

2025

# Pan-Canadian Report on Digital Learning Trends

---



Author

Dr. Nicole Johnson



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

---

## Acknowledgements

The Canadian Digital Learning Research Association (CDLRA)'s research initiatives are made possible with the support of our sponsors and partners. The primary funding agencies for the 2025 Pan-Canadian Digital Learning Trends Survey were eCampusOntario, Risepoint, BCcampus, Campus Manitoba, and D2L. We also thank our partner organizations, Academica Group, Nicole Johnson Research and Consulting, Contact North | Contact Nord, Bay View Analytics, and WCET, for their support. Findings from a survey of Canadian students conducted by Academica Group are highlighted in the 2025 Pan-Canadian Report and contrasted with the CDLRA findings.

In addition, we acknowledge the individuals who served on CDLRA's Board of Directors in 2025 (Dr. Evan Cortens, Sam Charles, Dr. Charlene VanLeewen, Éric Martel, and Dr. Roger Pizarro Milian) and the CDLRA Research Steering Committee (Dr. Nicole Johnson, Dr. Stephanie McKeown, Dr. Jeff Seaman, and Dr. George Veletsianos).

The CDLRA recognizes that, as a remote team, we live and work in many different locations 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 individuals who have met with our team to discuss potential survey topics, provide feedback on our findings, and 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.

## Sponsors and Partners

The 2025 Pan-Canadian surveys and this report would not be possible without financial support from the following organizations:

### Gold Sponsors



### Additional Sponsors



The CDLRA conducted our 2025 research initiatives in partnership with:



The 2025 Pan-Canadian Report on Digital Learning is released by the Canadian Digital Learning Research Association | Association canadienne de recherche sur la formation en ligne (CDLRA/ACRFL) under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives \(CC-BY-NC-ND\) 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)



---

## Executive Summary

In some ways, it seems as though the Canadian post-secondary system hopped on a rollercoaster ride at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, facing unexpected twists, loops, and terrifying drops ever since. Changes (technological, legislative, economic, and sociopolitical) are impacting post-secondary education and seem to be never-ending at times, leaving many within the sector feeling exhausted. And yet, despite our desire for a pause to reflect and regroup, the changes persist.

The 2024 Pan-Canadian Report questioned whether we are living through a time of profound digital disruption that will find those who do not embrace technology “left behind and ill-equipped to thrive in the future.”<sup>1</sup> The findings indicated that, while technology use has increased, the ways in which post-secondary institutions are using technologies are not revolutionary.

As 2025 has unfolded, it has become clear that the disruptors to the sector (and the drivers of increased technology use in teaching and learning) extend beyond technological innovation itself. Instead, our existing technological infrastructures and tools provide a means to address broader issues in new ways. For instance, as this year’s findings will illustrate, learning modalities other than in-person are being considered as possible solutions to the financial crises happening at many institutions.

The objective of this report is to identify and interpret digital learning trends in Canadian post-secondary education, helping sector leaders navigate the seemingly relentless change as they continue on the rollercoaster with no end to the ride in sight.

### **Changes to the 2025 Report:**

Longtime readers of the CDLRA’s annual reports will notice that this year’s report is missing some of the topics covered in past years. For 2025, the CDLRA shifted some of our survey questions from spring to fall and vice versa to give each of the two annual surveys a specific focus. The data collected for this report, from the first survey, is focused entirely on digital learning trends. Data collected during the second survey will be focused on emerging technologies (including AI), and the findings will be presented during the CDLRA’s first-ever Emerging Technologies Symposium.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://cdlra-acrfl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2024-Pan-Canadian-Report\\_EN.pdf](https://cdlra-acrfl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2024-Pan-Canadian-Report_EN.pdf)

## Key findings from 2025

The survey questions covered the following topics: modality trends, faculty competencies and preferences, student needs and preferences, digital learning challenges, and open educational resources (OER). The key findings that emerged are as follows:

- The majority of respondents expect growth in online and hybrid learning over the next two years. The majority do not expect in-person and multi-access learning to grow.
- When respondents were asked to rate the competencies of faculty at their institution, the majority did not feel confident that all or most faculty had the skills and know-how to teach in modalities that required substantial technology use. Participants also reported room for improvement in how their institution prepares faculty to teach (both online and in person). Conversely, when asked to assess their own competencies, respondents who had taught over the past 12 months tended to view themselves as having the skills and know-how to teach effectively in any modality.
- The CDLRA findings, combined with findings from a student survey conducted by Academica Group, showed that the primary reasons driving student preferences for online or hybrid learning are to manage competing priorities, cost savings, an inability to find affordable housing near campus, and an inability to access affordable and reliable transportation to and from campus.
- Awareness of open educational resources (OER) as well as institutional policies for OER have remained relatively unchanged over time.
- Respondents identified the financial stability of their institutions, student enrolments, developing AI policies and strategies, and academic integrity as the most pressing challenges facing their institutions.



## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	1
<b>Sponsors and Partners</b> .....	2
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	3
Changes to the 2025 Report:.....	3
Key findings from 2025.....	4
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	5
<b>Introduction</b> .....	6
<b>Digital Learning Trends</b> .....	7
Modality, Technology, and Resource Trends.....	8
Technology and Alternative Credential Trends.....	9
<b>Faculty Preferences and Competencies</b> .....	10
Faculty Preferences.....	10
Faculty Competencies for Teaching with Technology.....	13
<b>Student Preferences</b> .....	15
Perceived Drivers of Student Needs and Preferences for Different Modalities.....	16
<b>Open Educational Resources (OER)</b> .....	19
<b>Digital Learning Challenges</b> .....	22
Respondent Comments Regarding Challenges.....	25
<b>Institutional Letter Grades</b> .....	27
Improving Institutional Letter Grades.....	28
<b>Concluding Thoughts</b> .....	30
<b>Methodology</b> .....	32
<b>Contact</b> .....	33



---

## Introduction

The 2025 Pan-Canadian Report is based on the findings from the 2025 Digital Learning Trends Survey, conducted from April 7 through May 30, 2025. Respondents (n=234) held a range of roles at all types of Canadian post-secondary institutions (universities, colleges, polytechnics, and CEGEPS), including administrators, faculty, teaching and learning leaders, instructional designers and educational developers, institutional researchers, library services staff, student support staff, and educational technology specialists.

The survey is part of a larger longitudinal research project, The CDLRA's Pan-Canadian Digital Learning Survey Project, through which the CDLRA has been conducting annual surveys since 2017 to track digital learning trends over time. Findings from past years are included in this report to provide comparison points and to identify trends. Detailed information about the methodology for the CDLRA's Pan-Canadian Digital Learning Survey Project is available here:

<https://cdlra-acrfl.ca/methodology-for-the-pan-canadian-digital-learning-survey-project/>

The CDLRA continues to work to gather diverse perspectives as we expand our survey reach in the years to come. We invite any readers of this report who work at a post-secondary institution to sign up to join our survey roster by [clicking here](#) or scanning the QR code.



### **Student Findings from Academica Group**

Each year, when sharing our findings, the CDLRA is asked about students' perspectives. In 2024 and 2025, one of CDLRA's partners, Academica Group, conducted a survey to capture perspectives on digital learning among Canadian post-secondary students. The Academica survey contained questions adapted from the CDLRA's annual surveys. Insights from the Academica student survey will be highlighted throughout the report, and the findings represent the perspectives of 1015 student respondents. More details about the Academica survey can be found in the [methodology section](#) of this report.

---

## Digital Learning Trends

Whenever a discussion relates to learning modalities, it is essential to ensure a common understanding of the terms being used. Throughout this report, we use the following definitions for key terms related to modality:

**ONLINE LEARNING** means that a course or program is delivered entirely online with no on-campus student requirements. Online learning experiences may be synchronous, asynchronous, or a mix of the two.

**IN-PERSON LEARNING** means students must attend all classes in person (or on campus). Technology may be used to varying extents in an in-person course or program.

**HYBRID LEARNING** (also referred to as blended learning) means a mix of in-person and online instruction within a course or program. There are many different variations of hybrid learning.

**MULTI-ACCESS LEARNING** means that instruction is available in different modes for a given course, and students can move between modalities at their discretion. Hyflex learning is an example of multi-access learning.



## Modality, Technology, and Resource Trends

To assess the extent to which respondents anticipate growth in different learning modalities, overall technology use, and alternative credential offerings, the 2025 Digital Learning Trends Survey asked: Compared to the current situation, what is the likelihood of the following happening within the next 24 months?

The modality findings (displayed in Table 1) show that the majority of respondents continue to expect growth in online and hybrid learning over the next two years; however, the proportion of respondents who foresee growth in hybrid learning has steadily declined over the past three years. To clarify, this does not indicate that hybrid learning is decreasing over time; rather, the rate of growth may be starting to plateau. The proportion of respondents anticipating growth in online learning has remained steady since 2023.

Additionally, the proportion of respondents who expect in-person offerings to grow has declined year after year, with 2025 marking the first instance where those expecting growth were in the minority. The anticipated growth in multi-access offerings also dropped between 2024 and 2025.

Table 1

*Respondents expecting growth to some extent (modality)*

	2025	2024	2023
More courses and/or programs offered in a hybrid format	68%	73%	80%
More courses and/or programs offered in a fully online format	63%	62%	69%
More courses and/or programs offered in a fully in-person format	45%	52%	58%
More courses and/or programs offered in a multi-access format	41%	51%	53%

The CDLRA’s 2024 Pan-Canadian Report<sup>2</sup> reminded readers that “the findings [about modality trends] should not be interpreted to mean that fully online or hybrid offerings are expected to become predominant or overcome in-person offerings over time.” This statement continues to hold. The 2025 findings indicate that some modalities may be reaching a saturation point in the post-secondary sector, where the availability of offerings in a modality is becoming better aligned with demand.

### Technology and Alternative Credential Trends

When asked about growth related to technology use, a substantial majority of respondents continued to expect greater technology use in teaching and learning in the next two years. For alternative credentials, the proportion of respondents anticipating growth has dipped; however, the 2024 and 2025 findings are nearly the same.

Table 2

*Respondents expecting growth to some extent (technology and resources)*

	2025	2024	2023
Greater technology use in teaching and learning, regardless of the mode of course delivery	85%	84%	89%
More alternative credential offerings (e.g., microcredentials, badges, stackable credits)	69%	71%	77%

The survey also invited respondents to leave an open-ended comment to add context to their responses about growth. The majority of the responses centred on student demand and the financial challenges being felt across the sector, as well as the intersection between these two factors. Decreased institutional revenues resulting from international student restrictions have some institutions exploring whether more online offerings could boost enrolments.

*“Amid the budgetary cuts we expect for this upcoming fiscal year, I believe more courses will be offered online as a means to both make them available (ie, having asynchronous offerings) and to save money (ie, they can be taught by per-course instructors) while appealing to a wider variety of students.” (Support staff)*

<sup>2</sup> [https://cdlra-acrfl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2024-Pan-Canadian-Report\\_EN.pdf](https://cdlra-acrfl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2024-Pan-Canadian-Report_EN.pdf)

## Faculty Preferences and Competencies

For several years, the CDLRA surveys have asked a series of questions related to faculty preferences and competencies. Prior to 2025, the questions asking about perceptions of faculty preferences and competencies were only asked of those who had not taught in the past 12 months. In 2025, these questions were posed to all respondents to explore the difference between perceptions of others and perceptions of self among those who have recently taught (within the last year). Throughout this section, the breakdown of findings related to perceptions of (other) faculty between these two groups are provided. The results between those who have not taught and those who have are essentially indistinguishable.

### Faculty Preferences

Regarding perceptions of faculty preferences, there has been a substantial change since 2023. The survey presented respondents with a series of statements about modality preferences, and respondents selected whether “all or most faculty,” “some faculty,” or “few or no faculty” at their institution held that preference. There was also a “don’t know/not applicable” response option. In past years, one-third to one-half of respondents stated that “all or most faculty” had an interest in adopting new technologies, or would like to have the option of teaching online. In 2025, the proportion of respondents who selected “all or most faculty” was much lower. The proportion of respondents stating that “all or most faculty” would prefer to teach entirely on campus also dropped significantly.

Table 3

*Perceptions of faculty preferences from those who have not taught in the past 12 months*

All or most faculty at my institution:	2025	2024	2023
Are interested in adopting new technologies into their teaching practice	18%	38%	50%
Would like to have the option of teaching online some of the time	18%	36%	41%
Would prefer to teach entirely on campus	21%	42%	34%
Would prefer to teach entirely online	2%	5%	4%

The 2025 responses from respondents who had taught in the past year were practically the same as those who had not taught.

Table 4

*Perceptions of faculty preferences from those who have taught in the past 12 months*

All or most faculty at my institution:	2025
Are interested in adopting new technologies into their teaching practice	14%
Would like to have the option of teaching online some of the time	18%
Would prefer to teach entirely on campus	21%
Would prefer to teach entirely online	3%

Although fewer respondents reported in 2025 that “all or most faculty” were interested in adopting new technologies or teaching online sometimes, this does not mean that they perceive a total disinterest among faculty in these areas. Rather, the majority of respondents (from both groups combined) reported that “some faculty” had an interest in adopting new technologies (74%) and the option to teach online (73%). Likewise, the majority of respondents (66%) said that “some faculty” would prefer to teach entirely on campus.

Regarding perceptions of faculty preferences for teaching entirely online, 58% of respondents said that “some faculty” would prefer this option, and 34% said that “few or no faculty” preferred to teach entirely online.

In 2025, the survey also asked respondents whether they thought faculty would like to have the option of teaching multi-access (e.g., hyflex) courses: 3% said “all or most faculty,” 33% said “some faculty,” 50% said “few or no faculty,” and 14% said they did not know or it was not applicable.

The survey then asked faculty who had taught over the past 12 months about their personal preferences. The responses were very different from the perceptions of faculty preferences. The vast majority of respondents (92%) who had taught stated a preference for adopting new technologies into their teaching practice, and many (78%) wanted the

option of teaching online some of the time. Additionally, a sizeable minority (40%) expressed a preference for teaching entirely online.

Table 5

*Self-preferences from those who have taught in the past 12 months*

Agreement with the following statements	2025	2024	2023
I am interested in adopting new technologies into my teaching practice	92%	87%	86%
I would like to have the option of teaching online some of the time	78%	78%	73%
I would prefer to teach entirely on campus	28%	28%	35%
I would prefer to teach entirely online	40%	26%	23%
I would like the option of teaching multi-access courses (e.g., hyflex)	43%	not asked	not asked

These findings, namely the differences between perceptions of what others want compared to self-preferences, suggest that there may be misconceptions (and underestimations) about faculty interest in technology use and teaching online, either entirely or some of the time. Only the findings related to teaching entirely on campus and teaching multi-access courses showed congruence between the perceptions and self-assessments.

The reasons for these differences may be partially explained by sample bias: those who have an interest in digital learning are likely more inclined to participate in a survey on digital learning. At the same time, the vast difference between the perception and self-preference findings highlights a need for institutions to explore the interests of their faculty concerning technology use. Suppose faculty within an institution (or even within a department) are more interested in using technology than previously believed. Knowing whether there is greater faculty interest may justify greater institutional investment in technologies, online programming, and training for faculty to use technology effectively in their educational practices.

## Faculty Competencies for Teaching with Technology

Like faculty preferences, the 2023 and 2024 surveys only asked respondents who had not taught in the past 12 months to rate faculty competencies. Those who had taught were only asked to rate their own competencies in those years.

Again, the 2025 survey asked both groups to rate faculty competencies, but, for the sake of accurate comparisons, only the responses from those who had not taught in the past year are included in Table 6. With that said, there were no significant differences between the responses of those who had not taught and those who had.

The findings reveal that the majority of respondents are not confident that “all or most faculty” have the skills and know-how to teach in any modality where there are meaningful technology requirements or integration. Further, confidence in the capabilities of “all or most faculty” to effectively teach in any modality is progressively decreasing over time. An investigation into the reasons behind this declining sense of confidence in faculty capabilities would be beneficial to the sector, especially given the expectation of increased technology use in teaching and learning.

Table 6

*All or most faculty have the skills and know-how to effectively teach*

Modality	2025	2024	2023
In-person courses with minimal technology integration	80%	88%	92%
In-person courses with substantial technology integration	19%	45%	52%
Hybrid courses	18%	39%	42%
Online courses	18%	23%	33%
Multi-access courses (e.g., hyflex)	5%	11%	12%

Most respondents in 2025 (including those who taught and those who did not) reported that “some faculty” had the competencies to teach in-person courses with substantial technology integration (67%), online courses (64%), and hybrid courses (58%). Regarding multi-access learning, most respondents (57%) said that “few or no faculty” have the skills and know-how to teach in this modality.

When asked about their own competencies, respondents (who had taught in the last 12 months) perceived themselves as having significantly more skills and know-how than their peers across all modalities. This is a trend that has held steady over the past three years.

Table 7

*I have the skills and know-how to effectively teach:*

Modality	2025	2024	2023
In-person courses with minimal technology integration	97%	91%	94%
In-person courses with substantial technology integration	80%	81%	78%
Hybrid courses	85%	88%	85%
Online courses	92%	88%	85%
Multi-access courses	58%	58%	50%

It is also important to reiterate that the CDLRA surveys likely attract respondents with a greater interest in digital learning, which may account for the difference between perceptions of faculty skills and know-how and the above self-assessments. In 2025, of the respondents who had taught, 67% had taught in one or more of online, hybrid, or multi-access contexts, and 33% had only taught in person in the past year. At the same time, an interest in digital learning does not necessarily mean one has experience or skills teaching in multiple modalities.

More research is needed to explore the contrast between the overarching perceptions of faculty competencies and faculty self-assessments of their capabilities. If the perceptions are more accurate than the self-assessments, then more instructional training for teaching with technology is needed for faculty, regardless of modality. If faculty assessments are more accurate, then the reasons for misconceptions about faculty competencies (or the reasons for a wide range of differences in capabilities among faculty) need to be better understood to inspire confidence in faculty skills across the institution.

Again, considering the anticipated growth in technology use, online learning, and hybrid learning, it is critical that a large subset of faculty (all or most) have the skills and know-how to teach in contexts beyond in-person courses with minimal technology.

## Student Preferences

The CDLRA does not survey students directly, which means that the data gathered through CDLRA surveys focuses on respondent perceptions of student preferences. In 2024, the CDLRA partnered with Academica Group and for the past two years, Academica Group has sent a survey directly to students asking similar questions to the CDLRA survey questions. Throughout this section, we present the CDLRA findings alongside the Academica Group findings (see “Academica Spotlight on Students” boxes) to compare the perceptions of the CDLRA survey respondents with actual student responses.

The three-year findings from CDLRA survey respondents show that the perception that “all or most students” feel positively toward technology has largely decreased over time. Similar to the perception of faculty preferences, the longitudinal findings show a decline in the proportion of respondents who believe that “all or most students” want to learn online sometimes and want to learn entirely on campus. The small minority of respondents who believe that “all or most students” would prefer to learn entirely online has held steady over the years.

Table 8

*Perceptions of student preferences:*

All or most students at my institution:	2025	2024	2023
Feel positively toward technology use in teaching and learning	58%	77%	80%
Would like to have the option of learning online some of the time	48%	63%	66%
Would prefer to learn entirely on campus	10%	24%	25%
Would prefer to learn entirely online	8%	9%	10%
Would like to have the option of taking multi-access courses (e.g., hyflex)	15%	not asked	not asked

Again, like the responses related to faculty preferences, respondents who did not select “all or most students” as a response option tended to report that there were at least “some students” who would prefer each of the modalities.



### **Academica Spotlight on Students**

**Preferences:** The Academica survey asked students how they would describe their preferred format of learning. The most common response was a combination of in-person and online learning (61%). Additionally, 26% of respondents preferred an entirely in-person format, and 12% preferred a wholly online format.

**Experiences with Modalities:** Most students had enrolled in at least one entirely in-person class (65%), and a sizeable minority had experienced at least one fully online class (37%) and/or at least one hybrid class (42%).

When examining the CDLRA and Academica responses together, the CDLRA respondents' perceptions were well-aligned with students' preferences for fully online learning formats; however, the CDLRA respondents may be underestimating students' desire for hybrid learning and fully on-campus learning options.

### **Perceived Drivers of Student Needs and Preferences for Different Modalities**

The survey asked respondents to rate their level of agreement as to whether different factors were drivers of student modality needs and preferences. The survey specifically uses the phrase “needs and preferences” to acknowledge that sometimes students make modality decisions based on their needs, even though the chosen learning context may not be their preferred modality.

Regarding drivers of online or hybrid learning, nearly all respondents in 2025 (95%) identified the need to accommodate competing priorities as driving student needs and preferences for online learning. Roughly three-quarters of participants also agreed that the inability to access affordable housing on or near campus (79%), the inability to access affordable and reliable transportation to and from campus (74%), and the need to accommodate a disability (74%) drove student needs and preferences for online or hybrid learning. Overall, the 2025 findings were consistent with the findings from 2024.

Table 9

*Drivers of students' needs and preferences for online or hybrid learning*

	2025	2024
Inability to access affordable housing on or near campus	79%	75%
Inability to access affordable and reliable transportation to/from campus	74%	67%
To accommodate competing priorities (e.g., work, family, varsity sports, etc.)	95%	94%
To accommodate a disability	74%	72%
Lack of in-person options for courses students want or need	51%	not asked
Cost savings	53%	61%
Students perceive that the quality of instruction is better	9%	9%
Students perceive that the course will be easier to pass	46%	39%
Students perceive that they learn best in an online or hybrid modality	25%	25%

When comparing the identified drivers of students' needs and preferences for online learning with the student findings from Academica (see below), competing priorities emerged as the most prominent driver of student modality choices. There is no question that students who are managing competing priorities or dealing with housing and transportation challenges need the flexibility that online and hybrid contexts offer.

### **Academica Spotlight on Students**

**Drivers of student modality choices:** The Academica survey used the same factors listed in the CDLRA survey and asked students whether they agreed that these factors impacted their online and hybrid learning preferences. The top factors identified by students (where they indicated that they “strongly agree” or “agree”) were the need to accommodate competing priorities (65%) and cost savings (60%). A sizeable minority of students also identified the inability to access affordable housing on or near campus (46%), the perception that they learn best in an online or hybrid course (45%), and the inability to access affordable and reliable transportation to/from campus (41%) as factors driving their preferences.

The CDLRA survey also asked about drivers of students' needs and preferences for in-person learning. The vast majority of respondents in 2025 selected the desire for in-person interactions (90%) and students' perception that they learn best in person (80%). Again, the 2025 findings were very consistent with findings from the 2024 survey.

Table 10

*Drivers of students' needs and preferences for in-person learning*

	2025	2024
Inability to access technologies (e.g., devices, broadband Internet)	56%	59%
Uncomfortable or unfamiliar with using technology	57%	60%
Desire for in-person interactions	90%	94%
Lack of online options for courses students want or need	64%	not asked
To accommodate a disability	51%	46%
Cost savings	22%	21%
Students perceive that the quality of instruction is better	67%	72%
Students perceive that the course will be easier to pass	18%	18%
Students perceive that they learn best in an in-person modality	80%	79%

When interpreting data related to student needs and preferences, it is crucial to remember that the current post-secondary system in Canada offers predominantly in-person learning options. Those working within the system are rating student preferences based on their interactions with students within a primarily on-campus experience. Even the responses from students themselves still reflect the perspectives of those who, for the most part, have the means to attend in-person classes, even if that is not their preferred modality. Missing from the findings are the perspectives of prospective students who are not well-served by traditional, in-person learning experiences and who may not be attending post-secondary at all due to a lack of flexible options that are well-suited to their needs.



## Open Educational Resources (OER)

The CDLRA uses the definition for open educational resources (OER) from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation<sup>3</sup>, which states that OER are "teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others."

In Canada, the Canadian Coalition for Affordable Learning (CCAL)<sup>4</sup> was recently launched to facilitate interprovincial collaboration on reducing costs for students, including promoting greater adoption of OER. Data collected through the CDLRA surveys over the years shows that the cost of course materials continues to be a barrier to some extent for students, with no significant change over time (roughly one-third of respondents each year reported that cost often prevents students from having the required materials).

Table 11  
*Cost of Course Materials for Students*

Is the cost of course materials an issue at your institution?	2025	2024	2023
Yes, cost is a critical barrier preventing students from having the required materials	7%	6%	6%
Yes, cost is often a barrier preventing students from having the required materials	37%	36%	28%
Yes, we have a few instances where cost has been a barrier preventing students from having the required materials	20%	25%	27%
Perhaps, there may be instances where cost has been a barrier preventing students from having the required materials	21%	17%	20%
No, the cost of required materials is not an issue for our institution	2%	4%	8%
Don't know	12%	11%	12%

<sup>3</sup> <https://hewlett.org/library/ruminations-on-research-on-open-educational-resources/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://digitalcampus.ca/ccal/>

### Academica Spotlight on Students

**Cost of course materials:** Students were less likely than the CDLRA survey respondents to identify cost as a problem. Of the students surveyed by Academica Group, 29% reported that cost never prevents them from having the required materials (this proportion was consistent across institution types).

Within the group of students who identified cost as an issue to some extent, 42% reported that cost is sometimes an issue, 17% indicated that cost is often an issue, and 6% said that cost always prevents them from having the required materials.

Together, the CDLRA and Academica findings show that while cost is not a critical barrier for most students, it is for a minority. For the majority of students, the cost of materials is not a problem all of the time, but it is a problem sometimes.

Although OER offer a solution to reduce costs for students, it is important to measure whether those within the post-secondary system are 1) aware that OER options exist, and 2) aware of how OER can be used. The findings presented in Table 12 indicate that general awareness of OER has remained relatively consistent over the past three years; however, the knowledge of how OER can be used has steadily increased.

Table 12

*How aware are you of Open Educational Resources (OER)?*

Extent of Awareness	2025	2024	2023
I am very aware of OER and know how they can be used in the classroom	57%	49%	43%
I am aware of OER and some of their use cases	26%	35%	32%
I am somewhat aware of OER, but I am not sure how they can be used	6%	3%	7%
I have heard of OER, but don't know much about them	4%	8%	8%
I am not aware of OER	6%	5%	9%

### Academica Spotlight on Students

**OER Awareness:** The majority of students (61%) continue to have no awareness of OER (Academica Group asked the same question in 2024, and 64% reported being not at all aware). Of the students who reported being aware of OER in 2025, 54% had used them as part of their course materials, 25% had not, and 21% were unsure.

Additionally, the survey asked respondents about whether greater support for the use of OER over the next two years would be likely. Two-thirds of respondents (66%) expect greater support for the use of OER over the next two years, which is consistent with the findings from past years.

The final question the CDLRA asked about OER was whether or not respondent institutions had a policy or strategy for OER and/or other free course materials. The findings show that institutions or departments with a policy (formal or informal) remain in the minority, assuming that the policy is known.

Table 13

*Prevalence of Institutional Policies Related to OER*

Type of Policy	2025	2024	2023
Yes, we have a published institutional policy	9%	12%	15%
Yes, individual departments/units have a published policy	3%	5%	3%
Yes, we have an informal policy	21%	22%	20%
Not yet, but one is under development	7%	12%	10%
No	26%	31%	30%
Don't know	33%	24%	27%

Overall, the findings related to OER use have held a steady pattern over the years, with little substantial change. As efforts (like CCAL) emerge to expand the use of OER in Canada, the CDLRA will continue to monitor shifts in trends related to cost, OER awareness, and OER policy. At the same time, as one administrator noted in a comment at the end of the survey, financial constraints may also impact OER-related trends. The administrator described their institution as being successful in implementing OER use, but said, “Given financial realities, it [their institution] will be severely challenged to continue with the same impact.”

---

## Digital Learning Challenges

In previous years, academic integrity, faculty fatigue and workload, and technology infrastructure have emerged as the top teaching/learning and operational challenges. In light of the changes that have occurred over the past year, including international student restrictions, budget and program cuts, and continued advancements in AI technologies, the CDLRA chose to modify the question on challenges for the 2025 survey.

The 2025 survey asked respondents to rate the extent to which they agreed that the factors listed in Table 14 were pressing challenges at their institution at the time of the study. The list of factors was developed based on commonly identified challenges in past years, as well as factors that have emerged over the past year.



Table 14

*Pressing Challenges in 2025*

Challenges	Strongly agree	Agree	Total agreement
Academic integrity (e.g., preventing plagiarism and cheating)	48%	40%	<b>88%</b>
Developing policies or guidelines for AI use	51%	35%	<b>86%</b>
Effective instructional practices for teaching with technology	23%	51%	<b>74%</b>
Effective assessment practices for <u>online learning</u> contexts	34%	43%	<b>77%</b>
Effective assessment practices for <u>in-person learning</u> contexts	17%	40%	<b>57%</b>
Faculty digital literacy (e.g., proficiency with technologies)	36%	43%	<b>79%</b>
Student digital literacy (e.g., proficiency with technologies)	26%	46%	<b>72%</b>
Faculty fatigue and burnout	47%	30%	<b>77%</b>
Social and mental health supports for students	34%	45%	<b>79%</b>
Accommodating diverse learning needs among students	26%	58%	<b>78%</b>
Readiness for post-secondary studies among first-year students	33%	38%	<b>71%</b>
Evaluating the quality of courses taught in an <u>online or hybrid</u> context	18%	37%	<b>55%</b>
Evaluating the quality of courses taught <u>in person</u>	10%	38%	<b>48%</b>
Cybersecurity	25%	39%	<b>64%</b>
Technology infrastructure	31%	38%	<b>69%</b>
International student restrictions	49%	30%	<b>79%</b>
Student enrolments	53%	31%	<b>84%</b>
Financial stability of the institution	54%	24%	<b>79%</b>

---

The data analysis examined whether different factors emerged as top issues when strong agreement was compared to total agreement. The top three factors that respondents “strongly agreed” were pressing challenges at their institution were the financial stability of the institution (54%), student enrolments (53%), and developing AI policies and strategies (51%). Nearly half of the respondents also strongly agreed that international student restrictions (49%), academic integrity (48%), and faculty fatigue and burnout (47%) were pressing challenges.

In terms of total overall agreement, however, academic integrity (88%) rose to the top of the list, followed by developing AI policies and guidelines (86%) and student enrolments (84%). These findings indicate that, while there is consensus that academic integrity and developing AI policies are top pressing issues, the strength of concern around financial stability and student enrolments is amplified.



## Respondent Comments Regarding Challenges

Respondents were also given the option to leave an open-ended comment where they could share anything else they wanted to mention about challenges their institution was facing. Of the respondents who left a comment (n=32), half (n=16) spoke of the financial situation at their institution and within the sector. The nature of the comments relating to financial challenges are well-captured by the following remarks from a faculty member and an administrator.

*“The ability to be more broadly focused in terms of program offerings and type of student we attract to increase enrollments. Putting an unbalanced amount of resources into attracting and serving one type of student caused a collapse in the system that will have a serious and lasting impact on the institution, its staffing, and its student body (suspension of programs).” (Faculty/instructor)*

*“The institution's financial stability is the number one factor limiting everything we do. Declining funding is a long-term problem in my province that has grown to be an all-consuming issue.” (Administrator)*

The remaining comments covered several different topics, including academic integrity and rigour, student preparedness, leadership, policy, uncertainty, and technology. The following quotes illustrate the types of challenges mentioned on these topics.

*“Responding to increasing levels of government oversight and "accountability measures". (Administrator)*

*“First-year student transitions seem to be the pressing issue that is not being discussed. Many domestic first-year students are struggling in ways not seen pre-pandemic, and lack basic literacy skills (both traditional and digital literacies). The "digitally literate" student is a myth, and appropriate first-year curricula to build needed skills are absent.” (Faculty/instructor)*

*“Everything is on fire right now. :( There is so much stress and uncertainty about job loss, program loss, etc.” (Educational developer/instructional designer)*

---

*“Yes, a significant challenge is the lack of stable upper leadership, with many key roles currently filled on an interim or acting basis. This contributes to uncertainty in planning and decision-making.” (Educational developer/instructional designer)*

*“Current financial instability has driven a lack of TA support and increasing class sizes, which affects the quality of learning. Further, not staying par with the technology infrastructure that would promote digital pedagogy.” (Teaching and learning leader)*



## Institutional Letter Grades

The CDLRA survey closed with a question that asked respondents to give their institution a letter grade for its performance in a few key areas. This question was designed to provide ongoing, high-level insights into some of the topics that the survey has covered in more detail in the past (e.g., accessibility, faculty fatigue and burnout, and professional development for faculty).

My institution:	A	B	C	D	F	Don't know
Incorporates accessibility into our courses (any modality)	13%	43%	28%	8%	4%	3%
Prevents and alleviates faculty fatigue and burnout	1%	18%	33%	22%	16%	10%
Prepares faculty to teach diverse groups of learners (any modality)	6%	25%	38%	22%	6%	2%
Prepares faculty to teach online	9%	24%	37%	18%	9%	2%
Prepares faculty to teach in person	12%	34%	36%	10%	4%	3%

Respondents mostly rated their institution as having an okay performance regarding the incorporation of accessibility into courses: 43% of respondents gave their institution a “B,” and 28% gave their institution a “C.”

Faculty fatigue and burnout has been a persistent challenge for institutions since the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents gave their institution low marks for preventing and alleviating faculty fatigue and burnout: 38% of respondents gave their institution a “D” or “F,” and 33% of respondents gave their institution a “C.”

---

Prior surveys have shown that professional development for faculty is mostly voluntary (only a small minority of institutions across Canada have professional development requirements for faculty). Respondents also give their institution mostly “B” and “C” grades for preparing faculty to teach diverse groups of learners, to teach online, and to teach in person. The letter grades assigned by respondents are aligned with the findings from the “Faculty Preferences and Competencies” section of this report, where few respondents reported that “all or most faculty” had the skills and know-how to teach in all modalities with substantial technology integration.

### **Improving Institutional Letter Grades**

To gain more insight into the changes that faculty want to see at their institution, the survey asked respondents to share what their institution needs to do to improve its letter grade. Below are some of the issues and suggestions that the respondents raised:

*“My institution does not require training for faculty to teach online and the quality of the delivery suffers. Online courses are not always designed well, so the learner experience varies significantly.” (Educational developer/instructional designer)*

*“A challenge at colleges is that professors come largely from 'industry' and often have no background in pedagogy. While some PD is offered that would help these profs become better prepared to teach, it is non-mandatory, and many do not take it. Colleges are outcomes-based institutions, but my experience is that only lip service is paid to ensuring faculty learn what this means for their teaching and evaluation strategies. Upshot, both online and f2f offerings at my college could be better. Certainly, however, online offerings should be more prevalent than they are at present. Part of the problem seems to be that the decision makers are from a generation that received education in the f2f format, and they hold a belief that online is necessarily subpar. We need input from younger people at my college.” (Faculty/instructor)*

*“I just wanted to note that while my institution provides the supports that can prepare faculty to teach to diverse learners, teach online, or teach in person, that does not mean these supports are being utilized. In order to improve, a facilitated effort needs to be made to dedicate the person-power and resources to making change.” (Educational developer/instructional designer)*

---

*“Actually recognize the needs of the people in the institution (students, faculty, staff) rather than high-level administrators making pronouncements that are totally divorced from reality. Right now, we have administrators who are somewhat like DOGE (the tech bros decimating the US government): moving quickly and breaking things with apparently no meaningful plan. We need competent leadership, meaningful planning, and consultation/collaboration with all key players, in particular, faculty, staff, and students.” (Educational developer/instructional designer)*

*“I think a more important question might be “Does your institution NEED to improve its letter grade in all areas above”. Most academic institutions cannot just ‘dump’ resources into a perceived problem - it often means shifting them from other priorities. My opinion - if an institution’s “niche” is the personal touch - shifting resources from areas that strengthen ‘the personal touch’ to resources that facilitate online may be a mistake.” (Administrator)*



---

## Concluding Thoughts

At the end of each survey, the CDLRA provides respondents with a final opportunity to share anything else that they would like the research team to know about digital learning at their institution. Many respondents reiterated their challenges and frustrations in the comments they wrote.

*“Digital education has a lot of potential to give students more flexible ways to learn. This supports the actual student community at my institution (such as older students, those who are working, or those with caregiving responsibilities), but this shift does not appear to be fully accepted or recognized.” (Educational developer/instructional designer)*

*“How can effective digital learning be a priority when faculty are precariously employed and overworked, and the kind of tech the institution’s interested in is passing fancy?” (Faculty/instructor)*

*“Online courses have the potential to meet the needs of our students, and I believe they want more, but due to limitations in staffing, training, tools, and budget, this is not currently possible.” (Faculty/instructor)*

*“Ontario PSE is underfunded to prepare students for the workforce of the future. Institutions are no longer sustainable based on international tuition fees, nor are they distracted from domestic needs because of international students. It is my sincere hope that the value for money audits that many PSE institutions are currently engaged in will provide the evidence that investments in PSE institutions are justified.” (Administrator)*

*“It [digital learning] could be a lot better and more effectively integrated across most programs and courses. Also, the microcredential effort at my institution is disorganized and confused.” (Faculty/instructor)*

*“The current focus on in-person programs prevents the institution from focusing on best practices for using technology in teaching. Additionally, because the focus is on in-person learning, the quality of online/blended/hyflex courses is inconsistent, although the courses continue to be in demand and have high enrolment.” (Teaching and learning leader)*



The financial and enrolment challenges facing the Canadian post-secondary sector are front of mind for many. Online and hybrid courses and programs are recognized as being desirable for some students, and viewed as a potential solution for boosting enrolments and revenue. Despite this potential, many institutions do not have the financial or human resources to develop such offerings. The Canadian post-secondary system has found itself in a Catch-22: new, flexible offerings are needed to meet the demands of prospective and current students and to increase funding, but funding is needed to develop these offerings.

At the same time, faculty competencies to teach effectively in online or hybrid contexts are questionable. The 2025 survey results re-emphasize findings from past years that identified a need for faculty professional development. There is considerable room for improvement in how we (as a sector) prepare faculty to teach at post-secondary institutions. There are also critical barriers, such as collective agreements, that restrict mandated training, regardless of the need. This is an ongoing, system-wide problem that needs attention.

In summary, the 2025 findings show that our current post-secondary landscape is not inspiring confidence for many. There do not appear to be quick or easy solutions; however, there is an acknowledgement that change is needed, which is a good starting point.



## Methodology

Information for this report comes from the 2025 Pan-Canadian Digital Learning Trends Survey, which is part of the CDLRA's Pan-Canadian Digital Learning Survey Project. The project is longitudinal and includes gathering data from two annual surveys. More details about the project and the methodology can be found here:

<https://cdlra-acrfl.ca/methodology-for-the-pan-canadian-digital-learning-survey-project/>

Specific to the 2025 Digital Learning Trends Survey:

- The survey was open from April 7 to May 30, 2025.
- 234 participants from 92 unique institutions responded to the survey, with representation from all provinces and two territories.
- Participant roles included administrators (e.g., senior administrators, deans, and directors), teaching and learning leaders, instructional designers and educational developers, institutional researchers, library services staff, student support staff, and educational technology specialists.

Through the 2025 Pan-Canadian Digital Learning Report, we have compared some of the 2025 findings with those from previous years. More information about past surveys can be found in the respective annual reports on the publications page of the CDLRA website: [www.cdlra-acrfl.ca/publications](http://www.cdlra-acrfl.ca/publications)

Copies of the survey instruments for each year are available upon request.

### **Academica Spotlight on Students**

**About StudentVu:** Academica Group operates a research panel called StudentVu, which is composed of approximately 10,000 Canadian post-secondary applicants and students. Panelists are compensated for their participation through points, which can be redeemed for gift cards.

**Methodology:** Current students attending postsecondary schools in Canada were invited from Academica's StudentVu research panel to participate in an online survey between June 6 and 19, 2025. Panelists were incentivized through Academica's internal points system for their time. A total of 1,015 students qualified for and completed the survey. Findings are weighted by gender from Statistics Canada's Postsecondary Student Information System (PSIS) data.

---

## Contact

**Dr. Nicole Johnson**, Executive Director, Canadian Digital Learning Research Association

Email: [nicole.johnson@cdlra-acrf.ca](mailto:nicole.johnson@cdlra-acrf.ca)

Website: [www.cdlra-acrf.ca](http://www.cdlra-acrf.ca)

To sign up to receive invitations to participate in future CDLRA research studies (and to receive notifications when new reports are released), please [click here](#) or scan the QR code.

