

2026

Pan-Canadian Report on Digital Learning Trends



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Canadian Digital Learning
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In 2026, the CDLRA launched a new Institutional Partnerships program, which provides Canadian post-secondary institutions with a way to directly support our ongoing work. We thank our current Institutional Partners: University of Alberta, Brock University, and Laurentian University for helping the CDLRA advance digital learning research in Canada. (For more information about becoming an institutional partner, please email nicole.johnson@cdlra-acrfl.ca.)

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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.

The CDLRA recognizes that, as a distributed team, we live and work across Indigenous lands, territories, and treaty relationships throughout what is now called Canada. We understand settler colonialism not only as a history, but as an ongoing structure shaping post-secondary education. We recognize our responsibility to examine how digital learning initiatives intersect with Indigenous rights, sovereignty, and self-determination, and to work toward educational futures that do not reproduce colonial relations.

Sponsors and Partners

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Executive Summary

At a time when concerns about academic integrity and artificial intelligence (AI) continue to impact education, this report highlights important nuances to guide decision-making by examining the broader digital learning landscape within Canadian post-secondary education.

The Canadian Digital Learning Research Association (CDLRA)'s ongoing investigation of digital learning trends situates current educational initiatives and challenges within a historical context to help us better discern hype from meaningful transformation. The purpose of our research is to assess and improve different aspects of digital learning across the country by exploring emerging and ongoing trends. Our goal is to provide institutional leaders and key interest groups in Canadian post-secondary education with valuable information, as they develop digital learning strategies and launch new learning pathways and initiatives.

In exploring the findings from the 2026 Pan-Canadian Digital Learning Trends Survey, we will focus on the high-level changes taking place in the sector related to technology use in teaching and learning. While this report mentions AI and the related assessment challenges, a deeper discussion of AI trends will be presented in a separate report based on findings from our 2026 Emerging Technologies Survey, conducted in the fall.

Key findings from 2026

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

- Nearly half of respondents expected the number of online and in-person programs to stay relatively the same over the next 12 months; however, of the remaining respondents, more expected an increase in online programs than in-person programs. Very few expected a decrease in online offerings.
- Findings on microcredentials showed mixed views on their value, even as a sizable minority of represented institutions are increasing microcredential offerings and a majority are investing in their development. At the same time, a sizable minority of respondents reported being interested in pursuing microcredentials to improve in their current role. The findings revealed gaps in institutional microcredentials policies and a lack of standardization across the sector.
- Faculty remained interested in adopting new technology in their instructional practices, and most would like the option to teach online some of the time.
- The need to manage competing priorities, an inability to access affordable housing, and an inability to access affordable and reliable transportation to/from campus remained the top drivers of student preference for online or hybrid learning.
- The proportion of respondents who are “very aware” of OER has continued to grow over time; however, the proportion of students who are “not at all aware” of OER has remained consistently high (according to data provided by Academica Group).
- Academic integrity, developing policies or guidelines for AI use, and social and mental health supports for students topped the list of pressing digital learning challenges.

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Introduction

The 2026 Pan-Canadian Report is based on the findings from the 2026 Digital Learning Trends Survey, conducted from April 13 through May 29, 2026. Respondents (n=126) 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 initiative, the CDLRA's Pan-Canadian Digital Learning Survey Project, through which the CDLRA has conducted annual surveys since 2017 to track digital learning trends over time. This report includes findings from past years to provide comparison points and 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. Since 2024, one of CDLRA's partners, Academica Group, has conducted a similar 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 are spotlighted throughout the report, and the findings represent the perspectives of 803 student respondents. More details about the Academica survey are in the [methodology section](#) of this report.

Modality Trends

When discussing learning modalities, it is essential to ensure a common understanding of the terms used. We use the term “digital learning” as an overarching term that encompasses the many different ways that technology is integrated into various learning experiences.

Throughout this report, we also use the following definitions for key terms related to modality at the course level:

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.





In past years, the questions about modality trends have focused on whether respondents expected growth in online, hybrid, in-person, and multi-access (e.g., hyflex) offerings. The previous set of questions did not ask whether respondents expected any offering type to decrease.

To capture more nuance related to modality growth, the CDLRA developed a new set of questions for the 2026 Digital Learning Trends Survey. The survey asked respondents whether the following types of offerings (program-level and course-level) would be increasing, staying the same, or decreasing at their institution over the next 12 months:

- PROGRAMS offered FULLY ONLINE (e.g., no in-person component at all)
- PROGRAMS offered MOSTLY ONLINE with a small in-person or on-campus component
- PROGRAMS offered FULLY IN PERSON (e.g., entirely on campus)
- PROGRAMS offered MOSTLY IN PERSON, with optional or mandatory online components
- Individual COURSES OR SECTIONS offered in an ONLINE format within in-person programs
- Individual COURSES OR SECTIONS offered in a HYBRID format within in-person programs
- Individual COURSES OR SECTIONS offered in a MULTI-ACCESS (e.g., hyflex) format within in-person programs

Rather than classifying a program-level offering as “hybrid,” we categorized program-level offerings with a mix of online and in-person learning based on whether they were designed to be predominantly online or predominantly in-person.



For institutions wanting a categorization system to track programs by modality, we suggest the following plain-language taxonomy. This program-level taxonomy is designed to be easily understood by institutional staff and prospective students searching for information about different program requirements.

- **FULLY ONLINE program**

- No in-person courses or components are required for students in the program, and they can complete the entire program (including exams) in an online environment. Courses within the program may be synchronous, asynchronous, or a mix of the two.

- **PREDOMINANTLY ONLINE program**

- The majority of courses, or all required/non-elective courses, are delivered online; however, there are: 1) one or more mandatory in-person components (e.g., on-campus intensive, practicum experience, on-campus exams, etc.), or 2) one or more elective courses may require an in-person presence depending on the chosen elective (or, in some cases, the student's chosen concentration).

- **PREDOMINANTLY IN-PERSON program**

- The majority of courses, or all non-elective courses, are delivered in-person; however, there are: 1) one or more mandatory online components, or 2) options are available for completing some required or elective courses in an online or hybrid format.
- Most in-person programs at Canadian post-secondary institutions fall into this category.

- **FULLY IN-PERSON program**

- No online or hybrid options (e.g., online or hybrid sections for mandatory courses or electives) are available to students in this program, and the entire program must be completed in an entirely in-person environment.

The responses related to online, or mostly online, program growth were similar. Just under half of respondents reported that they did not expect online programs to increase or decrease at their institution. Roughly one-quarter to one-third of respondents expected an increase and very few (10% or less) expected a decrease.

Table 1

Online Program Growth

	Increasing	Staying the same	Decreasing	Don't know, N/A
PROGRAMS offered FULLY ONLINE	33%	44%	10%	13%
PROGRAMS offered MOSTLY ONLINE with a small in-person or on-campus component	28%	43%	7%	22%

Expected growth was greater for online programs than in-person programs. Although a similar proportion of respondents anticipated no change, fewer than 20% expected programs delivered predominantly in person to grow. Respondents were less likely to expect a decrease in mostly in-person programs with some online components compared to fully in-person programs.

Table 2

In-Person Program Growth

	Increasing	Staying the same	Decreasing	Don't know, N/A
PROGRAMS offered FULLY IN PERSON (on campus)	18%	46%	20%	16%
PROGRAMS offered MOSTLY IN PERSON, with optional or mandatory online components	15%	49%	7%	29%

At the course level (within in-person programs), more respondents expected growth in online courses or sections (33%) than in hybrid (26%) or multi-access (17%) courses or sections.

Few respondents anticipated a decrease in any of these types of offerings at the course or section level.

Table 3
Online, Hybrid, and Multi-Access Course Growth

	Increasing	Staying the same	Decreasing	Don't know, N/A
Individual COURSES OR SECTIONS offered in an ONLINE format within in-person programs	33%	34%	8%	25%
Individual COURSES OR SECTIONS offered in a HYBRID format within in-person programs	26%	36%	8%	30%
Individual COURSES OR SECTIONS offered in a MULTI-ACCESS (e.g., hyflex) format within in-person programs	17%	35%	10%	38%

Fields of study in which online programs are increasing. If a respondent selected that fully online programs would increase at their institution over the next 12 months, the survey asked them to share the fields of study where these increases were happening. Respondents mentioned multiple fields including the arts, business, computer science, cybersecurity, education (including early childhood education), energy, engineering, environmental studies, graduate studies (in general), health, IT, professional development and continuing education, psychology and mental health, science, and trades. Health and business were the most commonly mentioned fields. Several respondents stated that online program growth would be happening across multiple or all fields at their institution.

Reasons for change in course and program offerings. Respondents were invited to leave a comment sharing the reasons for any changes to course or program offerings at their institution. Consistent with the qualitative findings from 2025¹, financial challenges appear to be driving modality changes. To improve their financial situation by increasing enrolments, institutions are looking to attract new students outside their traditional demographic pool. These new, non-traditional learner demographics often require greater flexibility to make education an accessible pursuit. Institutions are also deciding on course and program modality based on student demand, workforce demand, efficiency efforts as part of restructuring, space and resource limitations, academic integrity concerns (often reducing online offerings in this case), brand differentiators, and market competition.

“One of the reasons for the recent increase in online courses in my institution is probably shrinking funding. Due to the huge drop in international students and limited budget from the government level compared to previous years, my institution is trying to explore online course opportunities more than in previous times as a cost-effective approach.” (Educational Developer/Instructional Designer)

“We are trying to offer more flexible formats to attract non-traditional students and provide more access for all students.” (Administrator)

“Some programs are moving to in-person proctored assessments given academic misconduct concerns. Programs that previously offered hybrid/hyflex programming will be breaking into section for in-person and online separately. It is believed that both delivery modes have different challenges and barriers to deal with.” (Educational Developer/Instructional Designer)

¹ <https://cdlra-acrfl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2025-Pan-Canadian-Report-EN.pdf>



The survey also asked respondents to assign a letter grade to how well their institution designs and offers courses and programs in multiple fields to attract non-traditional learners. Respondents mostly gave their institution a passing grade, typically in the “B to C” range.

Table 4
Variety of Offerings to Attract Non-Traditional Learners

	A	B	C	D	F
There are course and program offerings in multiple fields of study at my institution that are designed to attract non-traditional learners	12%	30%	27%	17%	3%

Percentages for “Don’t know” responses are not shown.

Conversations about work-integrated learning and workforce relevance have been at the forefront of many discussions recently, especially as they relate to ensuring students have the technological acumen to succeed in their careers, along with the requisite knowledge and skills for their occupation. To explore workforce relevance in digital learning contexts compared with in-person learning contexts, the survey asked several questions about work-integrated learning and workforce-relevant technology use.

To better understand the growth of work-integrated learning in the sector, the survey asked respondents whether it was increasing, staying the same, or decreasing at their institution. Most respondents reported that work-integrated learning was increasing (37%) or staying the same (35%). No respondents expected a decrease, and 28% said they did not know.

Respondents also gave their institution a letter grade based on how well it integrates workforce-relevant technology into both in-person and online courses and programs. The results were comparable, with neither modality receiving significantly better marks than the other. In both instances, most respondents gave their institution a “B” or “C” grade.

Table 5
Workforce-Relevant Technology Integration

	A	B	C	D	F
My institution integrates workforce-relevant technology use into IN-PERSON courses and programs	8%	39%	32%	6%	4%
My institution integrates workforce-relevant technology use into ONLINE courses and programs	7%	43%	26%	8%	3%

Percentages for “Don’t know” responses are not shown.



Microcredentials

From 2023 through 2025, the Digital Learning Trends Survey asked a single question about the expected growth of alternative credential offerings (including microcredentials). In those years, more than two-thirds of respondents reported an anticipated increase.

In 2026, microcredentialing remains a topic of great interest at Canadian post-secondary institutions. Institutions are exploring the potential of microcredentials to create flexible learning pathways and continuing education opportunities to meet a wider range of learner needs. As many microcredentials are delivered online, they have become an important digital learning trend to monitor, so a new section focused on microcredentials was added to this year's Digital Learning Trends Survey.

When designing the microcredentials section, the CDLRA research team examined the various definitions used across the Canadian sector and amalgamated them into the following definition.

MICROCREDENTIAL means a short-duration, competency-based learning experience that includes a certification of assessed learning. A microcredential has standalone value, but may also complement another qualification.

The 2026 survey included questions related to microcredential development and microcredential demand. Questions on microcredential development focused on growth, investment, industry role in development, policy, and standards. Questions on microcredential demand focused on the needs and interests of different groups (e.g., self, students, and general public) and the types of microcredentials respondents perceived as most valuable.

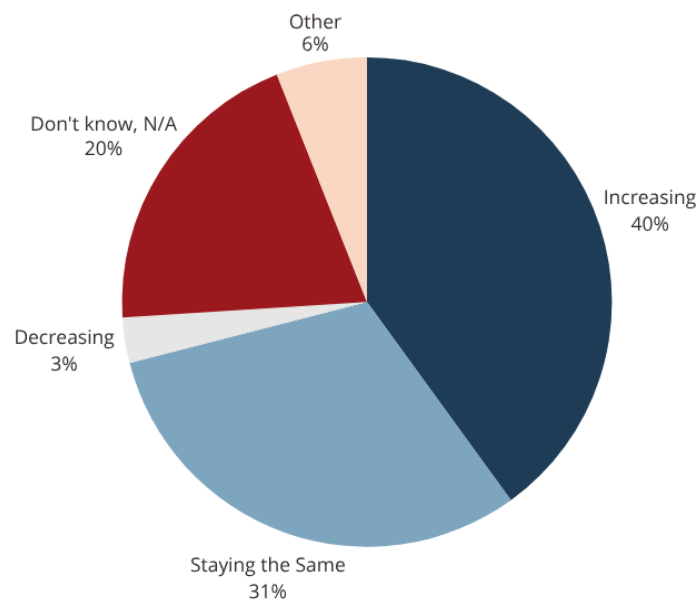


Microcredential Development

The survey asked whether microcredentials were increasing or decreasing at respondents' institutions. Most respondents reported that microcredentials were increasing (40%) or staying the same (31%). Very few respondents reported a decrease (3%). Another 20% said that they did not know. Several respondents selected "other" and left comments, mostly indicating that microcredential development was under consideration at their institution.

Figure 1

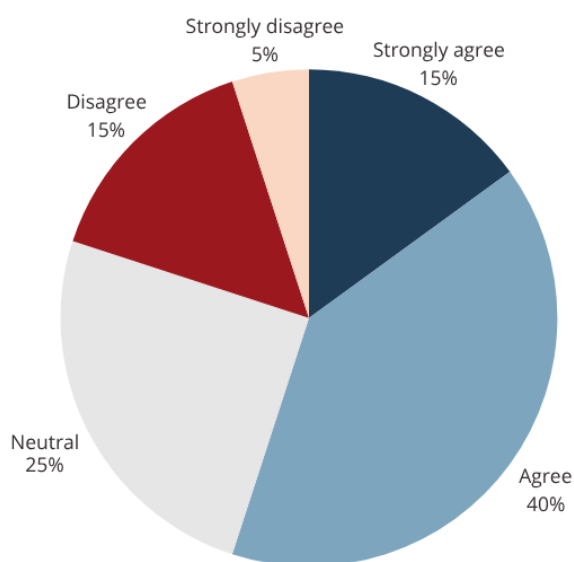
Are microcredentials increasing or decreasing at your institution?



The survey also asked respondents to rate their agreement with the statement that their institution is investing in microcredentials. Just over half of respondents (55%) agreed to some extent, while another 20% disagreed. One-quarter of respondents gave a neutral response.

Figure 2

My institution is investing in microcredentials



To explore the collaborative efforts between industry and post-secondary institutions, the survey asked respondents to indicate whether they had participated in microcredential development. The respondents who said “yes” (n=60) were asked to comment on the role of industry employers in the development of microcredentials and whether the employers valued them.

Of the 39 respondents who left a comment, most (n=24) said industry employers were consulted and played an important role in developing the microcredential.

*“Industry partners were invited to a program advisory committee for the microcredential I was developing. They seemed to value it highly.”
(Educational Developer/Instructional Designer)*

“Industry helped develop the curriculum. They continue to support the delivery of the microcredential.” (Faculty)

“We have Program Development Advisory Councils, consisting of industry professionals/employers as well as community members advising on the development of microcredentials. Yes, industry employers value them.”
(Administrator)

Other responses varied and included comments describing a lack of industry consultation, unsuccessful attempts at consultation, and uncertainty about whether consultation occurred.

“Varies - some involved employers more than others; lack of research, market analysis, and industry input is a common problem and deficiency in program development.” (Teaching and Learning Leader)

“We have attempted to develop programs with industry and government partners but have had little success for the past several years.” (Faculty)

“Very minimal input from industry stakeholders. I still think that industry doesn't understand microcredentials and doesn't understand the added value to students.” (Educational Developer/Instructional Designer)

Typically, when adding a comprehensive new section to the survey, the CDLRA gives respondents the option to answer a few more questions at the end of the survey to gain a more in-depth understanding of the topic. At the end of the 2026 Digital Learning Trends Survey, respondents were asked if they would be willing to answer additional questions on microcredentials. Forty respondents answered these additional questions on policy, intended audience, and standards.

Policy. The survey asked this subsample whether their institution has a specific microcredential policy. Most respondents said they had either no policy (n=13) or were not sure (n=11). Others said that their institution had a policy that was limited in scope or under development. Only two respondents reported having a comprehensive policy in place for microcredentials.

Units responsible. An open-ended question asked respondents to identify which units or departments at their institution were responsible for developing a microcredential strategy. The most common response was the continuing education department (n=16); however, the majority of respondents did not give a common answer, and their answers encompassed a variety of units including the provost's office, the registrar's office, quality assurance, program development, centres for innovation, and independent academic departments. Several respondents described a fragmented, decentralized microcredential ecosystem at their institution, with no single or overarching unit holding responsibility.

Intended audience. An additional open-ended question asked about the intended audiences for microcredentials being offered by respondents' institutions. Responses varied and included students, faculty and staff, the broader community or general public, and working professionals wanting to upskill or reskill. Nearly half of respondents (n=18) mentioned multiple intended audiences for microcredentials at their institution.

Standards. The survey asked respondents to indicate whether their institution had standards for any of the following: learning design, delivery, assessment framework, issuance of digital microcredentials, microcredential sizing, or none of the above. In most cases, roughly one-third to one-half of respondents reported having standards for at least one category. Two-thirds of respondents replied that their institution either had none of these standards (n=14) or they did not know (n=13).



Demand for Microcredentials

The survey asked a series of questions about demand for microcredentials, starting with how strongly respondents agreed with a set of statements.

First, to explore whether formal credentials alone would meet students' needs, the survey asked whether students would need microcredentials in addition to their program credentials to have a competitive advantage. A minority of respondents (44%) agreed that students would need more than their formal credential, and an additional 33% reported neutrality. Another 24% disagreed.

Next, two statements explored respondents' personal interest in microcredentials. Those interested in pursuing microcredentials were in the minority, whether to improve in their current role at their institution (45%) or to change career paths (15%). Significantly more respondents were interested in improving in their existing role than in preparing for a career change.

Table 6
Agreement with Statements About Microcredentials

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Students at my institution will need microcredentials in addition to their formal credential(s) to have a competitive advantage in the workforce*	13%	31%	33%	18%	6%
I am interested in pursuing microcredentials to <u>improve in my current role</u> at my institution	13%	32%	28%	18%	9%
I am interested in pursuing microcredentials to <u>change my career path</u>	3%	12%	31%	37%	17%

**The numbers have been rounded to the nearest whole number for the purposes of this report, making the sum 101%; however, when rounded to the nearest tenth, they add to 100%.*



The survey also asked respondents a series of optional open-ended questions about the types of microcredentials that would be most valuable to themselves, to students, and to the general public. To understand how respondents interpreted the word “type” as it relates to microcredentials, the question was designed to be intentionally vague, and the survey instrument did not define what was meant by “type.”

Valuable microcredentials for self. When thinking about the types of microcredentials that would hold the most value for them personally, respondents to this question (n=47) tended to comment on skills associated with a field of study. In particular, respondents noted a desire to develop technology skills (n=21) or business skills (n=11). Only one respondent left a remark related to the length of the microcredential, stating that they would prefer a microcredential experience that was “very short; less than 10 hrs.”

Valuable microcredentials for students. When considering which types of microcredentials would be most valuable to students, respondents to this question (n=45) focused primarily on career-related skills (n=26) and technology (n=14). Career-related skills encompassed domain-specific skills (e.g., healthcare, business) and soft skills (e.g., leadership, communication, presentation skills, etc.). A handful of respondents (n=5) brought up study skills. Two respondents mentioned that stackable credits or offerings that build on existing credentials would be valuable.

Valuable microcredentials for the general public. Respondents (n=38) who commented on which microcredentials would be most valuable to the general public provided a range of responses. Some described job-specific professional or specialist skills, reskilling, or upskilling (n=17). Others mentioned AI and digital literacy skills (n=9) or literacy skills more broadly (n=6). A few respondents talked about microcredentials for basic life skills like budgeting and managing finances (n=6).

In each category (self, students, and general public), a handful of respondents remarked that microcredentials held no value. The comments below illustrate some of the sentiments shared:

“I think they are pointless for universities to offer, as a single course or minor serves the same purpose. If a specific industry or occupational association wishes to offer those which are specific to their industry or occupation, that might make sense, given they would be more likely to know what employers immediately need.” (Faculty)

“I don't think we have enough data that the public cares about microcredentials. Especially since the introduction of microcredentials was exceptionally messy.” (Educational Developer/Instructional Designer)

“Microcredentials are not a good pathway for PSE. We are too siloed already, and students need help in integrating their knowledge more. They [students] don't need a checklist of skills that we think they need now (which means they will be out of date by the time they graduate).” (Faculty)

“Why do I need them? My understanding is that our students don't find them useful, either.” (Faculty)



Academica Spotlight on Students

Student demand for microcredentials. When investigating demand, it is critical to first determine whether students are aware of the opportunity. Of the total number of students surveyed (n=803), the 2026 Academica study found that the majority (59%) were not at all aware of microcredentials, which has important implications for institutions targeting students in their microcredential strategy and offerings. Only 10% of student respondents had personally completed a microcredential.

The survey also asked students about their plans for further studies beyond their current program. Among the 64% of students who indicated that they plan to pursue further education (n=511), few (13%) were interested in taking a microcredential. The offerings of greatest interest to students thinking about undertaking additional education were a bachelor's degree (35%) and a master's degree (35%). All other types of offerings (e.g., diploma, doctoral degree, microcredential, professional degree, certificate, or apprenticeship) were of interest to less than 15% of students planning to complete further studies.

To explore where these students might go to access further education (regardless of credential type), the survey asked those expecting to complete further study (n=511) to select any of the following education providers that they would consider:

- Current post-secondary institution (49%)
- Another post-secondary institution (50%)
- Online learning platform (e.g., Coursera, LinkedIn Learning, etc.) (15%)
- Through employer (9%)
- Other (2%)
- Not sure yet (10%)

Microcredential Insights

In both the main survey and the additional post-survey section on microcredentials, respondents were invited to share further comments to provide context for their responses. The comments revealed mixed feelings, in general, and highlighted some of the challenges institutions are experiencing as they work to develop and launch microcredentials:

“One of the challenges has been the lack of demand for microcredentials over the past few years. Employers and others have indicated a need, but the conversion of anticipated to actual has not been great from what I am seeing. It has been better in very specific areas, but not overall.” (Administrator)

“In my experience in postsecondary education, many students graduate with strong disciplinary knowledge but still lack key workplace skills such as effective communication, efficient collaboration, and practical critical thinking skills in proposing multiple problem-solving tactics. Regarding this matter, the most valuable microcredentials combine human skills and digital competencies. Microcredentials in professional communication, teamwork, leadership, time management, negotiation skills, and intercultural competence improve employability, while computer, digital, and AI literacy are essential. Alignment with industry needs ensures real-world application.” (Faculty)

“I have taken a number of microcredentials which are, frankly, not worth the paper they aren't printed on -- ones which I was able to complete in one sitting without having done any of the material just by the ineptitude of the assessment design. Unless the microcredential genuinely adds new, demonstrable skills, or there is an accreditation involved, they will not be valuable as anything other than a novelty.” (Educational Developer/Instructional Designer)

“Micro-credentials are a poor substitute for employers providing industry- or firm-specific training.” (Faculty)

“We should have watched and learned from the European model for microcredentials, so carefully and strategically accomplished.” (Teaching and Learning Leader)

Faculty Preferences and Competencies

Each year, the survey opens with several demographic questions, including whether the respondent has taught over the past 12 months. These respondents are considered faculty for the purposes of reporting.

For this year, 55 respondents selected “yes” to having taught in the past 12 months. The survey then asked these respondents about their experience teaching in different modalities, their modality preferences, and their competencies for teaching with technology.

Experience Teaching Different Modalities

Most respondents taught one or more online courses (62%) and/or one or more in-person courses (53%). A minority taught in a hybrid format (27%), and very few taught a multi-access course (7%).

In 2026, the survey also began asking faculty to share their academic field of instruction. The most common fields represented by respondents were health and business, along with a mix of other academic disciplines within the arts, sciences, social sciences, and trades. Very few respondents (n=3) taught in the field of education, which is an important finding because it indicates that an overrepresentation of individuals with extensive pedagogical training did not skew the faculty sub-sample results.



Faculty Preferences

Since 2023, the survey has asked those who have taught in the past 12 months to rate their agreement with a series of statements related to modality preferences. The proportion of faculty interested in adopting new technologies in their teaching practice remains very high (>90%) and has steadily increased over time. The longitudinal findings also show a marked rise between 2024 and 2025 in the proportion of faculty who would prefer to teach entirely online.

In 2026, the proportion of respondents who reported a preference for teaching entirely on-campus and who would like to teach multi-access courses increased. The proportion of respondents who would like the option to teach online some of the time decreased. Faculty who reported a strong preference for teaching only online or only in person remained in the minority.

Table 7

Self-Preferences From Those Who Have Taught in the Past 12 Months

Strongly agree/agree with the following statements	2026	2025	2024	2023
I am interested in adopting new technologies into my teaching practice	93%	92%	87%	86%
I would like to have the option of teaching online some of the time	69%	78%	78%	73%
I would prefer to teach entirely on campus	34%	28%	28%	35%
I would prefer to teach entirely online	43%	40%	26%	23%
I would like the option of teaching multi-access courses (e.g., hyflex)	52%	43%	not asked	not asked

Faculty Competencies for Teaching with Technology

From 2023 to 2025, the survey asked those who have taught in the past 12 months to indicate whether they have the skills or know-how to teach in different modalities by selecting “yes” or “no.” Historically, respondents tended to overwhelmingly select “yes” when rating their own competencies. For 2026, the question was modified to better capture the middle ground that may exist between a firm “yes” or “no” when it comes to competency.

The survey asked respondents to rate their level of agreement with whether they have the skills and know-how to teach effectively in various modalities.

Table 8

I Have the Skills and Know-How to Teach Effectively

Modality	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
In-person courses with minimal technology integration*	75%	24%	2%	0%	0%
In-person courses with substantial technology integration*	60%	33%	6%	2%	0%
Hybrid courses	58%	21%	13%	6%	2%
Online courses	65%	33%	0%	2%	0%
Multi-access courses*	27%	37%	21%	12%	4%

**The numbers have been rounded to the nearest whole number for the purposes of this report, making the sum 101%; however, when rounded to the nearest tenth, they add to 100%.*

While the more nuanced 2026 version of the question still shows most respondents agreeing that they have the skills and know-how to teach in each modality (especially in-person and online courses), not all strongly agree. The highest levels of confidence in one’s skill and know-how appeared to be associated with modalities that are more ‘clear-cut’ (e.g., in-person courses with minimal technology integration and online courses). Modalities with a greater mix of digital and in-person approaches, especially hybrid and multi-access courses, were met with lower confidence.

The survey also asked respondents to give their institution a letter grade for its performance in a few key areas related to pedagogical training for faculty. The most common response for all questions was a “B” grade, with the majority of responses clustered in the “A” to “C” range.

Table 9
Faculty Support and Training

	A	B	C	D	F
My institution provides faculty with pedagogical training to teach IN PERSON	25%	36%	21%	7%	5%
My institution provides faculty with pedagogical training to teach ONLINE	19%	35%	25%	12%	7%
My institution provides opportunities and supports to improve faculty digital literacy and technological competencies	17%	40%	27%	8%	6%

Percentages for “Don’t know” responses are not shown.



Student Needs and Preferences

The CDLRA does not survey students directly, which means that the data gathered through CDLRA surveys reflects respondents' perceptions of student preferences. For the past three years, Academica Group has sent a survey directly to students asking questions similar to those asked in the CDLRA survey. Throughout this section, we present the CDLRA findings alongside the Academica Group findings to compare CDLRA survey respondents' perceptions with actual student responses.

Academica Spotlight on Students

Preferences: Every year since 2024, the Academica survey has asked students how they would describe their preferred learning format. The findings have held steady over time with no meaningful year-to-year change. The vast majority of students want some sort of in-person component as part of their educational experience.

Table 10
Student Modality Preferences

	2026	2025	2024
Entirely in-person/on-campus	32%	26%	31%
Mostly in-person/on-campus with some online classes	31%	31%	27%
Mix of online and in-person/on-campus classes	17%	21%	18%
Entirely online	12%	12%	12%
Mostly online with some in-person/on-campus courses	6%	9%	9%
Not sure	2%	1%	2%

The CDLRA survey asked respondents to rate their agreement with whether different factors drove student modality needs and preferences. Each year, the survey uses the phrase “needs and preferences” to acknowledge that students sometimes make modality decisions based on their needs and may have to choose a learning context they do not prefer.

Since 2024, nearly all respondents have agreed to some extent that the need to accommodate competing priorities drives students' needs and preferences for online or hybrid learning. Other consistent predominant drivers are the inability to access affordable housing on or near campus, the need to accommodate a disability, and the inability to access affordable and reliable transportation to and from campus.

Over time, the proportion of respondents who believe students want online or hybrid courses because they think these offerings will be easier to pass has increased considerably.

Table 11

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

Strongly agree/agree with the following statements	2026	2025	2024
To accommodate competing priorities (e.g., work, family, varsity sports, etc.)	99%	95%	94%
Inability to access affordable housing on or near campus	79%	79%	75%
To accommodate a disability	77%	74%	72%
Inability to access affordable and reliable transportation to/from campus	72%	74%	67%
Students perceive that the course will be easier to pass	59%	46%	39%
Cost savings	58%	53%	61%
Lack of in-person options for courses students want or need	54%	51%	not asked
Students perceive that they learn best in an online or hybrid modality	26%	25%	25%
Students perceive that the course will be more engaging in an online or hybrid format	6%	not asked	not asked
Students perceive that the quality of instruction is better	4%	9%	9%

The CDLRA survey also asked respondents to rate their level of agreement with statements about drivers of students' needs and preferences for in-person learning. Every year, the vast majority of respondents select a desire for in-person interactions as a reason why students choose on-campus learning experiences. Since 2025, the proportion of respondents who believe students learn best in an in-person environment has also increased.

Table 12

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

Strongly agree/agree with the following statements	2026	2025	2024
Desire for in-person interactions	94%	90%	94%
Students perceive that they learn best in an in-person modality	90%	80%	79%
Students perceive that the course will be more engaging in an in-person format	87%	not asked	not asked
Students perceive that the quality of instruction is better	73%	67%	72%
Uncomfortable or unfamiliar with using technology	66%	57%	60%
Lack of online options for courses students want or need	63%	64%	not asked
Inability to access technologies (e.g., devices, broadband Internet)	56%	56%	59%
To accommodate a disability	48%	51%	46%
Cost savings	20%	22%	21%
Students perceive that the course will be easier to pass	18%	18%	18%



Academica Spotlight on Students

Drivers of student modality choices: The Academica survey listed the same items as the CDLRA survey and asked students whether they agreed that these factors impacted their online and hybrid learning preferences. Table 13 shows a year-to-year comparison of student responses.

Table 13

Drivers of Needs and Preferences for Online and Hybrid Learning

Strongly agree/agree with the following statements	2026	2025
Need to accommodate competing priorities	65%	65%
Cost savings	59%	60%
Inability to access affordable housing on or near campus	43%	46%
Inability to access affordable and reliable transportation to/from campus	41%	41%
I learn best in an online or hybrid course	37%	45%
The course will be easier to pass if it is online	34%	36%
The course will be more engaging in an online or hybrid format	29%	not asked
Lack of in-person options for the courses I want/need to take	29%	32%
To accommodate a disability	27%	26%
The quality of instruction is better online	18%	20%

The Academica student responses align with CDLRA survey responses in identifying the need to accommodate competing priorities, an inability to access affordable housing on or near campus, and an inability to access affordable and reliable transportation to/from campus as the primary reasons why students choose online or hybrid learning experiences. CDLRA survey respondents also identified the need to accommodate a disability as a top driver of choice; however, students were far less likely to make this same selection.

Open Educational Resources (OER)

The CDLRA uses the definition for open educational resources (OER) from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation², 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."

Since 2023, the CDLRA survey has asked a series of questions about OER awareness. The findings clearly show that the proportion of respondents who are "very aware" of OER has steadily increased over time.

Table 14

Respondent Awareness of OER

Extent of Awareness	2026	2025	2024	2023
Very aware of OER and know how they can be used in the classroom	64%	57%	49%	43%
Aware of OER and some of their use cases	23%	26%	35%	32%
Somewhat aware of OER, but not sure how they can be used	5%	6%	3%	7%
Have heard of OER, but don't know much about them	4%	4%	8%	8%
Not aware of OER	3%	6%	5%	9%



² <https://hewlett.org/library/ruminations-on-research-on-open-educational-resources/>

The Academics student survey results on OER awareness are essentially the opposite of the CDLRA survey results. Most students were not at all aware of OER, and very few used them (or were aware they used them) in their courses.

Academics Spotlight on Students

OER Awareness: Year after year, student awareness and use of OER remain low, with no meaningful change over time.

Table 15

Student Awareness of OER

Extent of Awareness	2026	2025	2024
Not at all aware of OER	64%	61%	64%
Familiar with OER, but haven't used them	24%	25%	23%
Personally used OER in my classes	12%	15%	13%

The 2026 CDLRA survey asked respondents who had taught in the last 12 months whether they use OER in their courses. Of these respondents, 78% said “yes,” 20% said “no,” and 2% replied that they did not know.

Next, the survey asked all respondents who had taught in the last 12 months if they would like support or training to use OER: 46% said “yes,” 42% said “no,” and 12% said they did not know.

Finally, the survey asked all respondents, regardless of whether they had taught, whether their institution designates or labels courses in the course catalogue that have no cost or zero-cost materials for students. Roughly one-half (51%) of respondents said “no.” The remaining respondents either said “yes” (23%) or said they did not know (26%).

Academica Spotlight on Students

Cost of course materials: Each year, the Academica Survey has asked students to select the statement that best describes the personal impact of course material costs. In 2026, most students (61%) reported that the cost of course materials prevents them from having the required materials at least some of the time, and 20% said this is often or always the case. This distribution of responses has remained consistent over time.

Table 16

Impact of Cost of Course Materials

	2026	2025	2024
The cost of materials never prevents me from having the required materials	30%	29%	32%
The cost of materials sometimes prevents me from having the required materials	41%	42%	43%
The cost of materials often prevents me from having the required materials	16%	17%	15%
The cost of materials always prevents me from having the required materials	4%	6%	5%
Don't know	9%	6%	6%

Because the cost of course materials is a barrier for many students, there is an opportunity for more institutions to adopt the practice of labeling courses with zero-cost materials. There is also an equally important opportunity to support and train more faculty to use OER, increasing adoption and reducing student costs.

Digital Learning Challenges

For the past two years, the survey has asked respondents to rate their level of agreement with a series of digital learning challenges to identify the most pressing challenges at institutions.

Table 17
Pressing Challenges

Strongly agree/agree with the following statements	2026	2025
Academic integrity (e.g., preventing plagiarism and cheating)	89%	88%
Developing policies or guidelines for AI use	88%	86%
Social and mental health supports for students	88%	79%
Effective assessment practices for <u>online learning</u> contexts	85%	77%
Faculty fatigue and burnout	84%	77%
Financial stability of the institution	82%	79%
Effective instructional practices for teaching with technology	82%	74%
Faculty digital literacy (e.g., proficiency with technologies)	81%	79%
Accommodating diverse learning needs among students	80%	78%
Student digital literacy (e.g., proficiency with technologies)	78%	72%
Student enrolments	77%	84%
Readiness for post-secondary studies among first-year students	75%	71%
Cybersecurity	73%	64%
International student restrictions	71%	79%
Technology infrastructure	70%	69%
Effective assessment practices for <u>in-person learning</u> contexts	67%	57%
Evaluating the quality of courses taught in an <u>online or hybrid</u> context	65%	55%
Evaluating the quality of courses taught <u>in person</u>	58%	48%



Many of the identified challenges overlap. For example, challenges related to academic integrity tend to be closely tied to developing guidelines for AI use and effective assessment practices.

The survey also asked respondents if they wanted to share anything else about digital learning challenges at their institution. Nineteen respondents provided comments with insights about additional challenges, including restructuring, artificial intelligence and academic integrity, institutional-level financial concerns, and student enrolment and retention.

“The significant loss of full-time faculty and support staff, and preparing for the significant increase of PT faculty over the coming years without teaching experience.” (Administrator)

“New systems that do not integrate with one another and cause far more manual work/effort hours than with previous systems. Lack of quality curriculum and instruction due to so many system changes.” (Administrator)

“We need to get a handle on LLM-based cheating as well as cheating generally in online courses. Society would be better off if online-only courses without proctored, in-person written exams were outlawed. Grade inflation is also a problem in the university and has also been a problem for some time, aggravated by turning to multiple-choice exams and cheating on online quizzes/assessments.” (Faculty)

“The institution is facing challenges that all institutions are facing, esp. related to student enrolment and financial instability. In my context, another pressing challenge is departmental collaboration. It is very difficult to implement and scale new initiatives without support from the Registrar, flexibility from the Ministry, etc.” (Educational Developer/Instructional Designer)

Concluding Thoughts

“To remain competitive, our faculty need to be digital and AI literate. To attract non-traditional learners, the institution needs to offer educational programming outside the traditional model (e.g., modular, application-based, ongoing enrolments, competency-based with pathways to achievement, etc.).”
(Educational Developer/Instructional Designer)

When looking at the survey findings as a whole, we see that technological advancements are reshaping educational pathways and experiences at Canadian post-secondary institutions. The findings show that institutions are considering ways to reach new student demographics, especially prospective students who need or want a more flexible experience. To attract these students, many institutions are expanding their online offerings at the course and program levels, or developing microcredentials (often delivered online). The shift toward more flexible opportunities is still emerging across the country, with plenty of room in the sector for innovation and growth.

At the same time, as flexible offerings emerge and expand, AI has become a complicating factor in online course delivery and assessment, especially agentic AI, which can now complete a course autonomously. Institutions are experiencing tension between the demand for greater technology integration (including from a workforce-readiness perspective) and the limitations of traditional assessment methods (e.g., essays and exams) in the age of AI.

In the past, digital learning practices (particularly online learning) have mostly been siloed within departments or standalone programs at institutions. That has changed. Technology use and flexible offerings within the educational experience have become the expectation, rather than the exception, regardless of modality or academic discipline. There is a pressing need to improve digital literacies, pedagogical approaches, assessment practices, and workforce relevance across institutions as a whole to meet learner expectations and ensure Canadian students have a variety of opportunities and pathways that equip them for future careers.

Methodology

Information for this report comes from the 2026 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 2026 Digital Learning Trends Survey:

- The survey was open from April 13 to May 29, 2026.
- 126 participants from 81 unique institutions responded to the survey, representing nine provinces and two territories.
- Participant roles included administrators (e.g., senior administrators, deans, and directors), faculty, teaching and learning leaders, instructional designers and educational developers, institutional researchers, library services staff, student support staff, and educational technology specialists.

Through the 2026 Pan-Canadian Digital Learning Report, we have compared some of the 2026 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

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 15,000 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 May 20 and June 12, 2026. Panelists were incentivized through Academica's internal points system for their time. A total of 803 students qualified for and completed the survey. Findings are weighted by gender using Statistics Canada's Postsecondary Student Information System (PSIS) data.

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