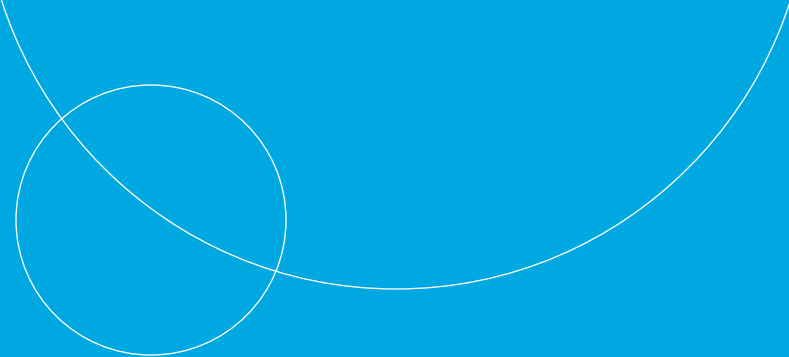rnl national conference
**leading ai innovation**
empowering higher education

# 10 Things You Need to Know About Online Student Motivations and Decision Making

Jason Issacs
Scott Jeffe
Reena Lichtenfeld

# Your Presenters and their Roles

**Scott Jeffe**

Vice President, Graduate and Online
Research
RNL

**Reena Lichtenfeld**

Vice President,
Consulting Services
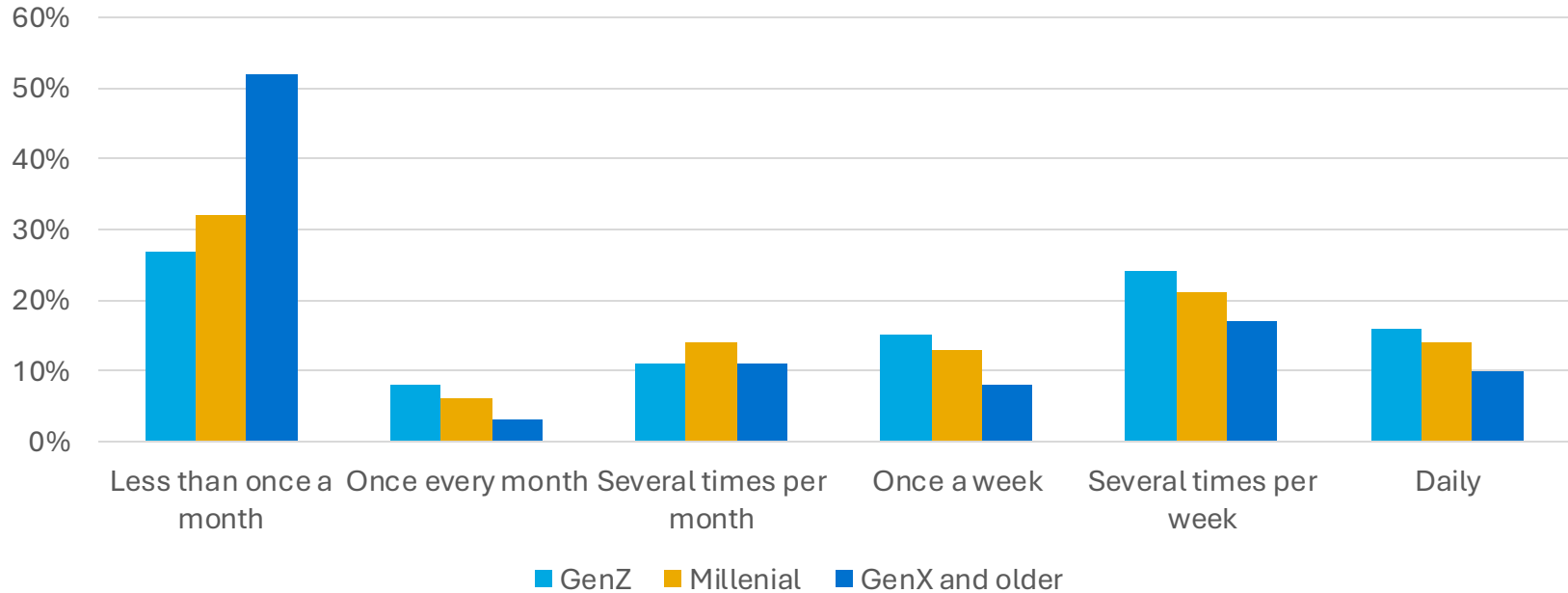RNL

**Jason Isaac**

Creative Director
RNL

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# Students are using AI regularly in their daily lives

## ...Gen Z are significantly more likely to be using than Gen X



How frequently do you use an AI tool like ChatGPT?

Legend: GenZ, Millenial, GenX and older

Source: 2024 RNL Online Student Recruitment Report. RNL.

3

# Students are using AI chat and are satisfied

## ...Gen X is less likely to use AI chat and more likely to be dissatisfied

Did you use an AI-driven chatbot during your search for an online program?
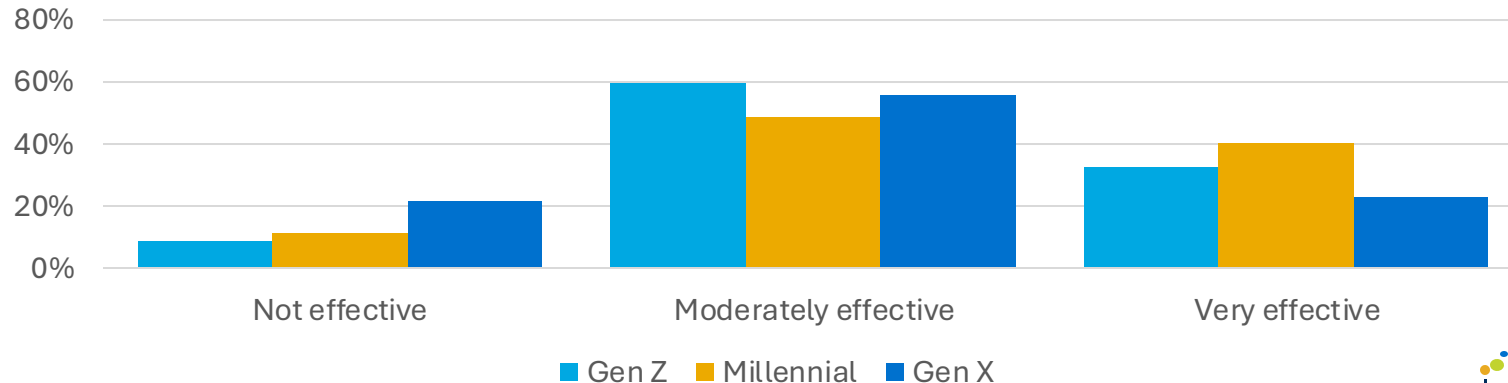
Yes

**84%**
Gen Z

**82%**
Millennial

**65%**
Gen X+

How effective did you find chatbots in providing the information you needed for your search?



Gen Z ■ Millennial ■ Gen X

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# Students enroll in order to advance their careers

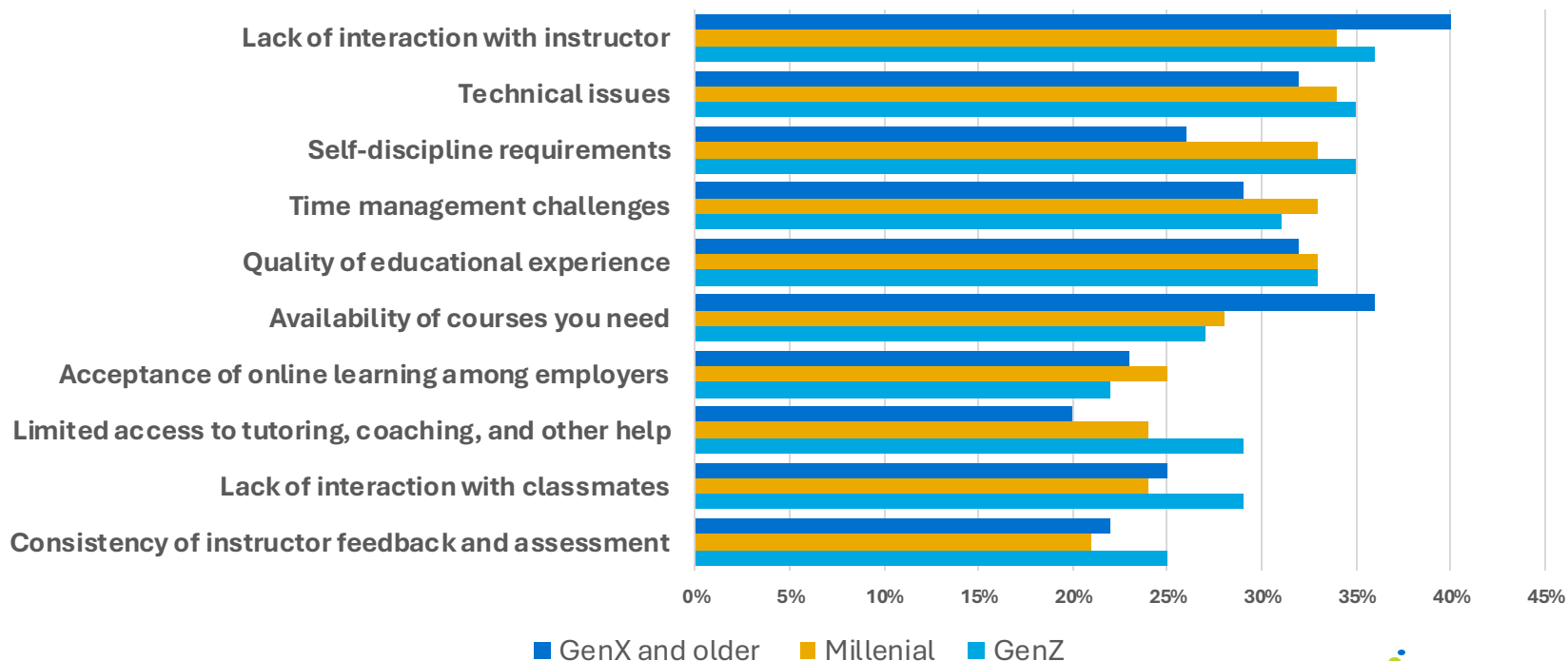## ...Gen Z is enrolling in order to prepare for their first career

What was your primary motivation to earn a degree?



Legend: GenZ, Millenial, GenX and older
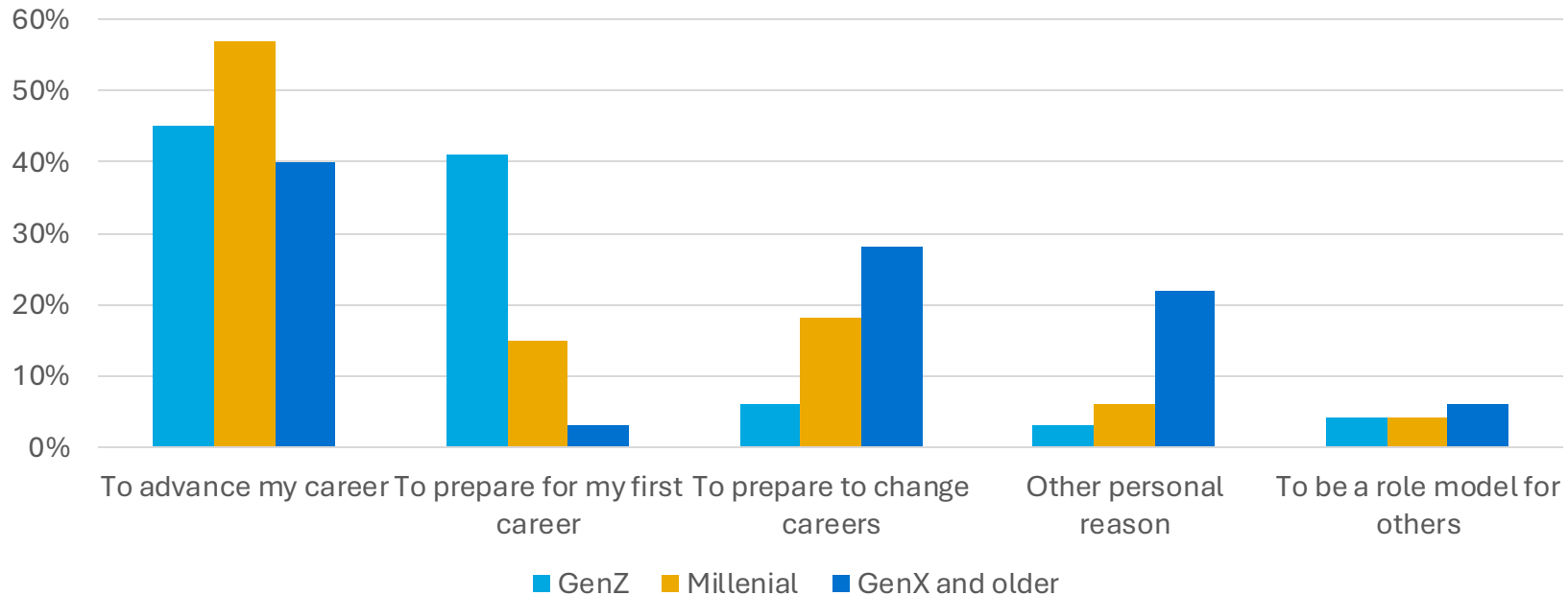
# Concerns focus on interaction and technical issues

What are your greatest concerns about online study?



Lack of interaction with instructor
Technical issues
Self-discipline requirements
Time management challenges
Quality of educational experience
Availability of courses you need
Acceptance of online learning among employers
Limited access to tutoring, coaching, and other help
Lack of interaction with classmates
Consistency of instructor feedback and assessment

0%  5%  10%  15%  20%  25%  30%  35%  40%  45%

■ GenX and older  ■ Millenial  ■ GenZ

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# The older the student, the more likely they are to be considering online programs far from home

## ...more than one-third of Gen X students considered a program very far away

How far away from where you reside was the furthest program you considered?



Legend: GenZ, Millenial, GenX and older
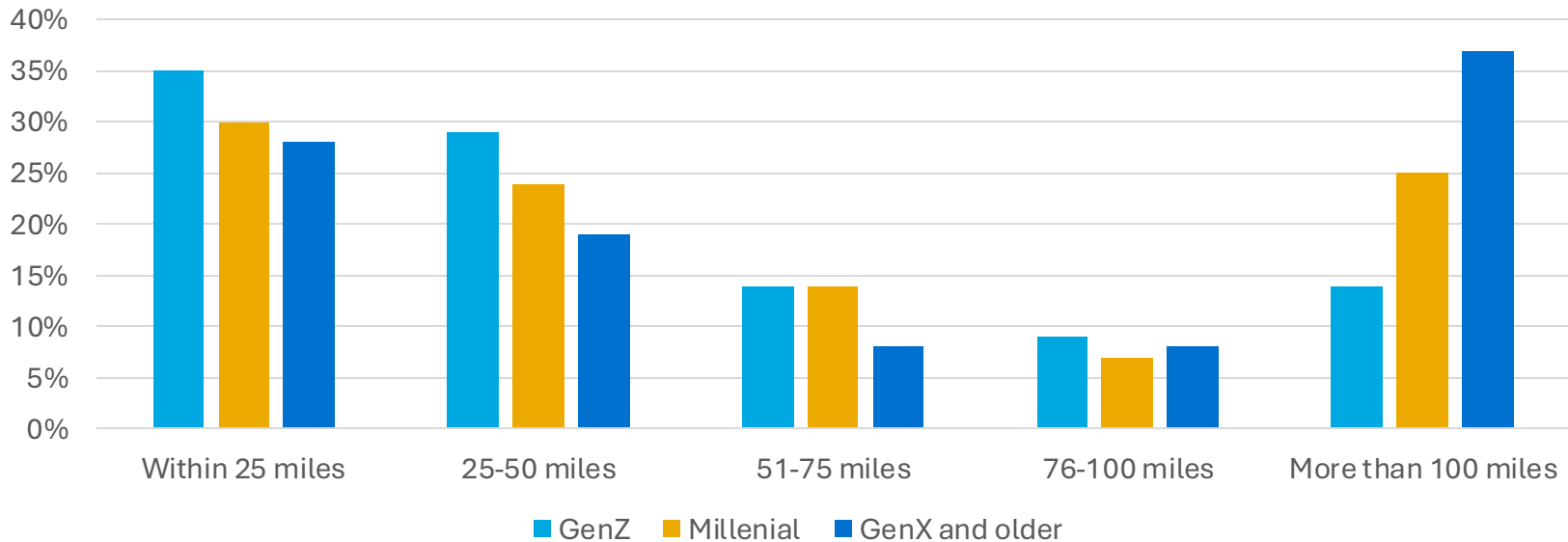
# Messaging – and curriculum – should focus on cost, employment, and convenience above all else

How important are each of the following in your enrollment decision? *(combined percents rating of "important" and "very important")*



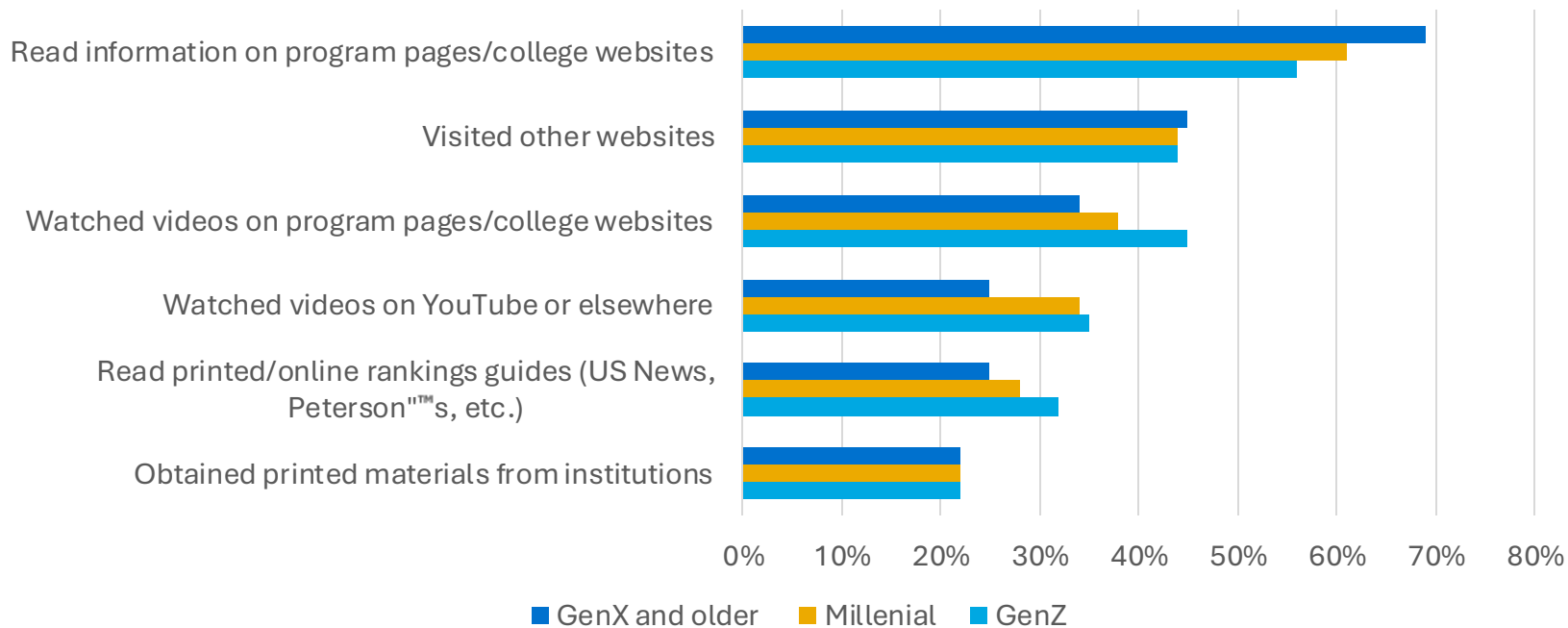Legend: GenZ | Millenial | GenX and older
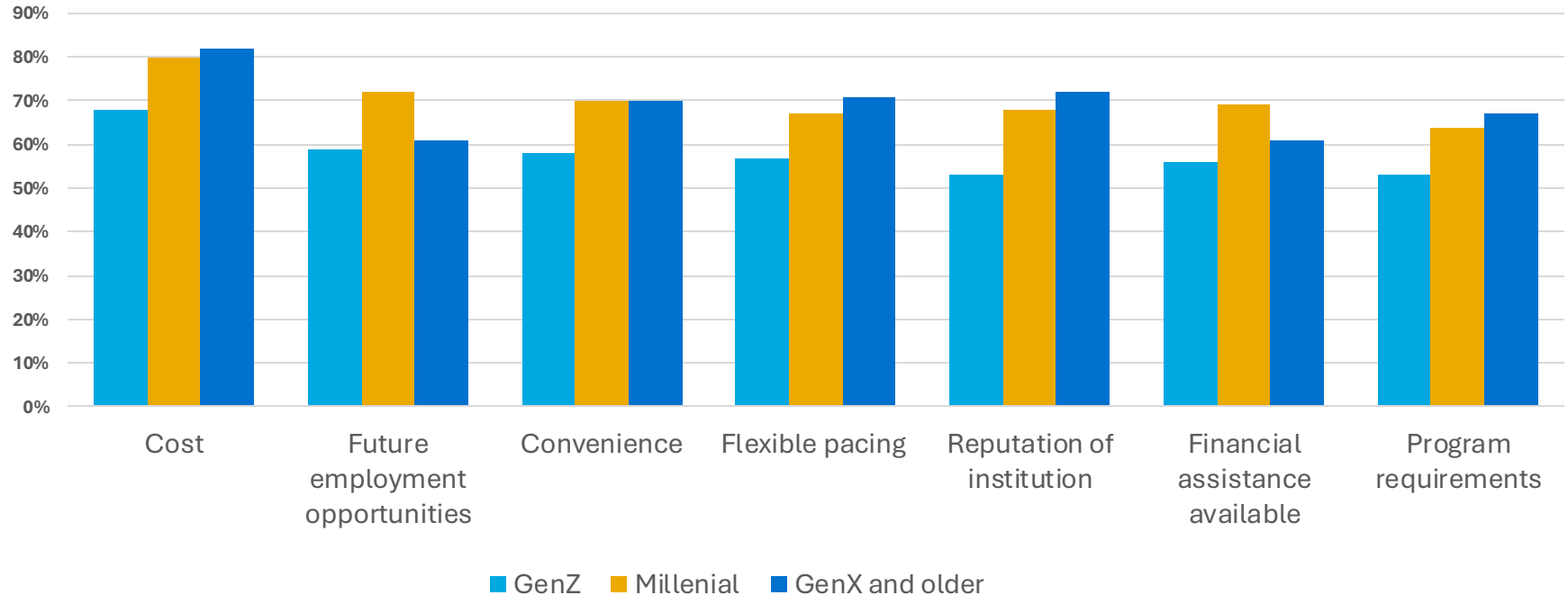
# Students expect curriculum to provide career preparation

What elements are important for you in online courses?



Source: 2024 Online Student Recruitment Report, RNL.
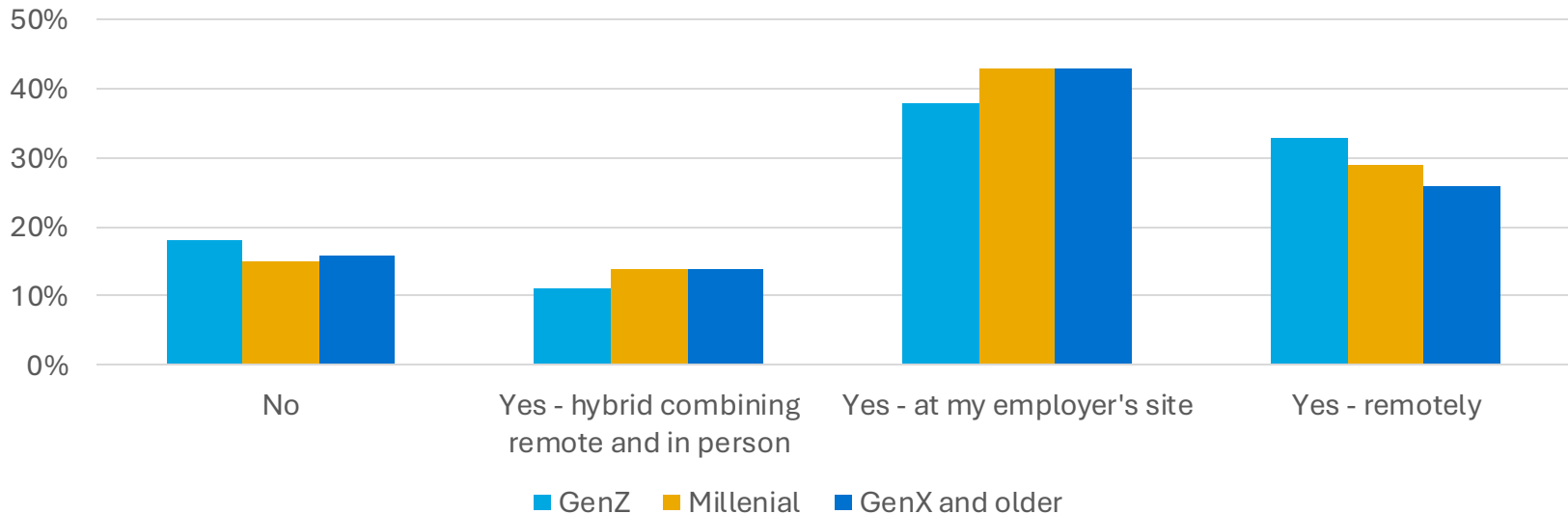
GenX and older    Millenial    GenZ
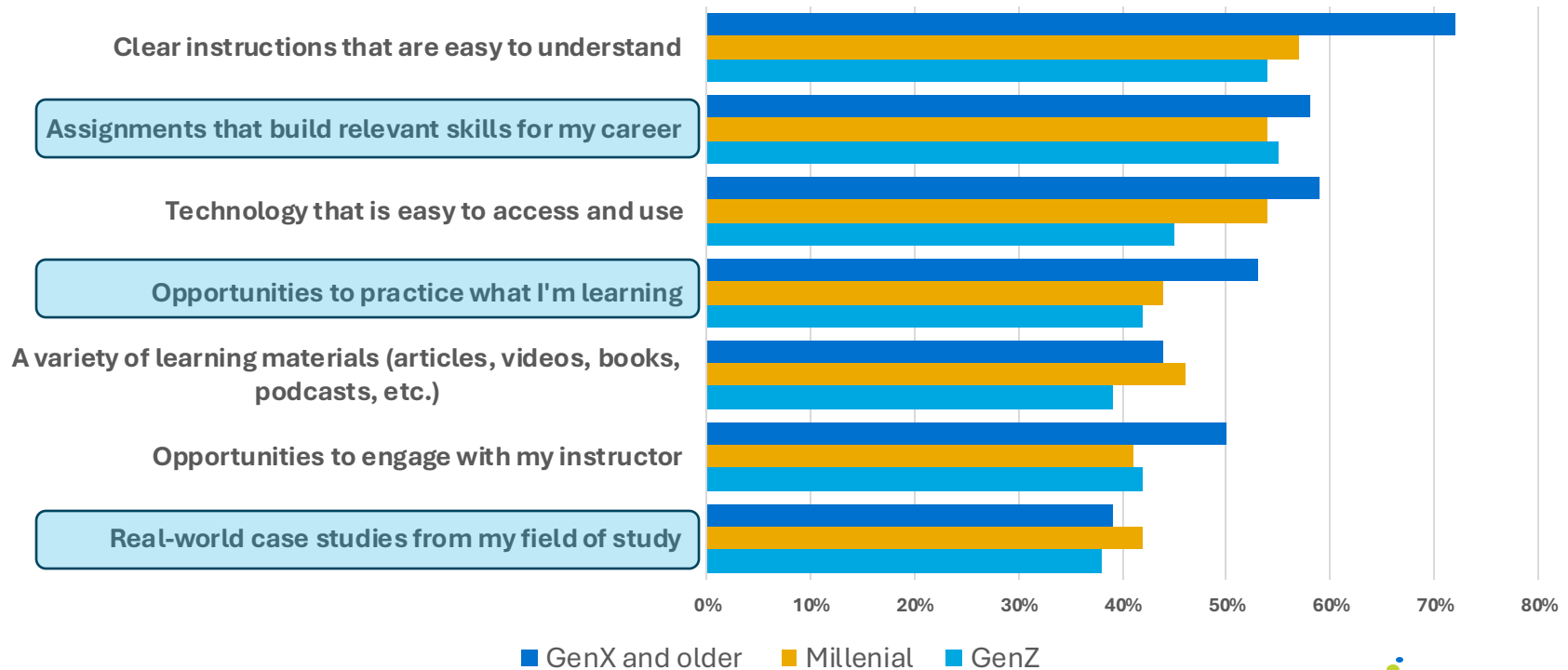
# Students research programs of interest on program pages – reading content and watching video

Once you began your search, how did you research programs of interest?



Legend: GenX and older (blue), Millenial (gold/yellow), GenZ (light blue)

Categories (top to bottom):
- Read information on program pages/college websites
- Visited other websites
- Watched videos on program pages/college websites
- Watched videos on YouTube or elsewhere
- Read printed/online rankings guides (US News, Peterson"™s, etc.)
- Obtained printed materials from institutions
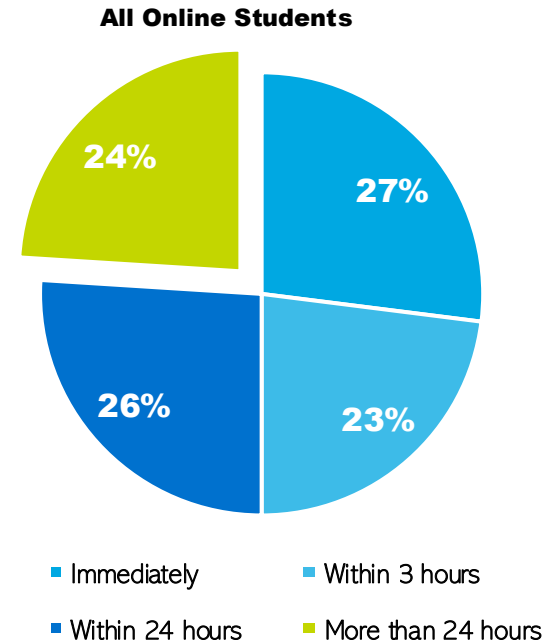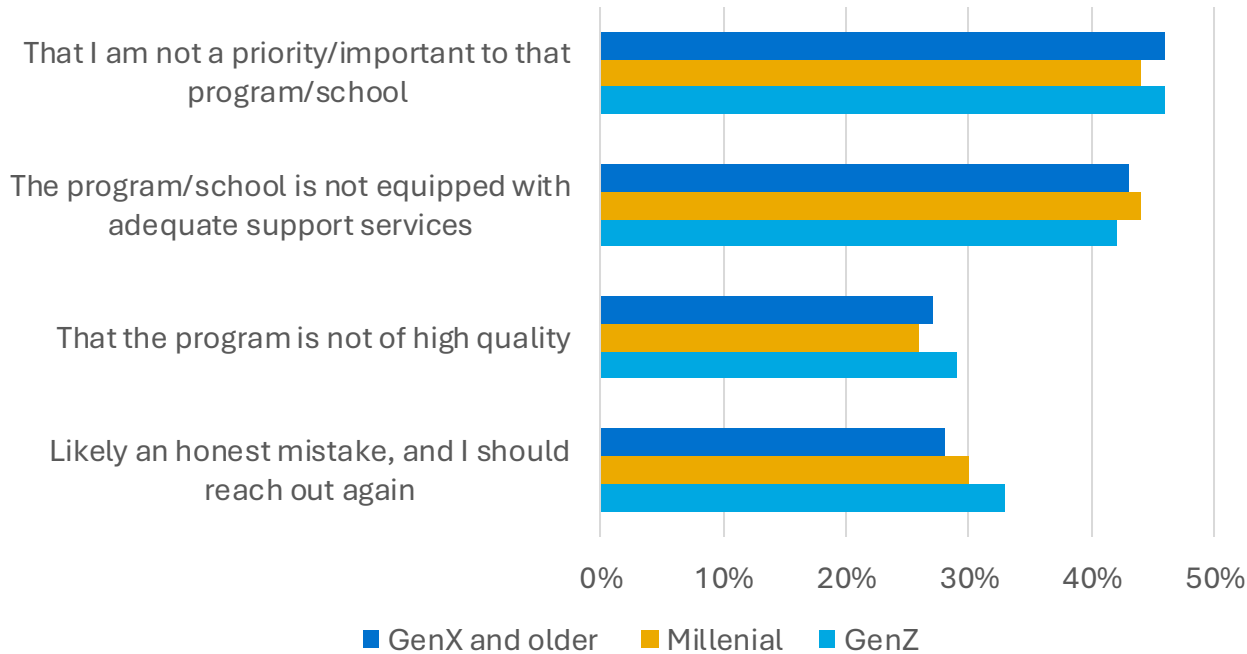
X-axis: 0% to 80%

# Students are employed when they start their online program search, regardless of age

Were you employed at the time you began your search for an online program?



Legend: ■ GenZ  ■ Millenial  ■ GenX and older

| | No | Yes - hybrid combining remote and in person | Yes - at my employer's site | Yes - remotely |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| GenZ | 18% | 11% | 38% | 33% |
| Millenial | 15% | 14% | 43% | 29% |
| GenX and older | 16% | 14% | 43% | 26% |

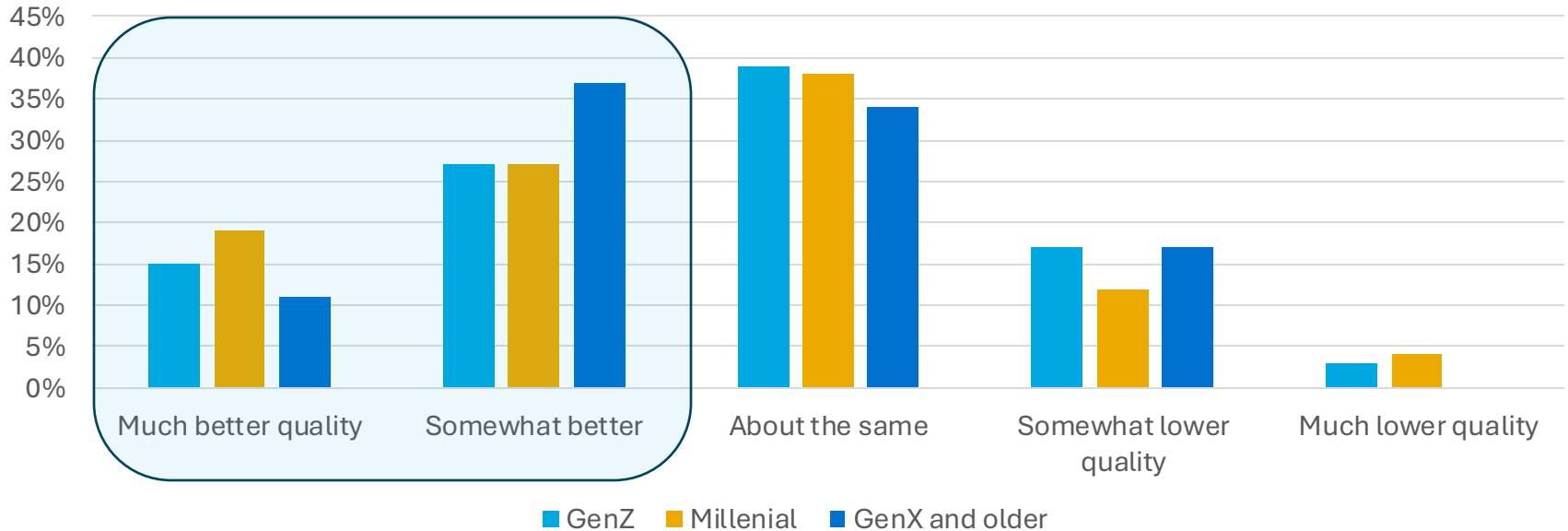Source: 2024 RNL Online Student Recruitment Report. RNL.

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# The best messaging and positioning can be upended by unsatisfactory follow up

What does a slower than expected response indicate to you?



Chart categories (top to bottom):
- That I am not a priority/important to that program/school
- The program/school is not equipped with adequate support services
- That the program is not of high quality
- Likely an honest mistake, and I should reach out again

X-axis: 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%

Legend: ■ GenX and older ■ Millenial ■ GenZ

**All Online Students**



Pie chart values: 27%, 23%, 26%, 24%

Legend:
- ■ Immediately
- ■ Within 3 hours
- ■ Within 24 hours
- ■ More than 24 hours

Source: 2024 RNL Online Student Recruitment Report. RNL.

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# Students that find the right online program are very satisfied with their experience

How would you rate the quality of your current/recent online program in comparison with past classroom experiences?



Legend: GenZ, Millenial, GenX and older

Categories: Much better quality, Somewhat better, About the same, Somewhat lower quality, Much lower quality

Source: 2024 RNL Online Student Recruitment Report. RNL.

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# How would you apply this information to your campus?

# Digital Assistants

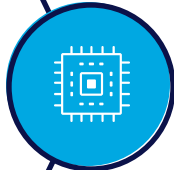## Chatbot/Digital Assistant Opportunity

### Finding

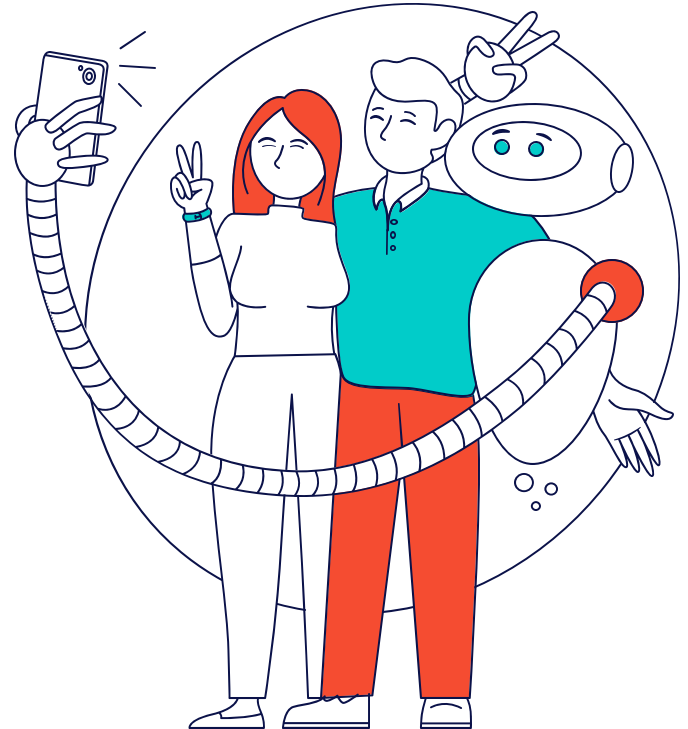Adoption of AI, especially among younger generations (Z and Alpha) are on the rise.

### Implication

Digital Assistants scratch the itch for immediate, real-time, personalized, resource-rich information

### Action

D.A.s for lead generation, source of inquiry and navigation paths, follow-up with real-time, personalized follow-up

# Importance of Career

## Different motives, but a universal career focus

**Finding:**
- Millennials enroll in order to advance careers
- GenZ enroll because they want to prepare for their first role
- GenX enroll because they want to change careers

**Implication:**
- Institutions must provide ample outcomes information (data) to address career advancement, preparation, and future navigation.

**Action:**

**Data**
Career placement, mobility, and leadership data must be collected, shared, and marketed widely.

**Marketing & Communications**
Integrate career information – data, events, programming, curricula, partner companies and organizations, etc. into marketing and communication plans

# Concerns About Technology

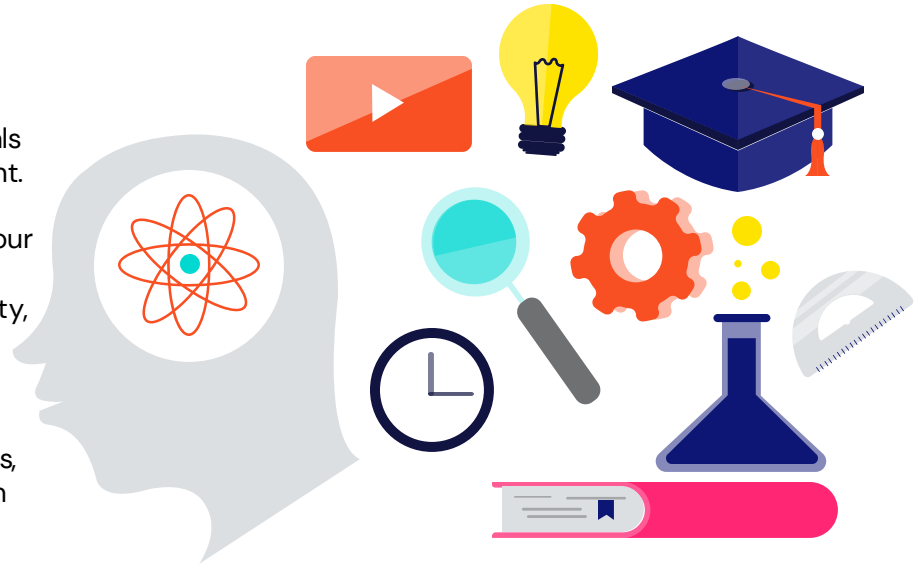## Generational differences may surprise

**Finding**

GenX are concerned about lack of interaction with instructor, whereas GenZ are concerned about lack of interaction with classmates. Millennials are concerns about time management.

**Investigate**

How do these findings compare to your institution? How do you currently position marketing around interactivity, time management, and course availability?

**Action**

Videos, testimonials, communications, digital ads – all to be considered with visuals and dialogue that address student and faculty interaction.

# Geographic Distance Considered for Online

## Generational differences on proximity to institution

### Finding

The older the student, the more likely they are to consider online education far from home

### Implication

Consider parameters for digital advertising and search

### Action

Change parameters for search, digital advertising, and communication depending on age and distance

# A focus on cost and convenience

## The older the student, the more important they are

### Finding

Cost and convenience (in addition to career prep) drive all enrollment decisions, but even more so for older than younger students.

### Implication

How affordable are you? Flexible? For higher priced programs, flexibility and convenience are even more important in "closing the deal."

### Action – 1

Don't be shy about positioning your program as among the most affordable – if you are.

### Action – 2

Messaging focused on convenience factors – and affordability – should lead and should precede messaging about quality, prestige, and other less compelling factors.

# Let's practice

- Pick one of the remaining findings

- Compete the worksheet identifying

    - Implications for a messaging/positioning strategy

    - Actions to be taken to apply to a messaging/positioning strategy.

- Share with your table and discuss.

- We will go round the room to hear some of these.
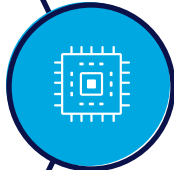
# Curricular focus on careers

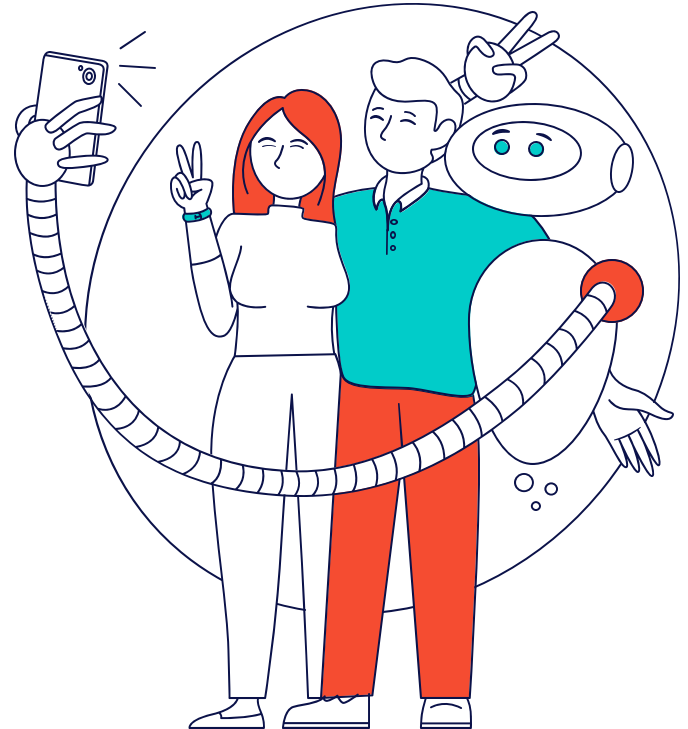## Its not just a messaging focus

### Finding
Regardless of the generation, they want the curriculum to actively prepare them for future careers. Its not just a message.

### Implication

### Action
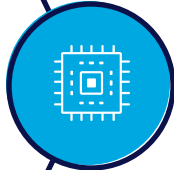
# Text and video are critical

## All ages mix reading and watching video to learn about programs, with the youngest most likely to do so
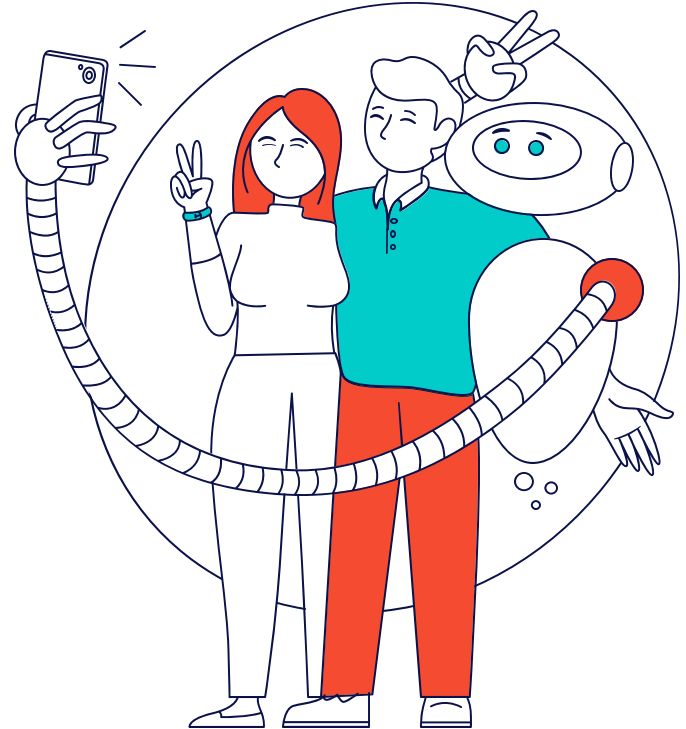
### Finding
Program page written content must be augmented by video and externally posted video will help with the youngest students.

### Implication

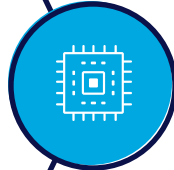### Action

# Most students are already employed

## Regardless of age, online students are employed at the time they start their search
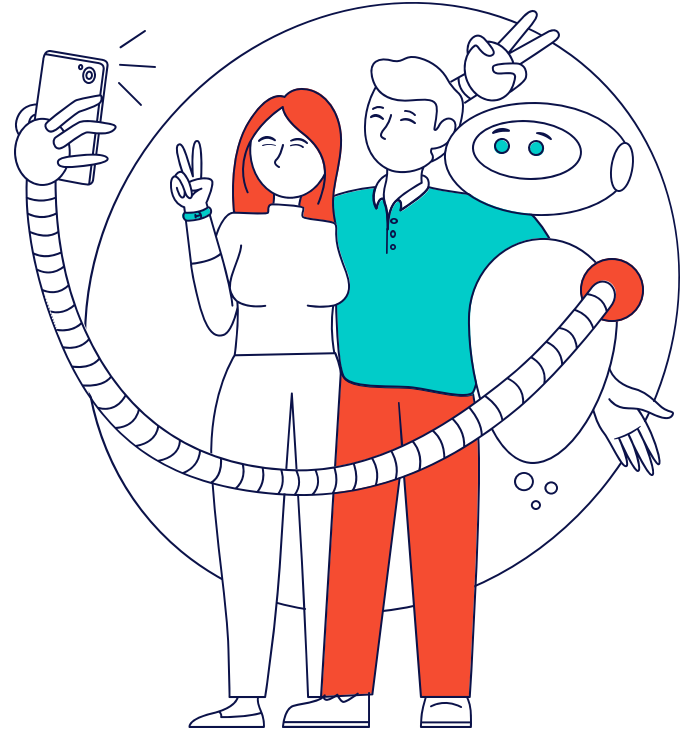
**Finding**
Working students have different needs from first contact. Regardless of age, they are working – with the youngest most likely to be in remote positions.

**Implication**

**Action**

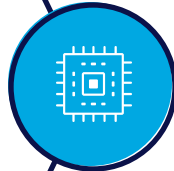# Online students love online study
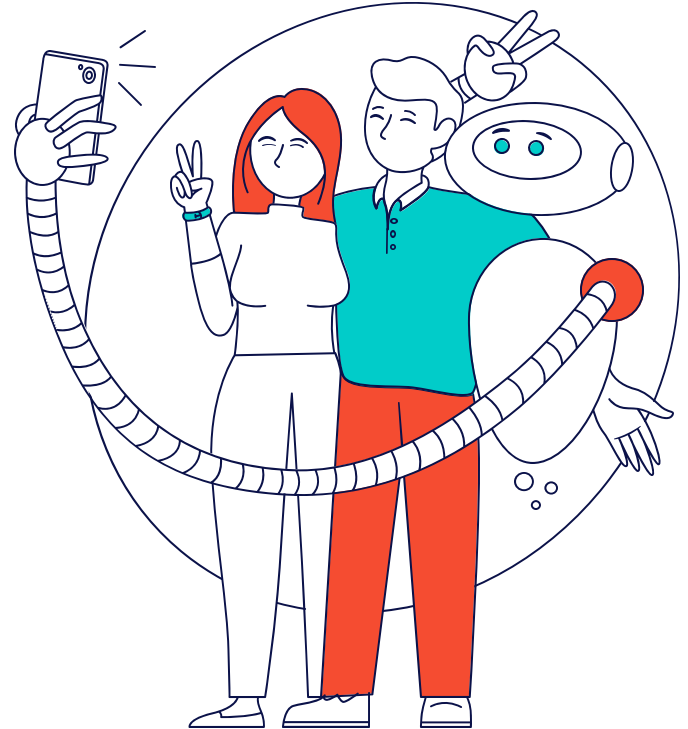
## Little difference by age group

**Finding**

The vast majority of online students rate their experience as better (or as good as) past classroom experiences.

**Implication**

**Action**

# Complimentary Consultation

# RNL's 2024 Online Student Recruitment Report

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# Your Presenters and their Roles



**Scott Jeffe**

Vice President, Graduate and Online
Research
RNL



**Reena Lichtenfeld**

Vice President,
Consulting Services
RNL



**Jason Isaac**

Creative Director
RNL

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