions of other characteristics that could affect their leadership skills. Furthermore, this descriptive background should also include their current vocational role/title, and a very short description of their leadership skills.

How do they lead? By example? Through micromanaging? Through inconsistent feedback? Authentically? In a biased manner?

Your description should be vivid enough to allow the reader a glimpse into your character's background (enough to predict some, at least, of what motivates them), but without being so specific that an actual person could be identified.

Please upload your NPC/avatar's name and description (character and physical—please use a virtual representation to support your written description) in this optional, extra-credit discussion board.

**Note from Dr. Mitcham that you MAY use AI to generate a virtual representation of your character and to create a character description, but please remember that each character must represent the real-life possible characteristics in any human being that include strengths, weaknesses, and areas of mediocrity!*



Student Feedback

"This class **deepened my interest in making changes in communities** and gave me the confidence to pursue these opportunities. I graduate with my bachelor's degree in May, and I can't wait to use everything I've learned from this course in future work."

"Course was organized in a fun way as a game board model."

"[I appreciated the] resources provided such as links or articles that we can go back and **use in our current or future jobs**. Also, the interactive tests and scenarios provided."

"The online videos for the modules were very helpful and motivational."

"Despite my preconceived notion that the material would be somewhat uninteresting, **real-life examples provided much needed context and relevance!** I was surprised by how interested I was in the material and how practical it felt."



The Heart of the Issue

What are we doing to support our students' development and help set them up for success in the workplace?

What does success look like?



Takeaways for University Leadership

1. Understand that online education and AI are here to stay
2. Ask the question: How can we best holistically support our students?
3. Understand that a tool is as effective as its user and does not replace the human value of creativity and innovation





Thank you

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AUDIENCE QUESTIONS



Stay Connected

WCET is the leader in the practice, policy & advocacy of digital learning in higher education.

We envision a future where high-quality digital learning fosters success for educators and learners.

Learn more about the benefits of joining our community:
wcet.wiche.edu/join-us

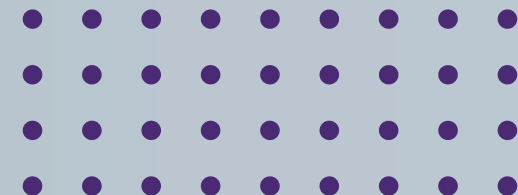
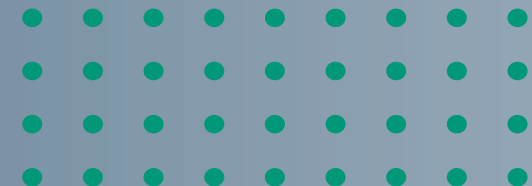
Additional Information and Resources



The webcast recording and additional resources will be available in the next week: wcet.wiche.edu/events/webcasts.



Visit wcet.wiche.edu to explore our Policy and Practice work, Events, Membership, and Sponsorship.



Upcoming WCET Events

Learn more and register: wcet.wiche.edu/events

- For WCET members:
 - Beyond Academic Integrity: Students, AI, and Mental Wellness—What Higher Ed Can Do – June 26, Noon MT
 - Beyond the LMS Outage: Strengthening Continuity and Preparedness – July 17, Noon MT (*Registration Full*)
- Understanding Recent Federal Department of Education Policy and Practice Updates – July 15, Noon MT

Join us in Minneapolis!

WCET 2026

OCTOBER 14-16, 2026

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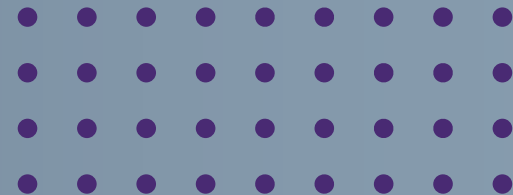
 **Sophia**



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THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING!

