

A review of the research about Chief Online Learning Officers

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Associate Vice President for Online Learning &
Professor in Educational Leadership
University of Rochester

Quality Matters Research Conference
February 16, 2024



Interest in Leadership for Online Learning

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Who's On Point for Online Learning?

Survey aims to identify who leads digital learning strategies at colleges and universities – and what they think.

By Doug Ledeman // January 23, 2017



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SPECIAL REPORTS

Why Your College Needs a VP for Online Learning

By Eric E. Frederickson | APRIL 08, 2019

If online or digital learning is not relevant to you or your college, you can stop reading now.

OK, thanks for staying with me. Most college leaders would agree that online education is not a passing fad: Recent studies show that one out of three students takes at least one online course.

At my institution, the University of Rochester, I serve as associate vice president for online learning—a role that has become increasingly common in American universities in the past five years, according to studies I have conducted on online leadership. Intended to organize and guide a college's online-learning strategy, the job often carries the title of vice president, dean, or director of online or digital learning.

So why is this new title spreading?

The flurry of activity around MOOCs starting in 2012 contributed to the general visibility of such courses and often led to more dialogue about online teaching and learning. Greater awareness among college leaders and trustees led to questions about the state of online learning at their institutions. Suddenly they wanted to know, "What's happening online at our institution?" or "What should be happening?"

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Inside Digital Learning

Driving Digital Learning at Community Colleges

Two-year-college administrators say student retention is their top goal, and are likelier than their university peers to have taken an online course themselves, survey finds.

By Doug Ledeman // November 29, 2017



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Episode 39: Introducing the Teaching Online Preparation Toolkit
Episode 38: Storytelling and Empathy in Online Education
Episode 37: 6 Deadly Sins of Online Teaching
Episode 36: Finding Online Learning Leaders: "Frederickson's List"

VIEW ALL

APRIL 2, 2019 BY JONATHAN PIZZO

EPISODE 36: FINDING ONLINE LEARNING LEADERS: "FREDERICKSEN'S LIST"

The New York Times

Will the Coronavirus Forever Alter the College Experience?



The evolution
A Modern Campus Illumination

PROGRAMMING PROGRAM PLANNING AND DESIGN Published on Aug 9, 2022

The Future of U.S. Higher Education with Online Learning—Two Steps Forward or One Step Back?

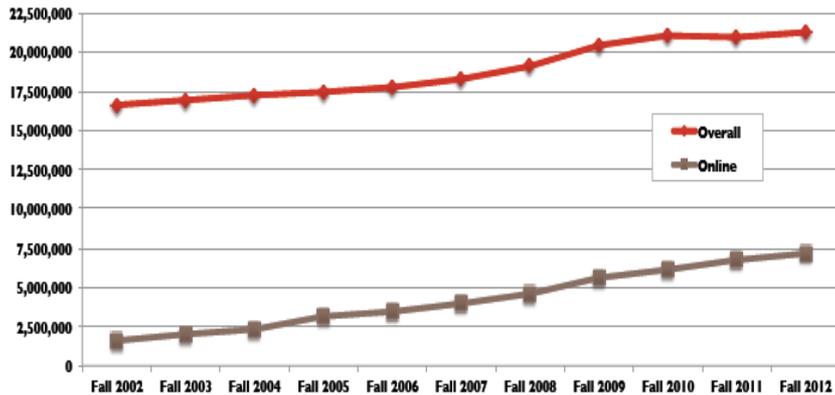
Eric Frederickson | Associate Vice President for Online Learning and Professor in Educational Leadership, University of Rochester



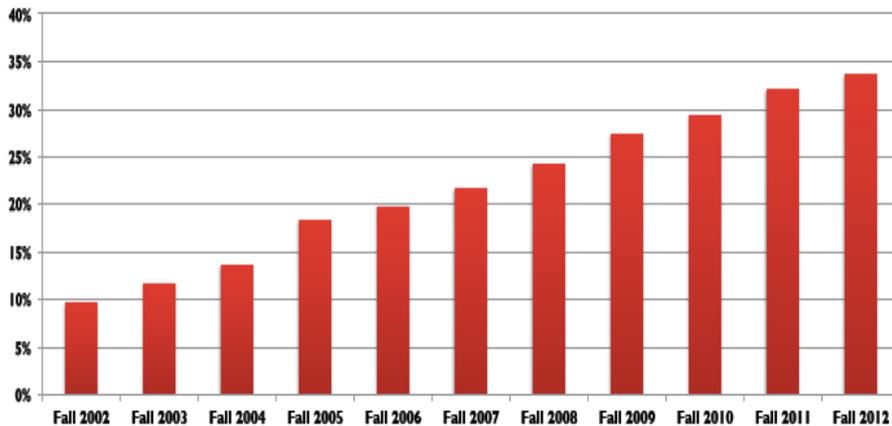
Higher ed leaders need to decide on the future of their institutions—either moving forward and building on established progress or reverting to a more traditional education model.

Growth in Online Education

TOTAL AND ONLINE ENROLLMENT IN DEGREE-GRANTING POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS: FALL 2002 - FALL 2012



ONLINE ENROLLMENT AS A PERCENT OF TOTAL ENROLLMENT: FALL 2002 - FALL 2012



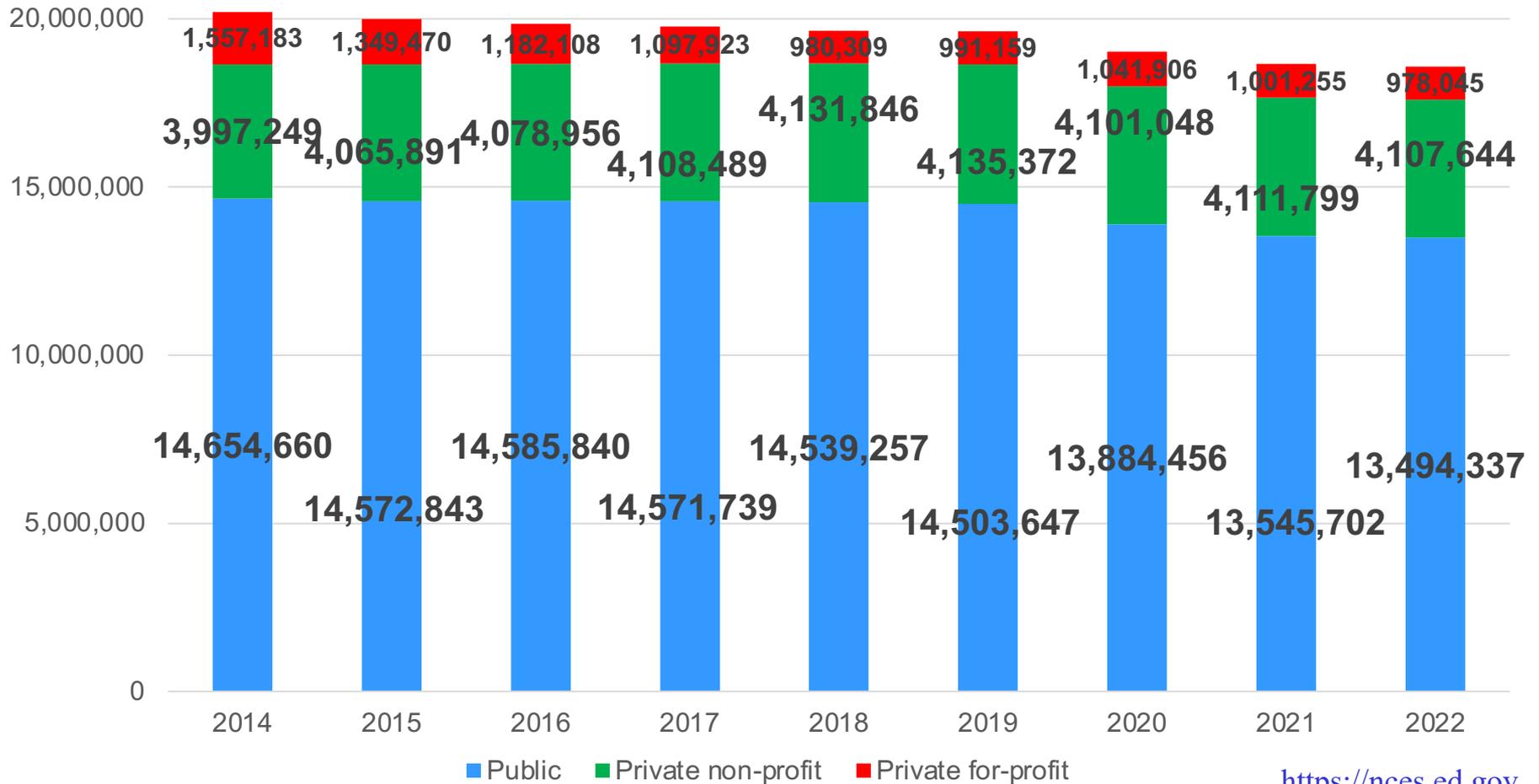
THE STANFORD EDUCATION EXPERIMENT COULD CHANGE HIGHER LEARNING FOREVER



The Prediction



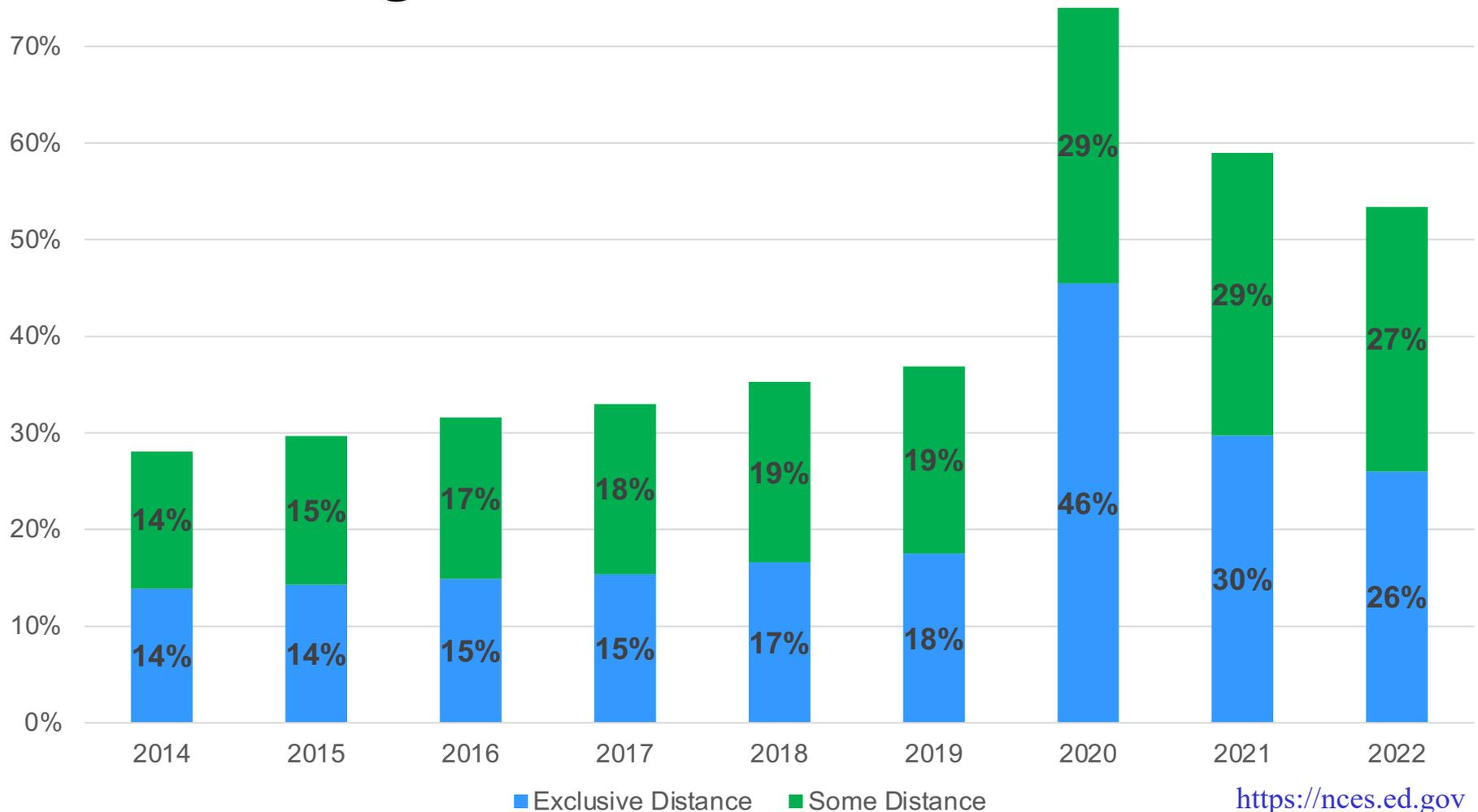
Total Higher Education Enrollments in US



<https://nces.ed.gov>



Online Education Enrollments in Higher Education in US



- With the growth of online education,
 - the increased strategic importance of online education to the institution, and
 - the visibility of these efforts to the BOT and executives,
- ➔ it is understandable that Presidents and Provosts have created leadership positions for online learning.

But what do we know about the leaders who are guiding these vital efforts?



Goals of the Studies

- Develop a systematic and comprehensive list of leaders for online learning in US Higher Education
- Collect institutional data for context
- Gather information about the position and professional experience of the leader
- Capture demographic and other information about these individual leaders
- Investigate the potential relationships among these factors and dimensions



Who is on point for online learning in colleges and universities in the US?

- How do you find out when there is no existing list?
- Review of institutional web sites and search for:
 - Organizational charts
 - President and Provost cabinets
 - Online learning / education
 - eLearning
 - Distance education / distance learning
 - Instructional / academic/ educational technology
 - Centers for Instructional Innovation / Teaching Excellence
 - Global Campus / World Campus / Virtual Campus / Extended Studies
 - Campus / Faculty / Staff / Office Directories
 - Press releases
- Sometimes it takes 5-10 minutes... other times, much longer
- Variation in title
- Systematic approach – Carnegie classification or enrollment size of the institution
- *(what else would you do in your free time in the summer?)*



Two National Studies

Universities

Community Colleges

	Total Population	Identified Population	Sample
R1	115 (11%)	112 (14%)	43 (17%)
R2	107 (10%)	100 (12%)	37 (15%)
R3	113 (10%)	84 (10%)	28 (11%)
M1	398 (37%)	322 (39%)	106 (42%)
M2	214 (20%)	139 (17%)	32 (13%)
M3	141 (13%)	63 (8%)	9 (4%)
Total	1088	820	255

	Total Population	Identified Population	Sample
Very Large	74 (7%)	72 (10%)	25 (11%)
Large	170 (17%)	160 (21%)	56 (25%)
Medium	322 (31%)	286 (38%)	84 (37%)
Small	458 (45%)	233 (31%)	61 (27%)
Total	1024	752	226



Institutional Context

- Loosely Coupled Systems - Weick (1976)
- Organized Anarchy - Cohen and March (1986)
- Professional Bureaucracy - Mintzberg (1979)



Organizational Theory related to Higher Education

- Loosely Coupled Systems
 - Weick (1976)
 - the image that coupled events are responsive, but that each event also preserves its own identity and some evidence of its physical or logical separateness
 - “... since some of the most important elements in educational organizations are teachers, classrooms, principals, and so forth, it may be consequential that in a loosely coupled system there is more room available for self determination by the actors.”



Organizational Theory related to Higher Education

- Organized Anarchy
 - Cohen and March (1986)
 - *Ambiguity = a state of uncertainty or being understood in multiple ways*
 - Ambiguity of Purpose
 - Ambiguity of Power
 - Ambiguity of Experience
 - Ambiguity of Success



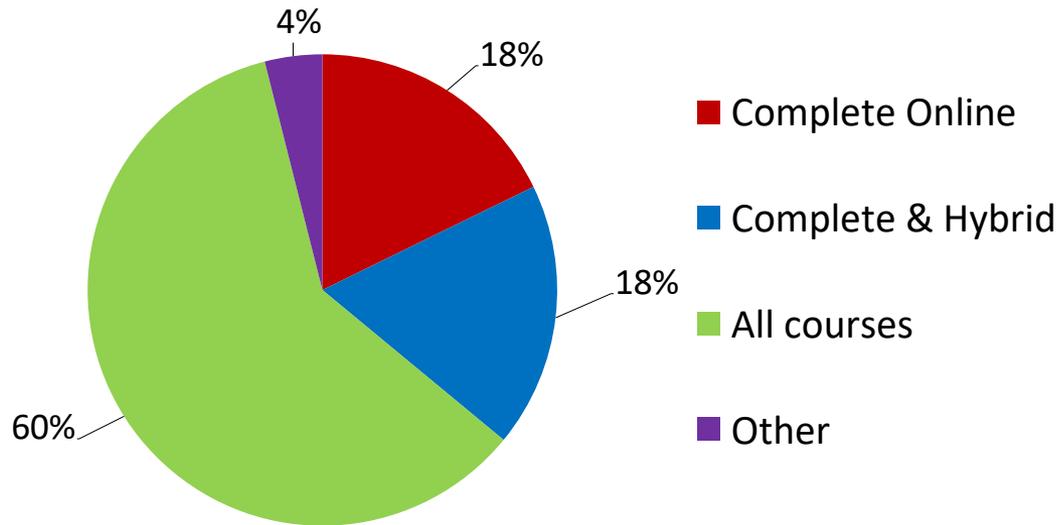
Organizational Theory related to Faculty

- Professional Bureaucracy
 - Mintzberg (1979)
 - The professional bureaucracy is highly decentralized horizontal and vertical structure. Power is seen at the bottom of the structure with the professionals of the operating core.
 - Professionals gain power by knowing that their work is very complex which eliminates the need for supervision by a manager.
 - Highly democratic
 - Professionals control their own work and seek to control the administrative decisions that impact their work.
 - “Collegial organizations” – professional operators at the top and administrators are below serving them.

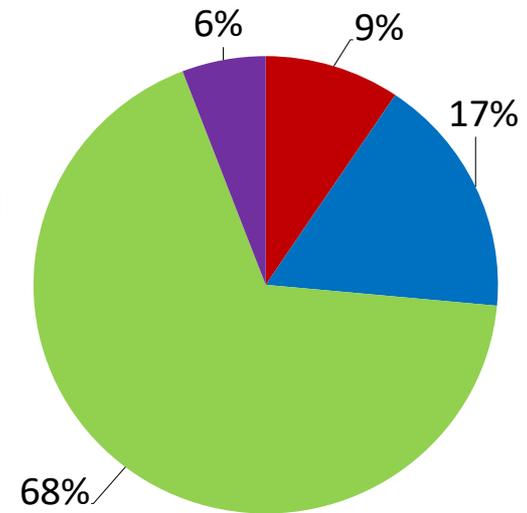


How do you and your institution define the scope of online learning for your position?

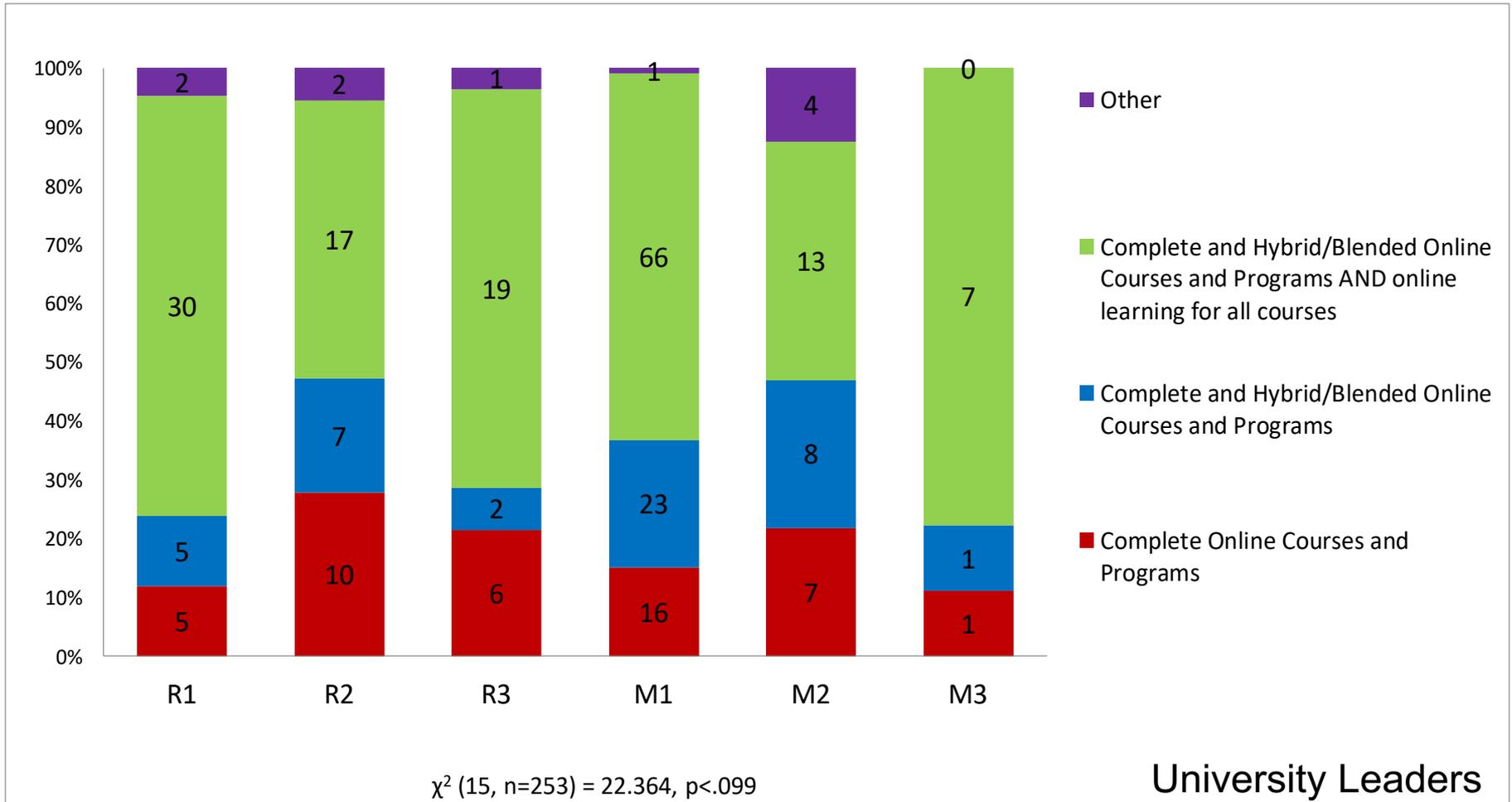
Universities



Community Colleges



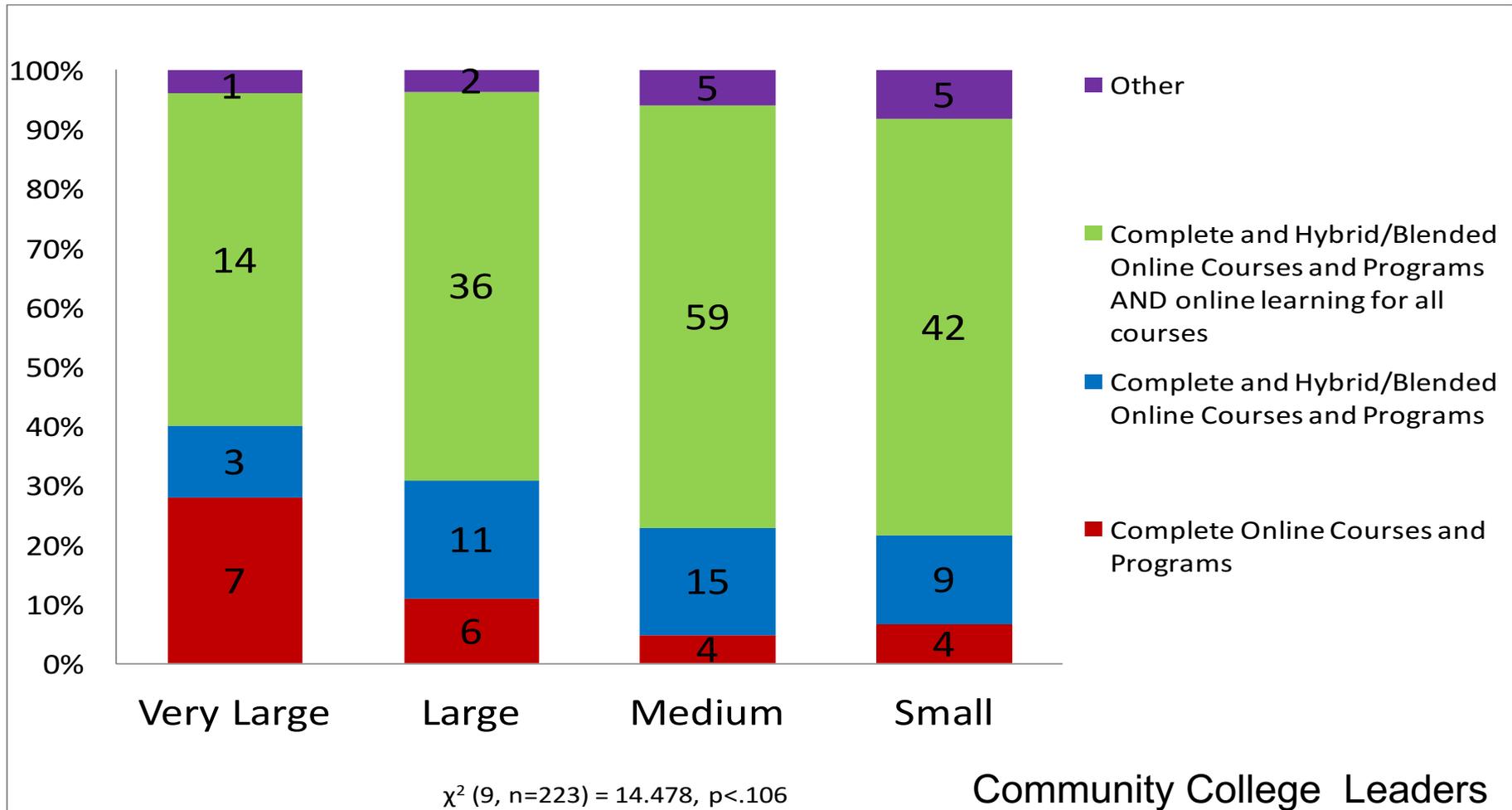
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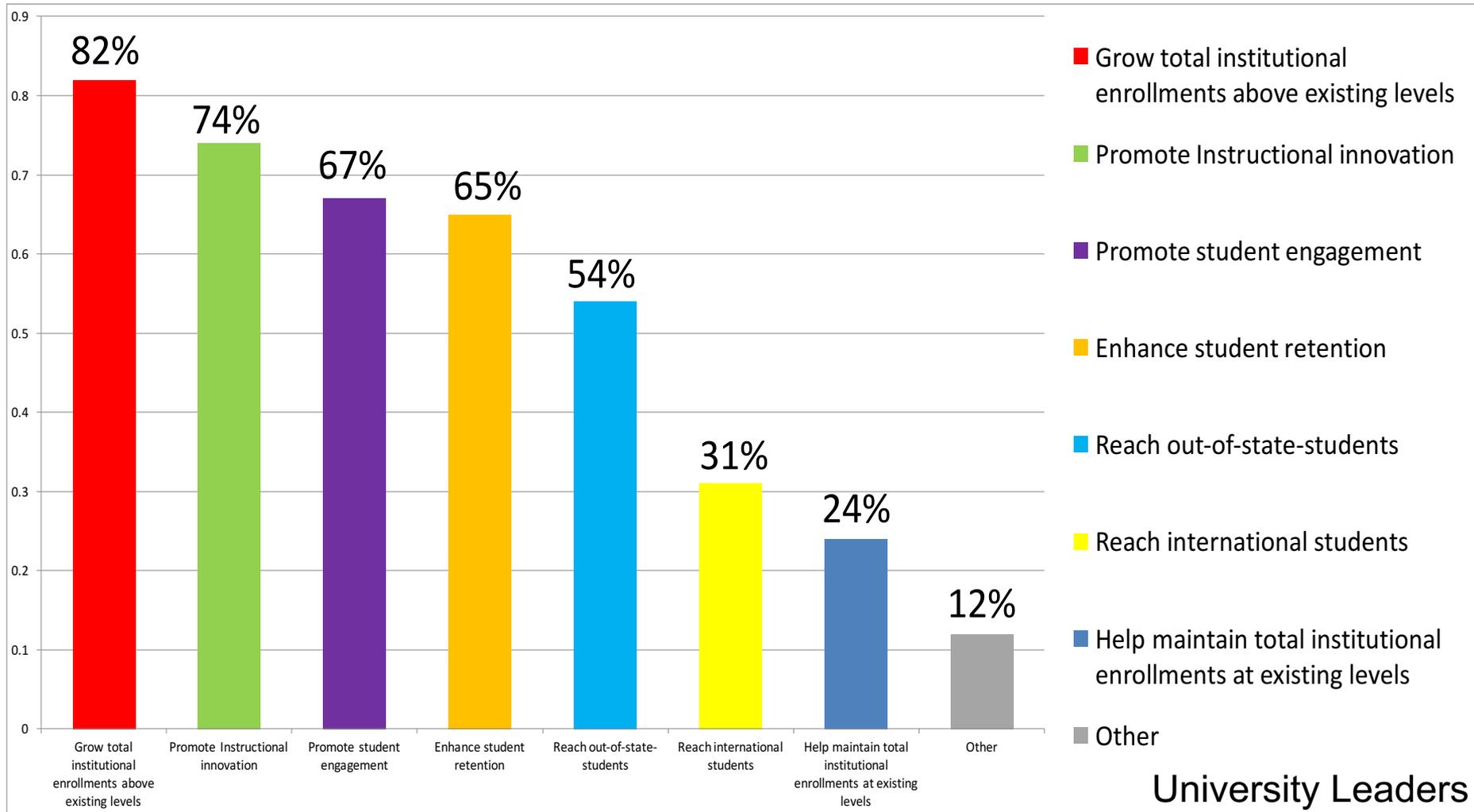
University Leaders



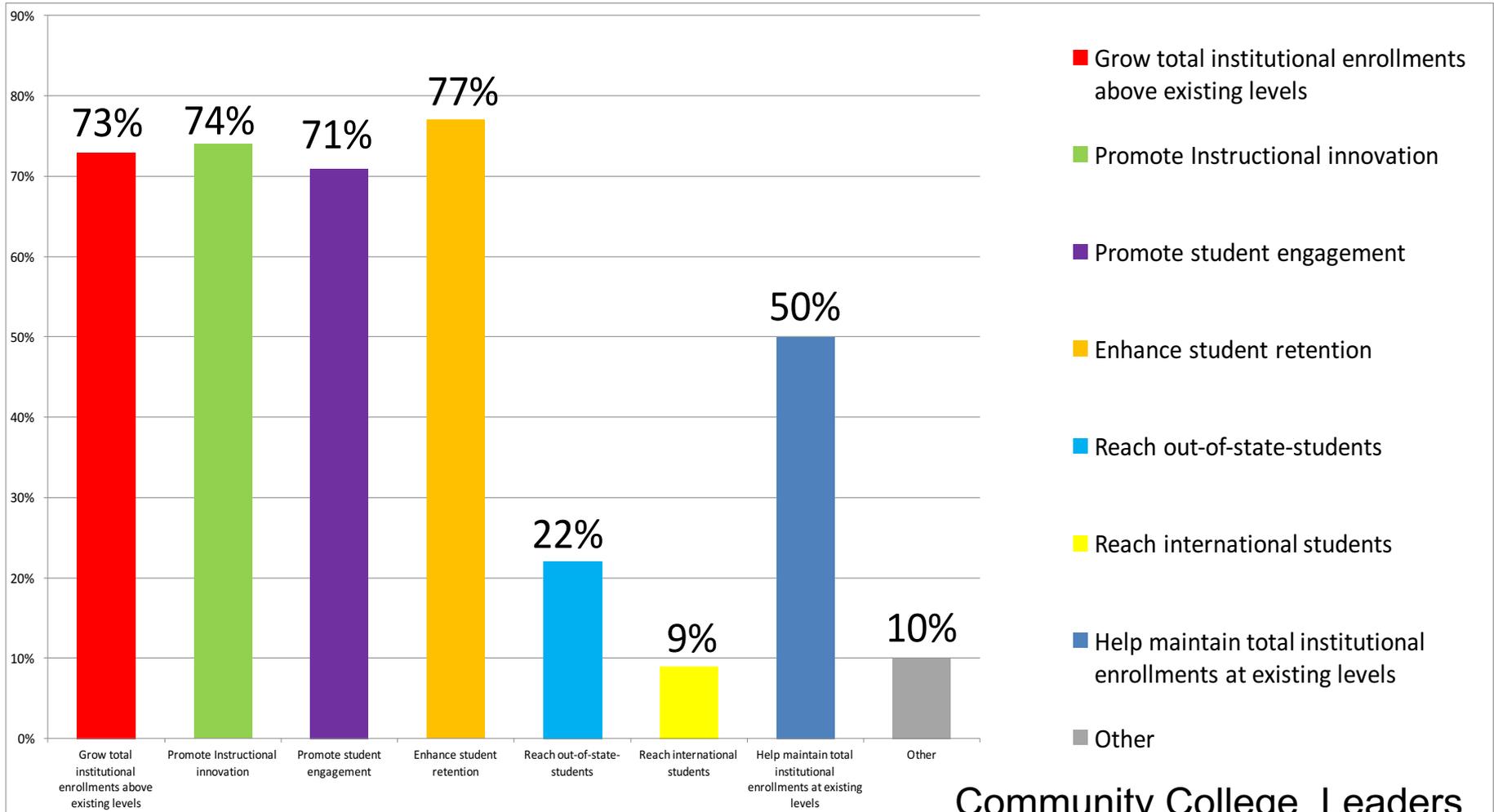
How do you and your institution define the scope of online learning for your position?



What are the highest-level strategic goals for online learning at your institution?

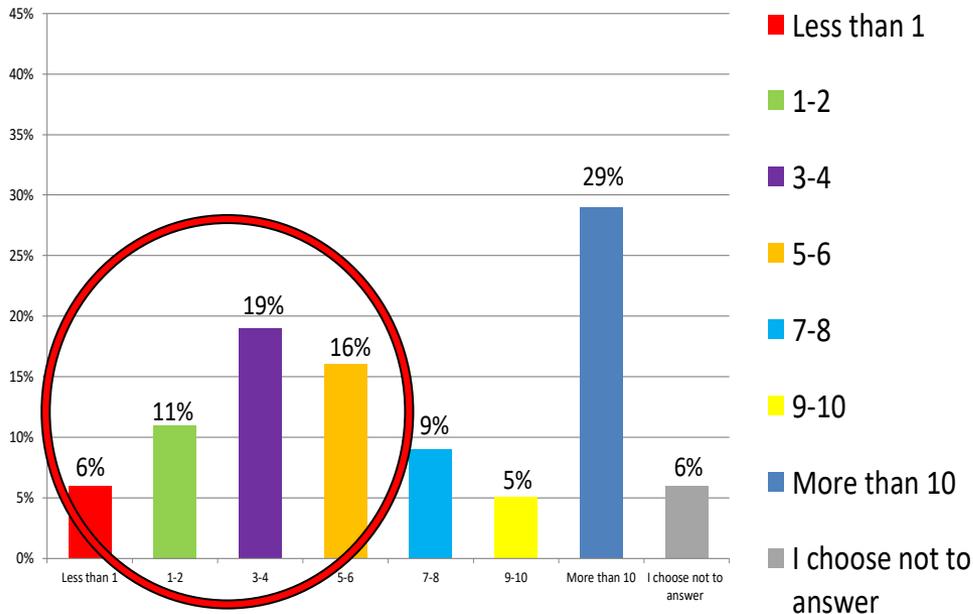


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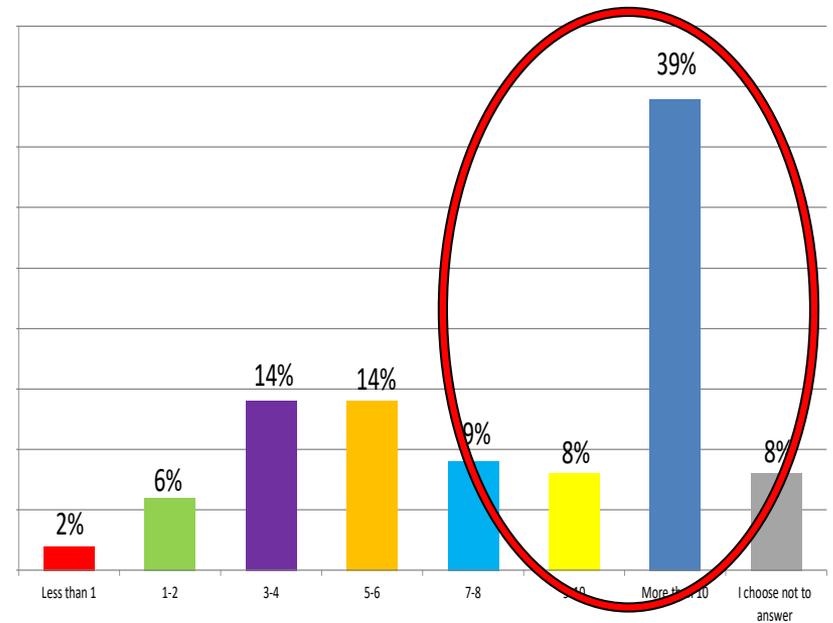


How many years ago did your institution create a leadership position for online learning?

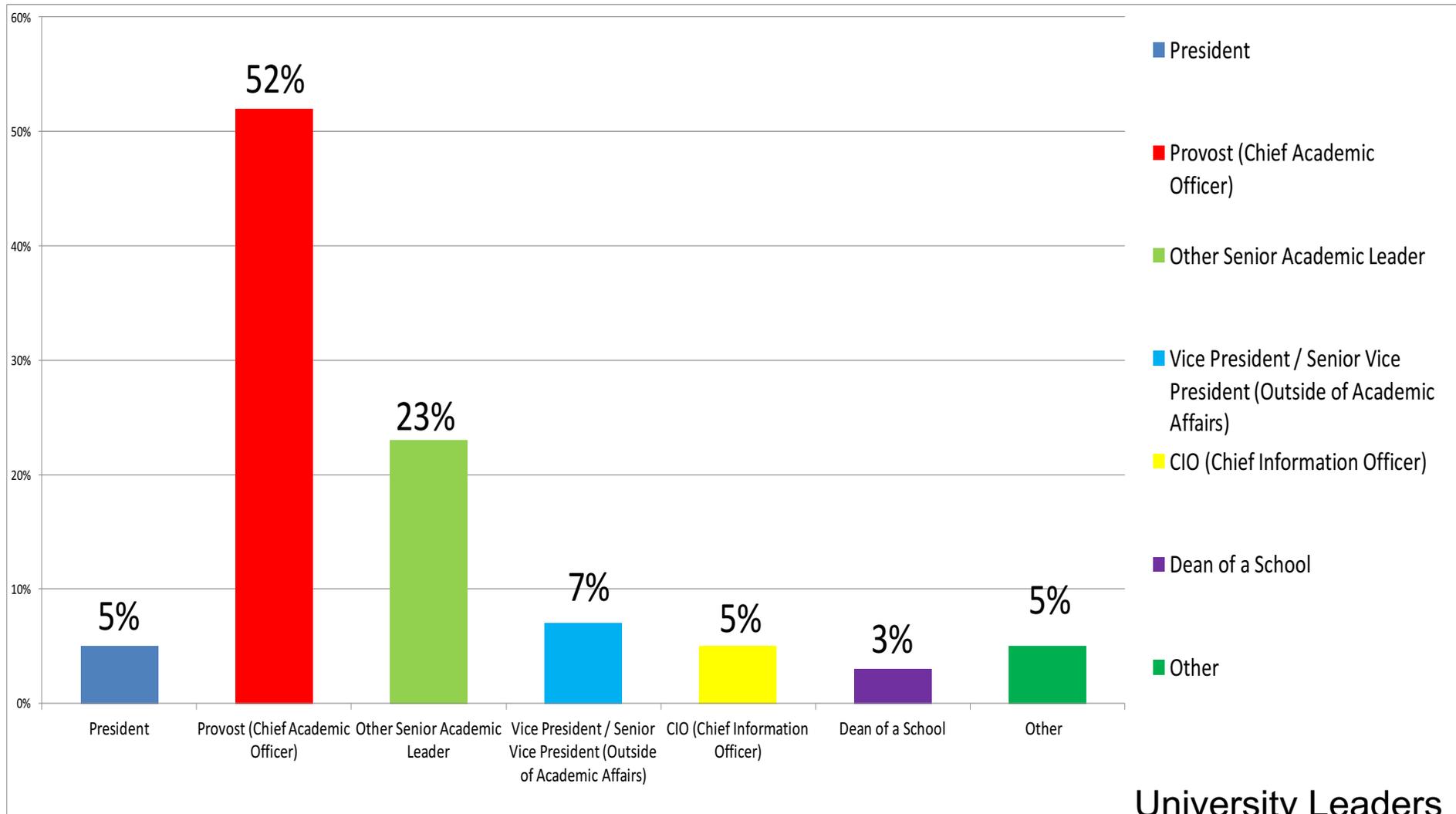
Universities



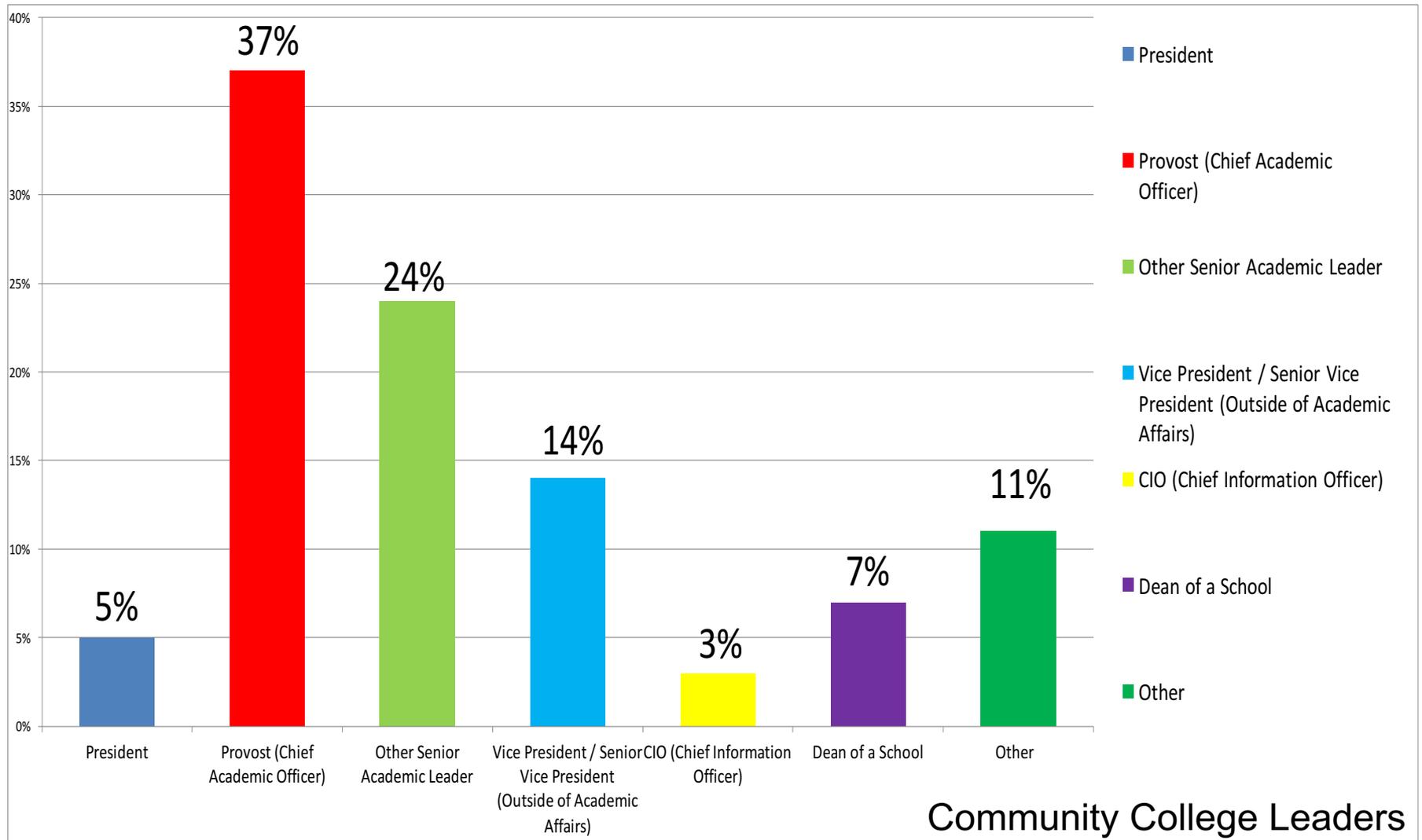
Community Colleges



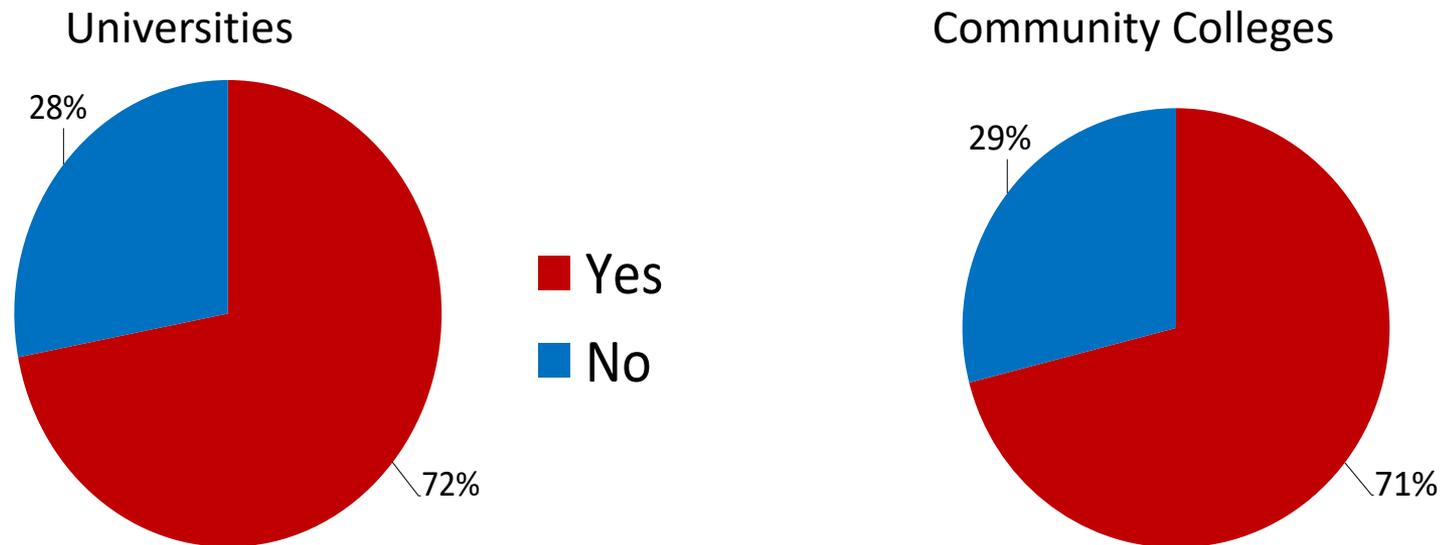
Whom do you report to?



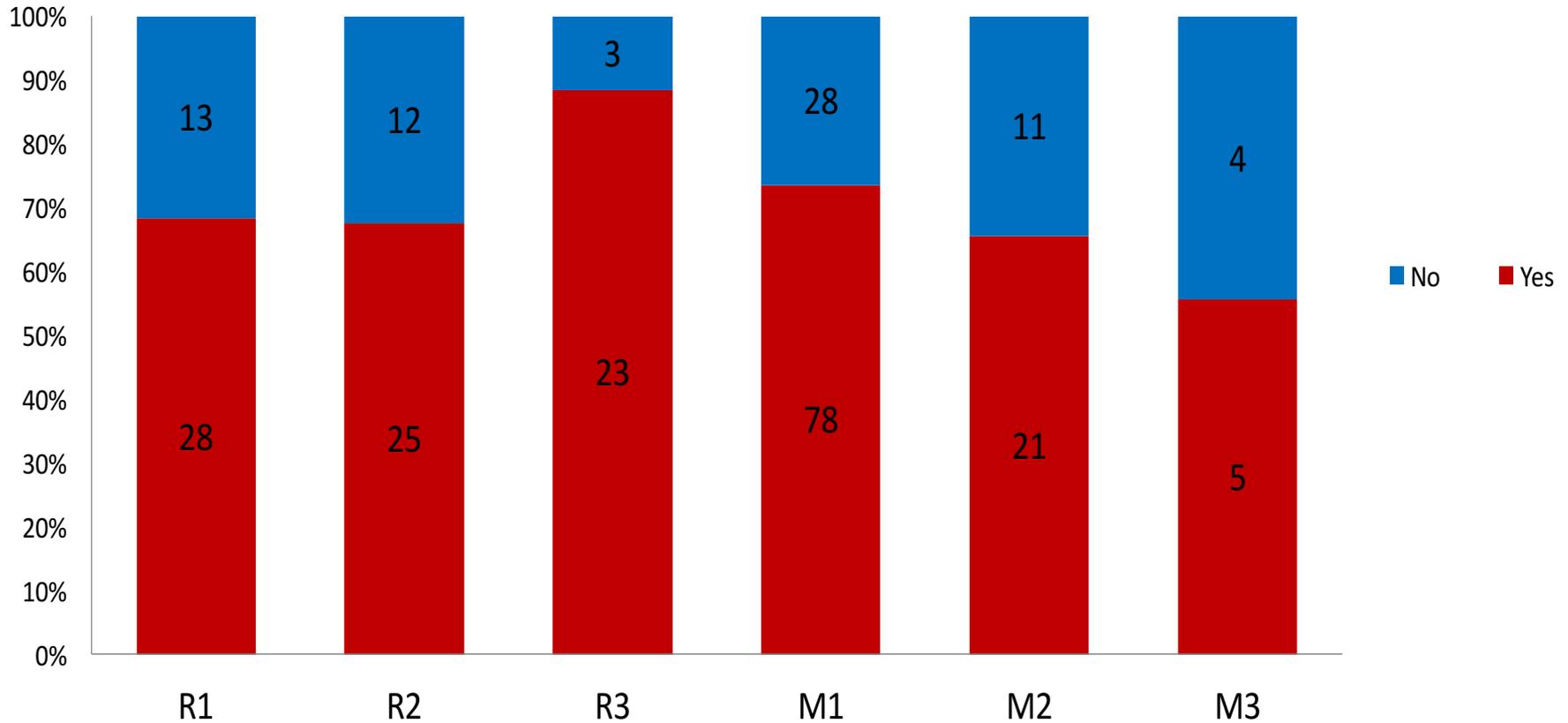
Whom do you report to?



Has your institution used your online learning efforts as a catalyst for organizational changes?



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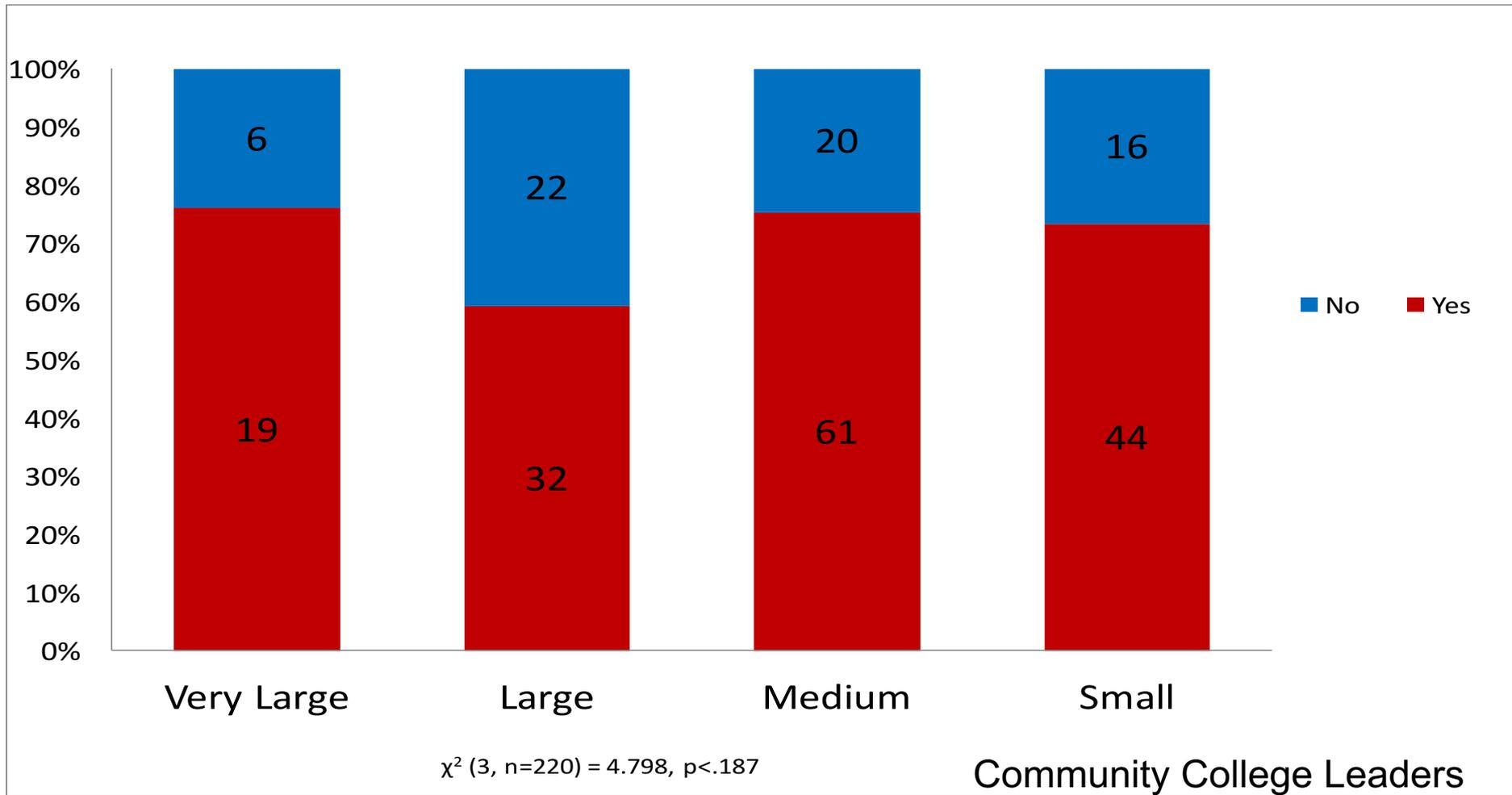


$\chi^2 (5, n=251) = 6.071, p < .299$

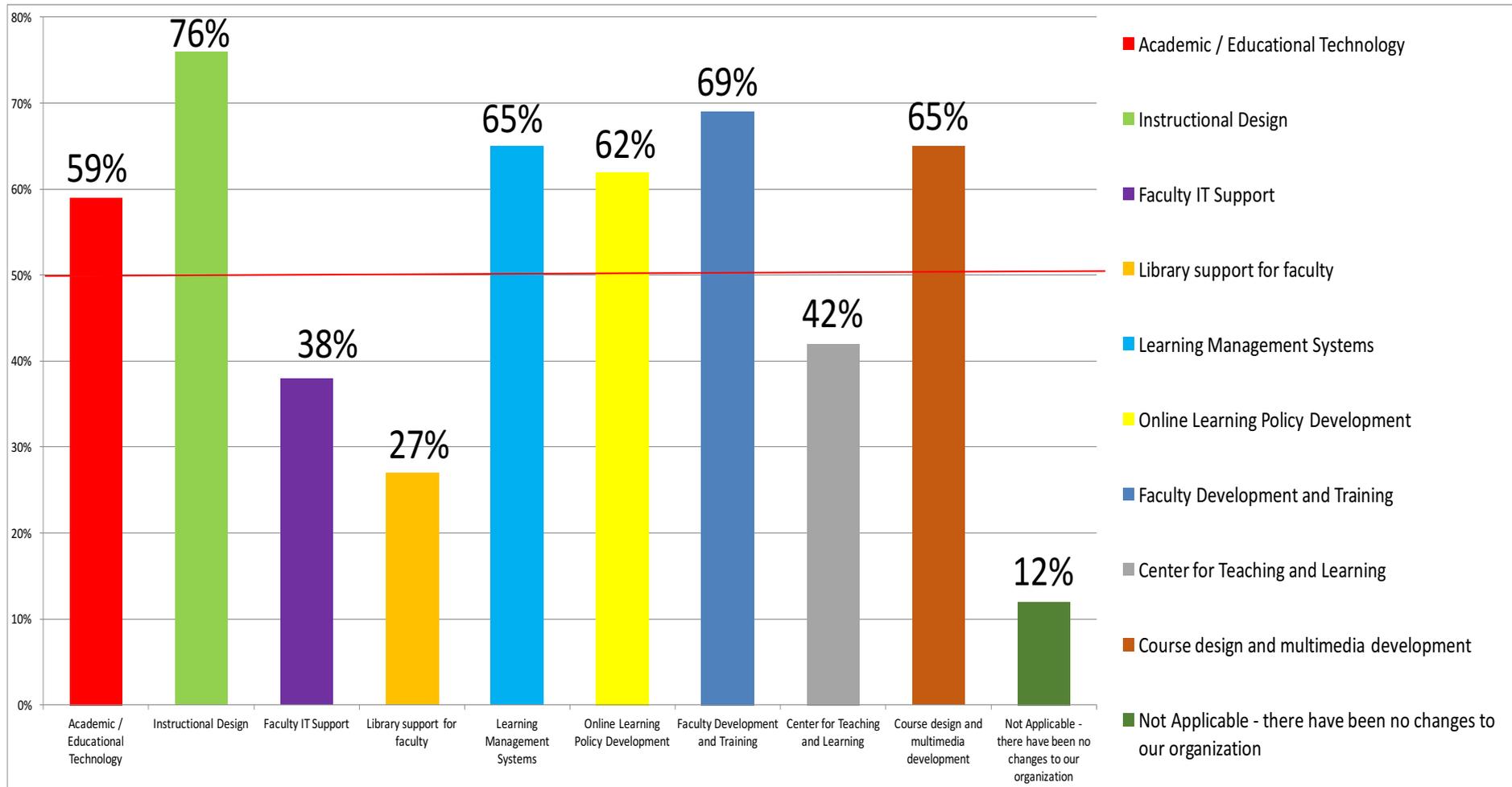
University Leaders



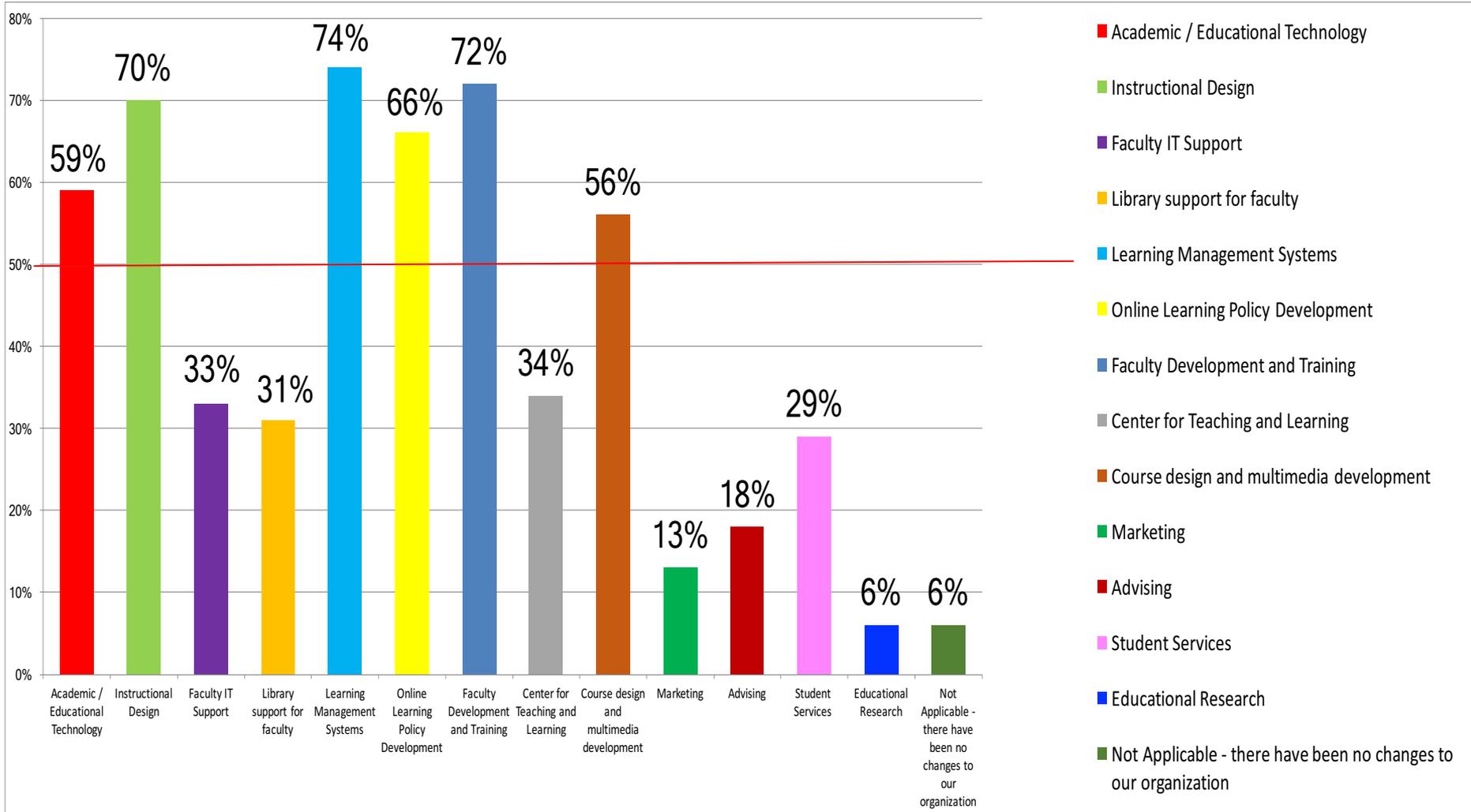
Has your institution used your online learning efforts as a catalyst for organizational changes?



What groups at your institution have been unified within your university?



What groups at your institution have been unified within your community college?



What are the top priorities or issues related to online learning for you and your university?

1. Faculty Development and Training
2. Strategic planning for online learning at your institution
3. Staffing for instructional design and faculty support
4. Funding and resources at your institution
5. Providing student support
6. Marketing and promotion of online courses and programs
7. Development of institutional policies for online learning
8. Ensuring academic integrity
9. State Regulations and SARA (State Authorization and Reciprocity Agreement)
10. Evaluation / Implementation of learning management systems
11. Learning analytics
12. Conducting research about the effectiveness of online learning
13. Working with Online Education Service Providers
14. Development of a MOOC strategy



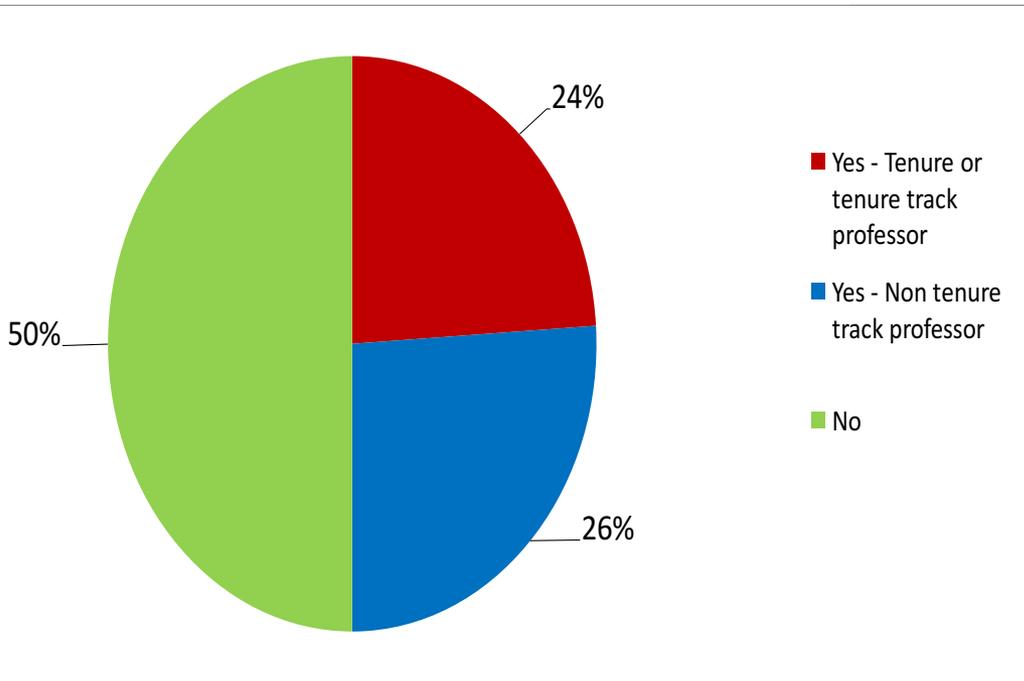
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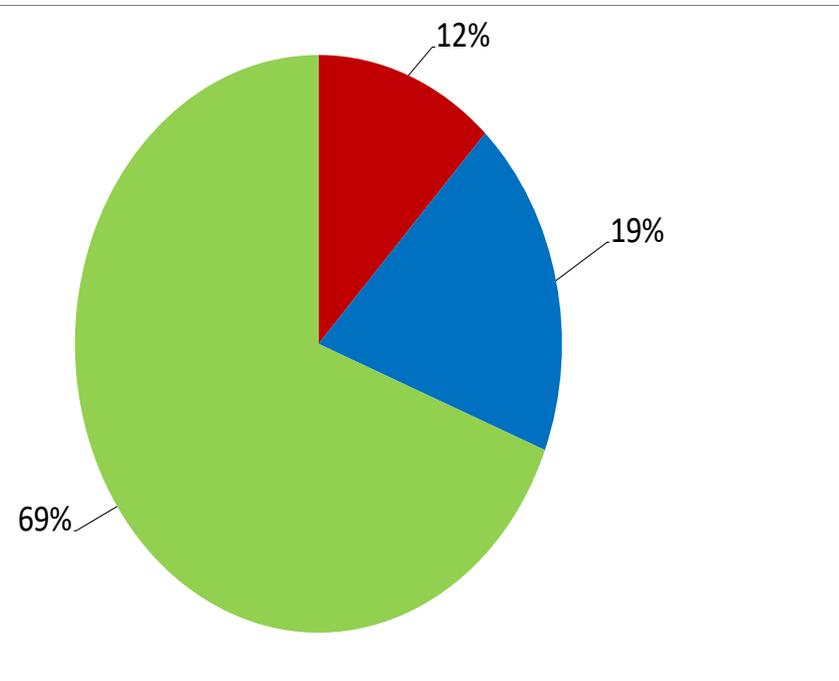


In addition to your leadership role for online learning, do you also hold a faculty appointment?

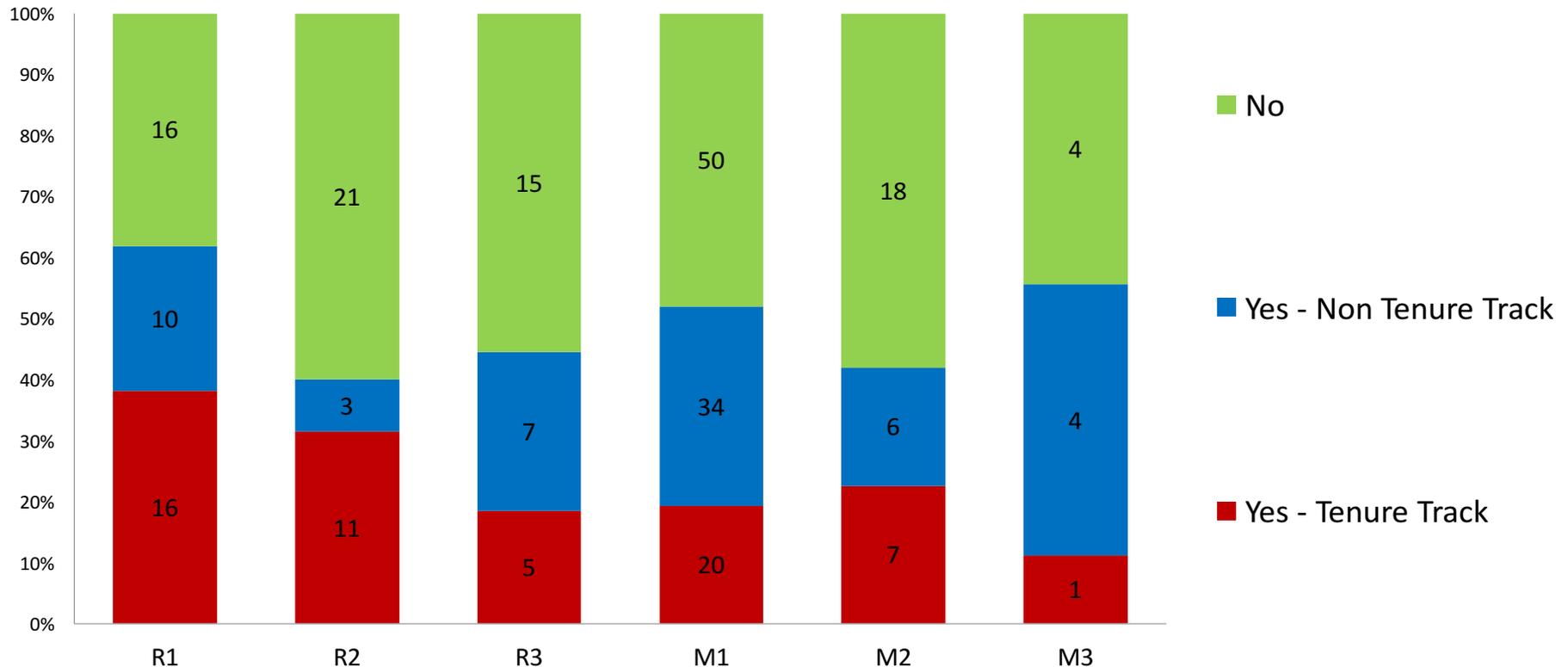
Universities



Community Colleges



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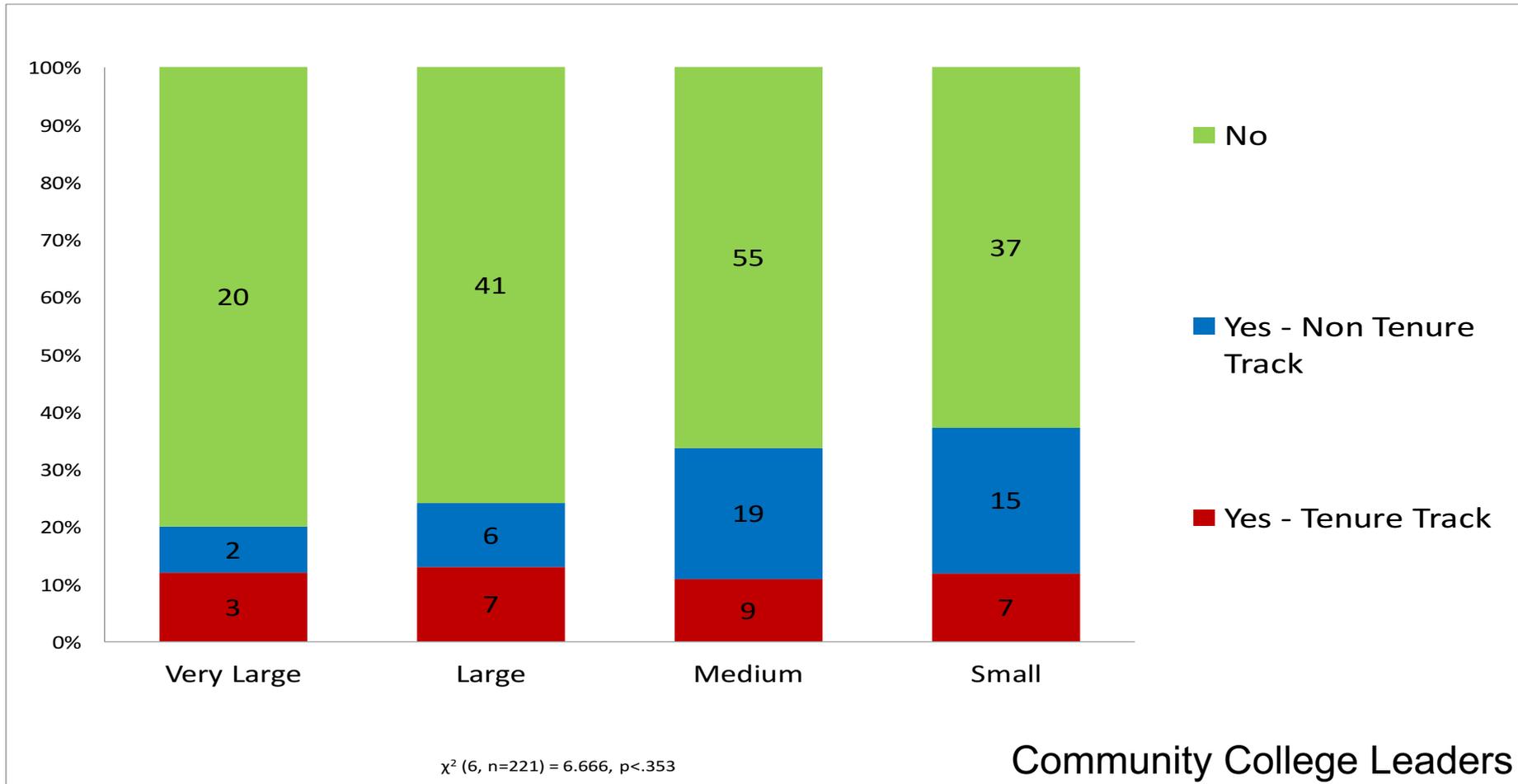


$\chi^2 (10, n=248) = 16.509, p < .086$

University Leaders

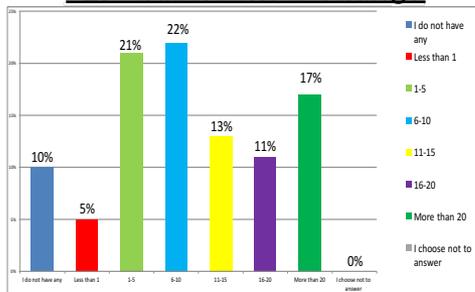


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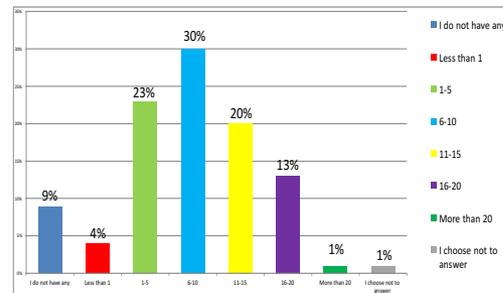


Professional Background and Experience of University Leaders

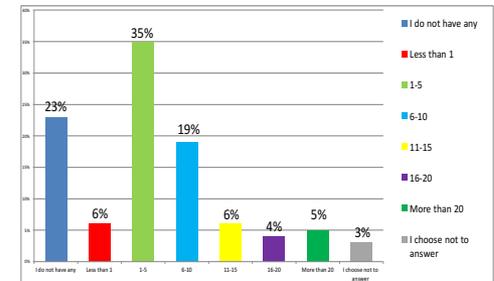
F2F classroom teaching?



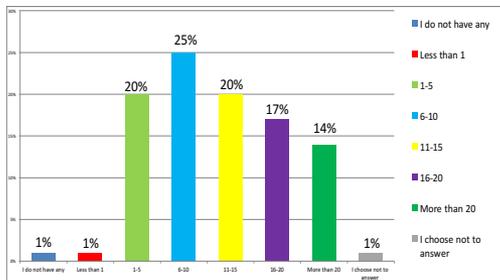
Online teaching?



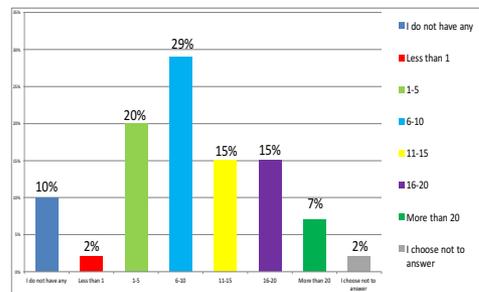
Educational research?



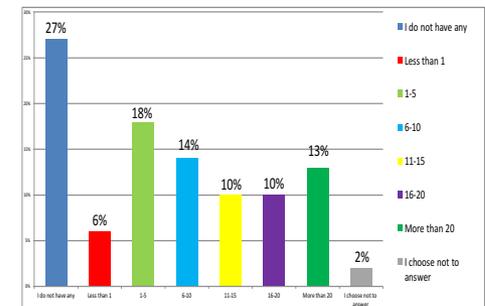
Management/leadership?



Instructional design?

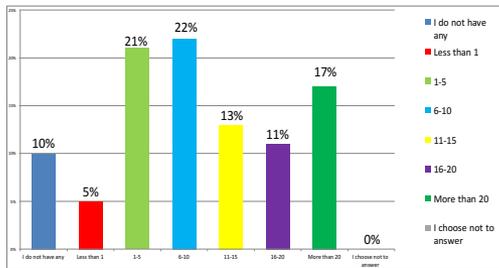


IT?

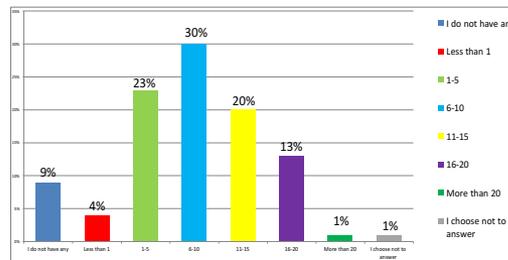


Professional Background and Experience of Community College Leaders

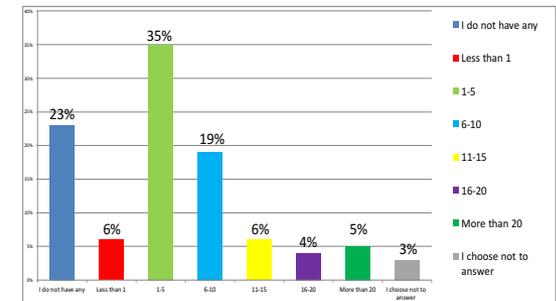
F2F classroom teaching?



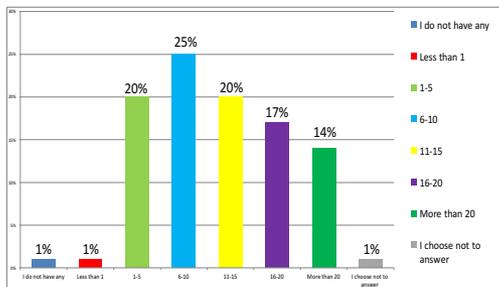
Online teaching?



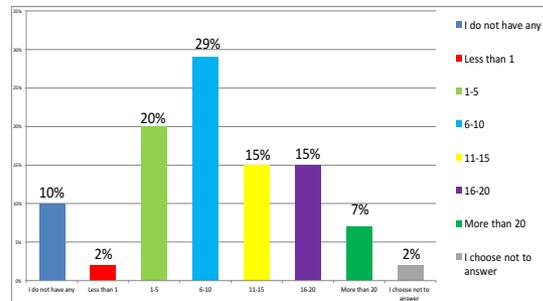
Educational research?



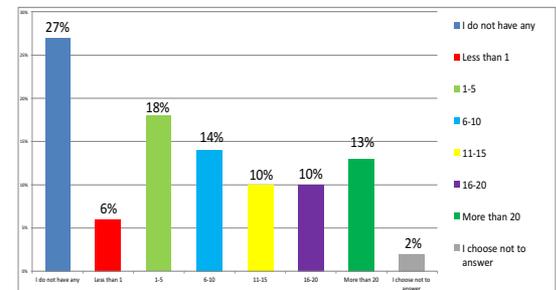
Management/leadership?



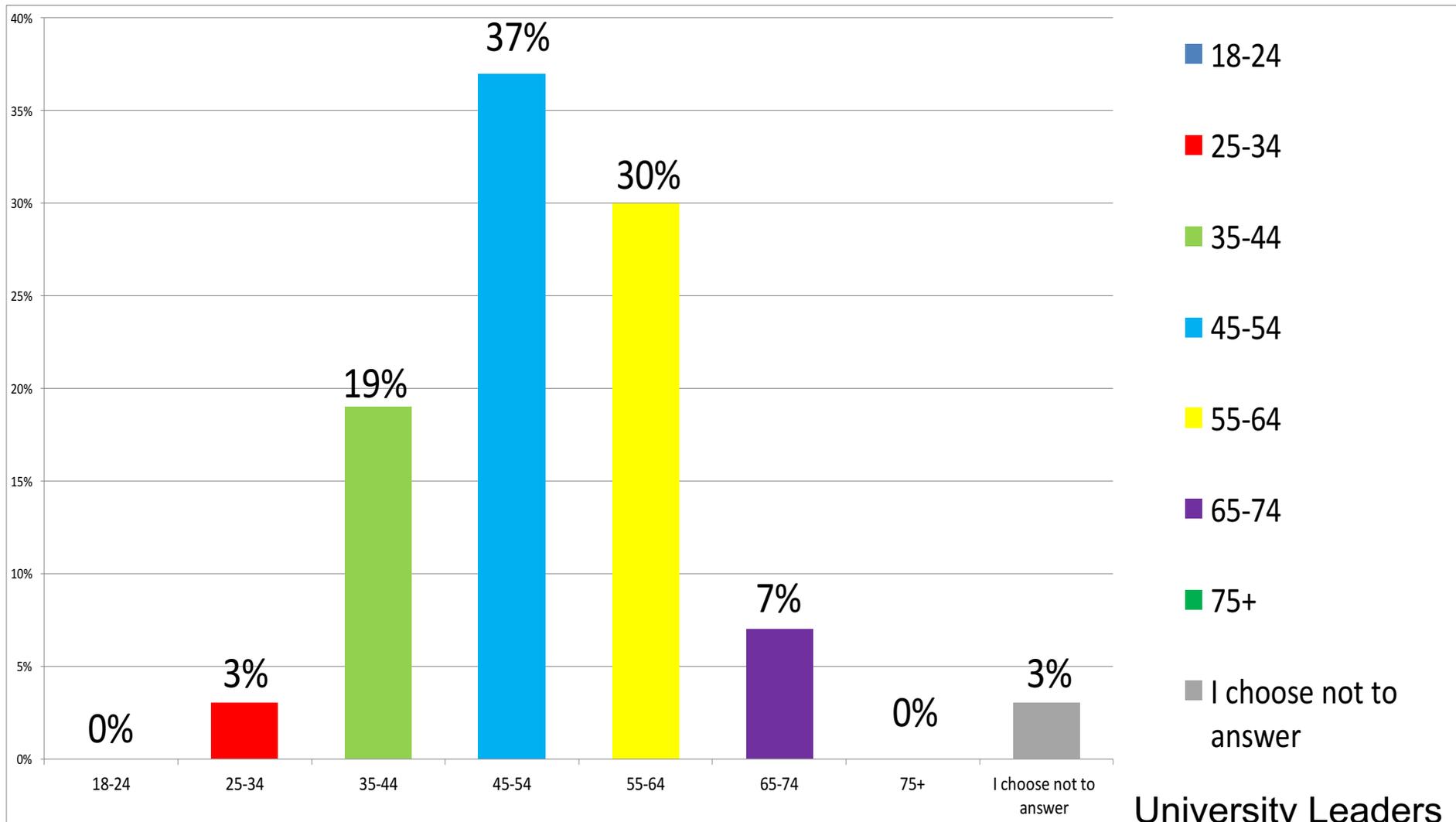
Instructional design?



IT?



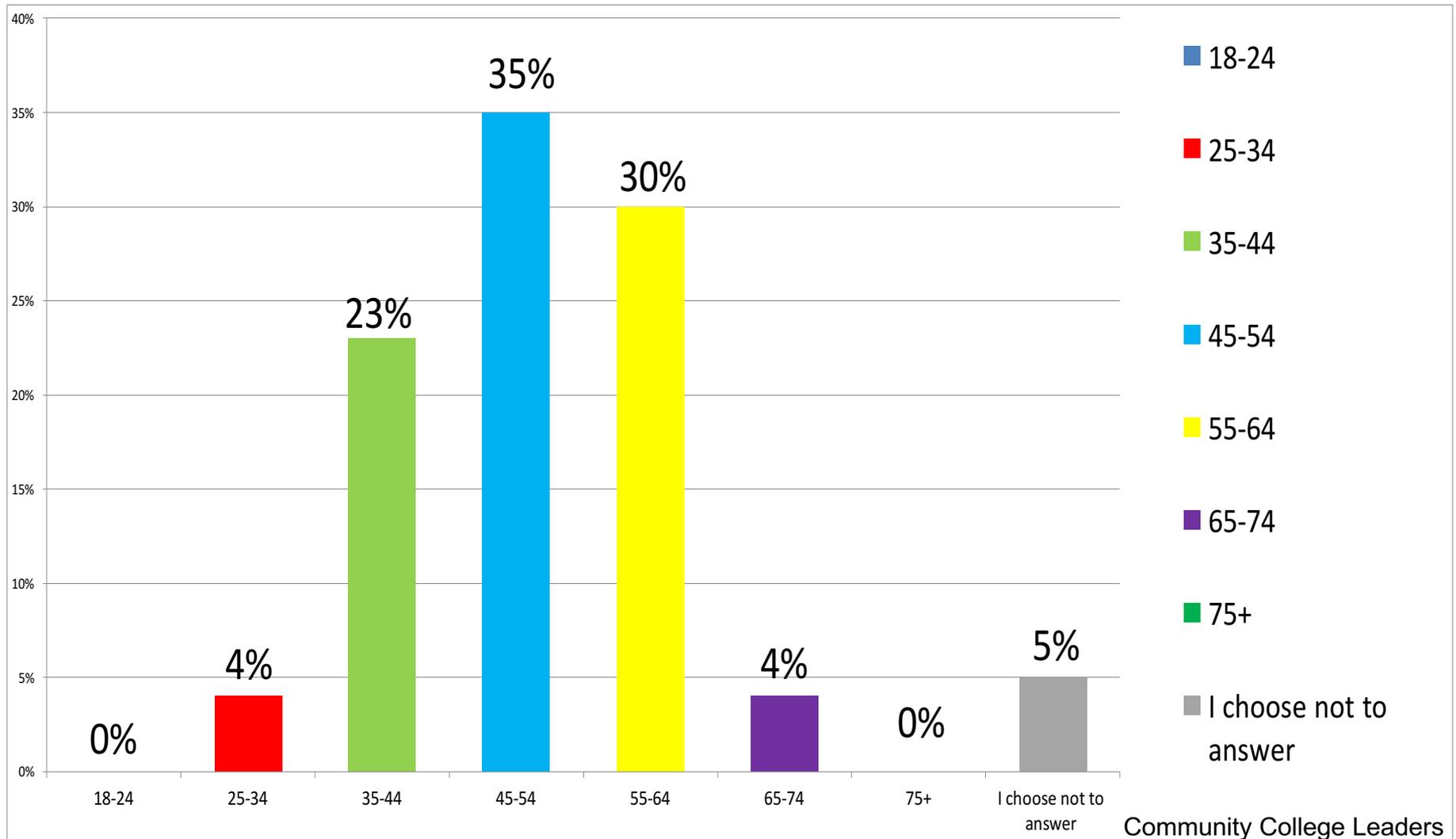
What is your age?



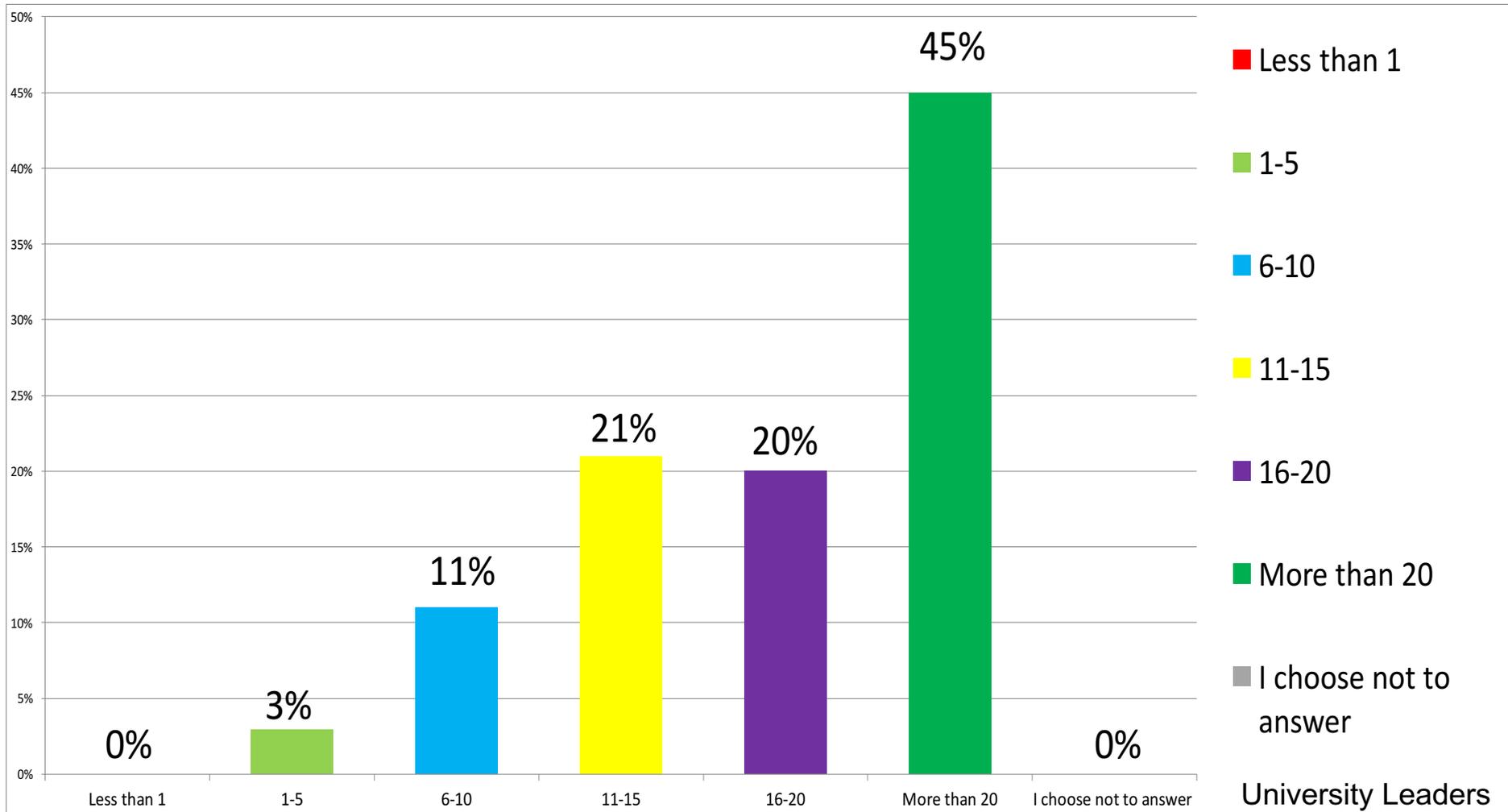
University Leaders



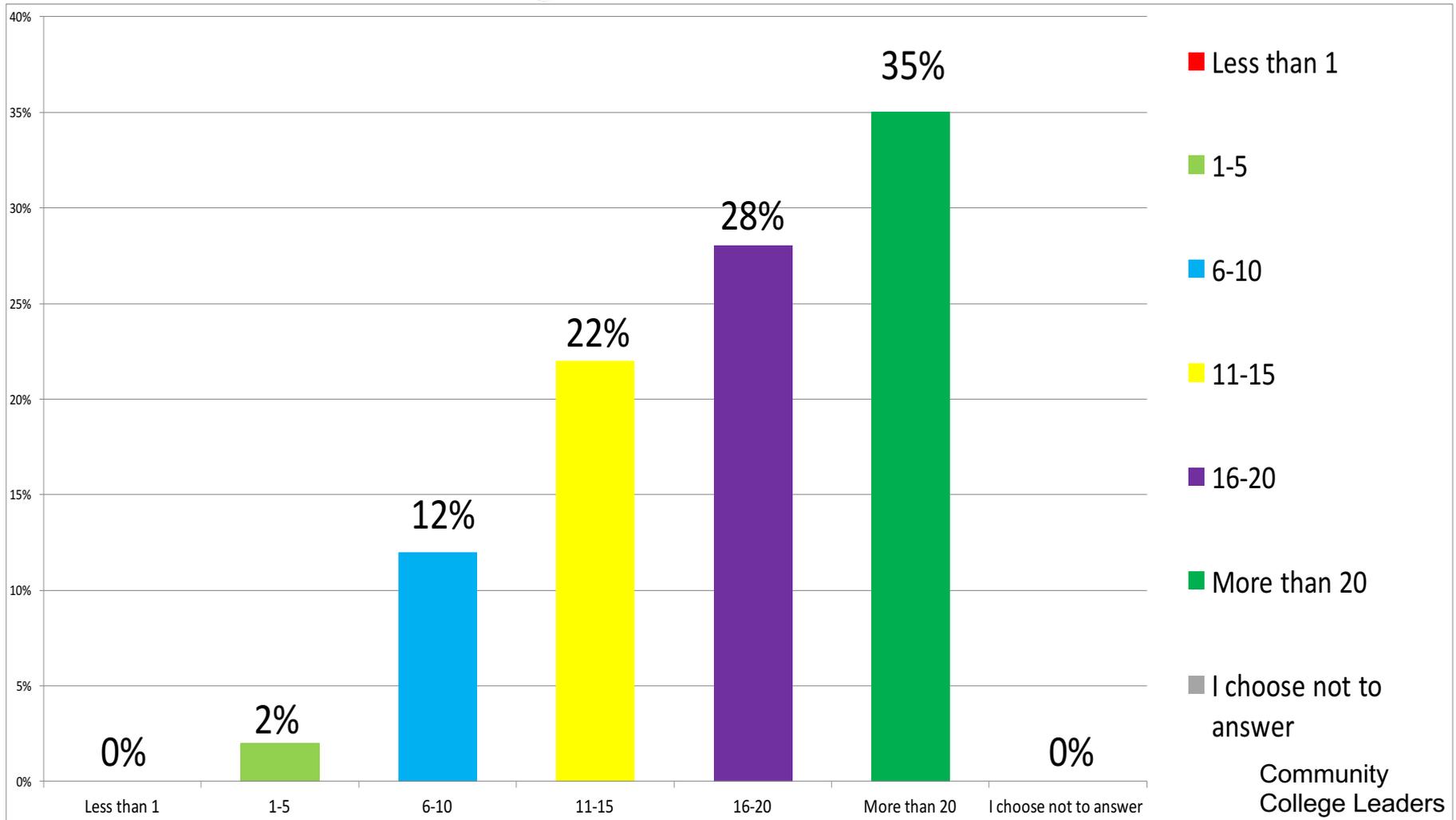
What is your age?



How many years of experience do you have in higher education?

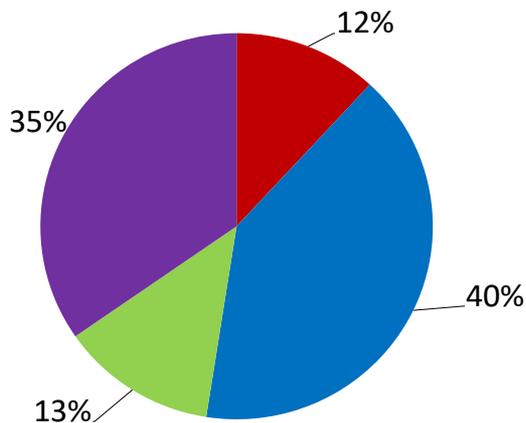


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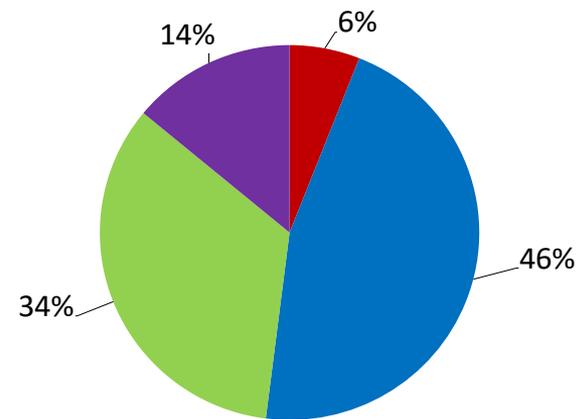


Have you been an online student? (credit bearing)

Universities



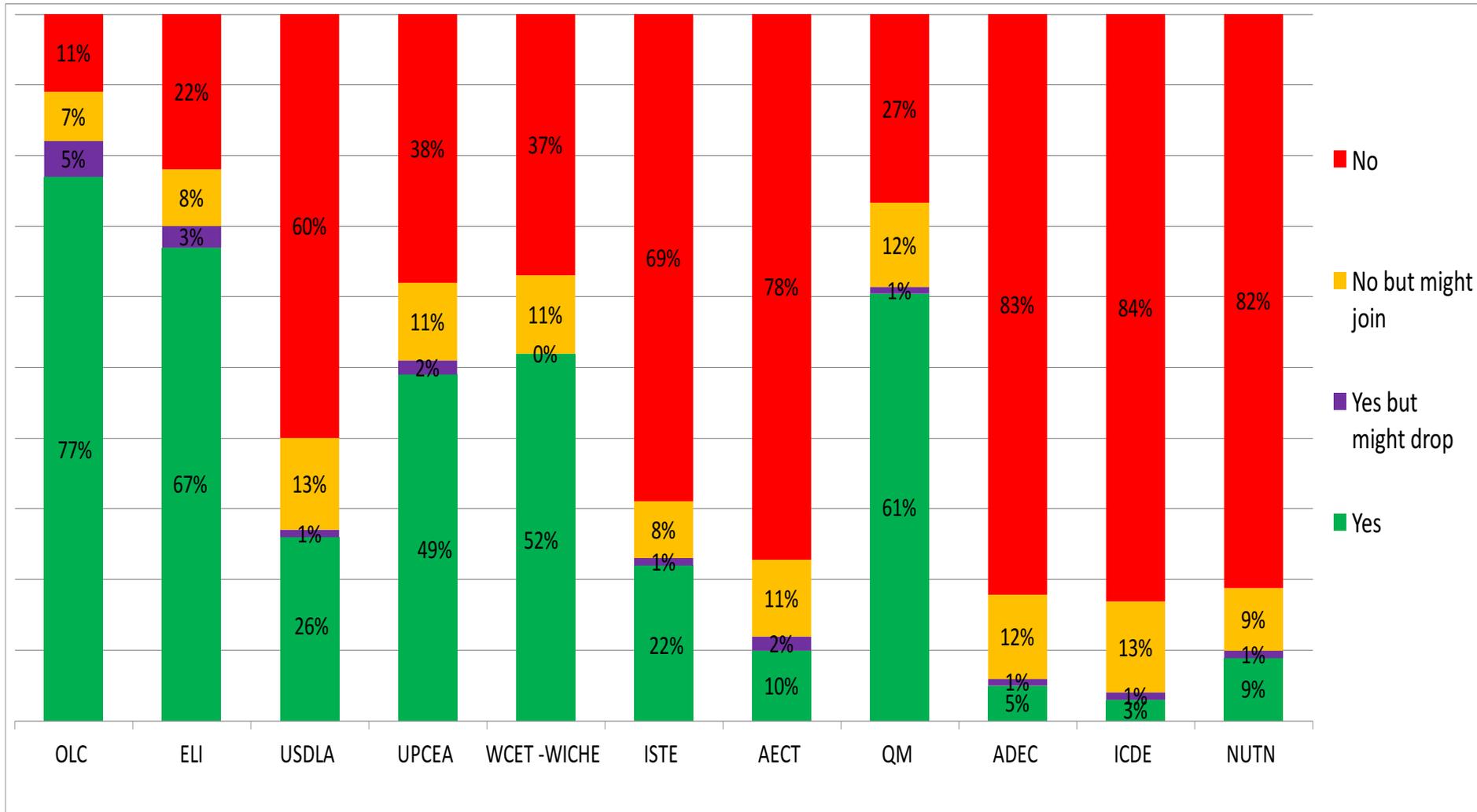
Community Colleges



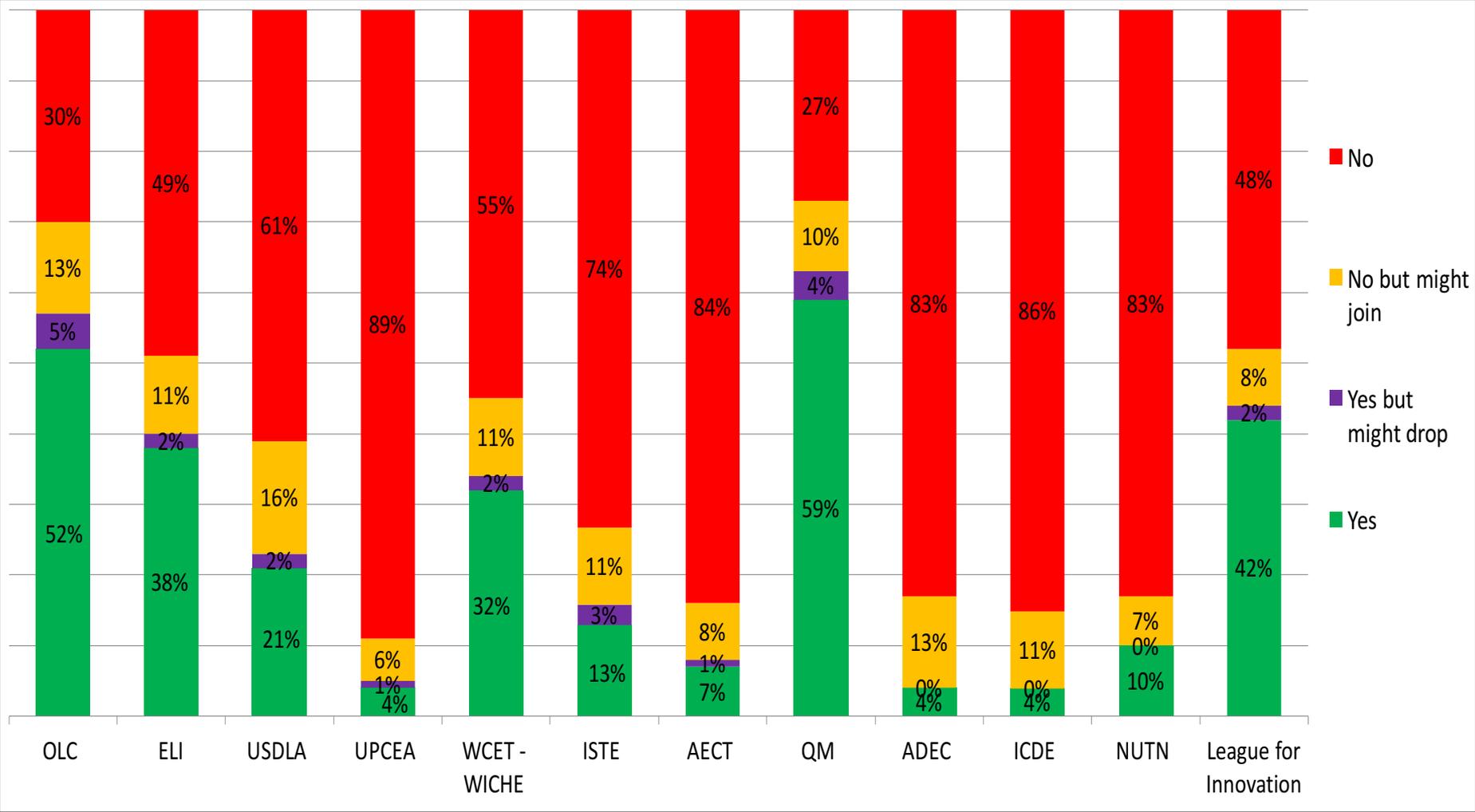
- Yes - one online course
- Yes - multiple online courses
- Yes - an online degree program
- No



Which of the following organizations or associations do you or your university belong? (check all that apply)



Which of the following organizations or associations do you or your community college belong? (check all that apply)



How do you stay informed about the state of online learning? (peers, methods, research, technologies, vendors, etc.)

216 responses to this open ended question

1. Research – 57%
2. Peers – 56%
3. Conferences / Associations – 54%
4. Online Groups / Lists / Blogs – 37%
5. Media / News – 31%
6. Vendors – 19%

University Leaders



How do you stay informed about the state of online learning? (peers, methods, research, technologies, vendors, etc.)

205 responses to this open ended question

1. Peers – 56%
2. Research – 42%
3. State organizations – 31%
4. Publications – 28%
5. Conferences / Associations – 23%
6. Online Groups / Lists / Blogs – 23%
7. Vendors – 20%
8. National organizations – 11%

Community College Leaders



Please feel free to offer any other comments or suggestions related to this role.

- *The sooner that online education is widely understood as an expansive concept that is integral to most everything we do in higher education, the better. I look forward to the day when online education (understood broadly) is the default and there are specialized people working in the Office of Time- and Place-Bound Education supporting those who work within the limitations of a traditional classroom.*



Summarizing the Key Findings



Key Findings

- Counter to a strict focus on distance education, the vast majority of COLOs report responsibility for supporting all types of courses.
- Almost 3 out of 4 institutions report using online learning efforts as a catalyst for organizational change.
- The majority of Online Learning Leadership positions report to the Provost /Chief Academic Officer of the institution or other Senior Academic Leader.
- Positions held by very seasoned leaders



What do Community College Leaders have in common with their University Colleagues

- Scope includes all courses for majority of institutions
- Online Learning as a catalyst for organizational change
- The same six units/activities are unified in organization
- Reporting line through Provost or Chief Academic Officer
- Faculty Development and Training the top priority
- Associate with OLC, QM, and ELI
- Years the individual has held this position and years of higher education experience
- Professional experience (some)
- Stay informed through Peers and Research



Where do Community College Leaders differ with their University Colleagues

- University Leaders more likely to have a faculty appointment
- University Leaders more likely to hold doctoral degree
- Community College leaders more likely to have online student experience
- Community College leader positions have been in place longer
- Top goal of Community College leaders is student retention and top goal for university leaders is growing enrollments
- Community College leaders connected to state organizations
- Gender – 61% female leaders in Community Colleges vs 50% in universities
- University leaders more likely to stay informed through conferences and associations



THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

CHLOE

of ONLINE EDUCATION

Moving forward A partnership with Quality Matters, Eduventures Research, and EDUCAUSE



Richard Garrett
CHLOE Co-Director and Eduventures Chief Research Officer, ACT | NRCCA



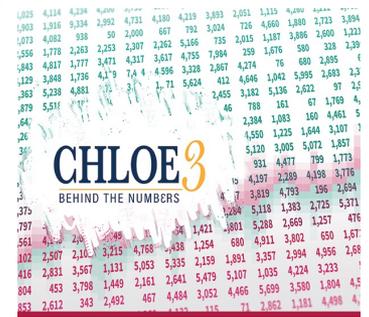
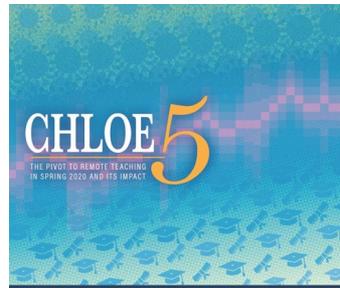
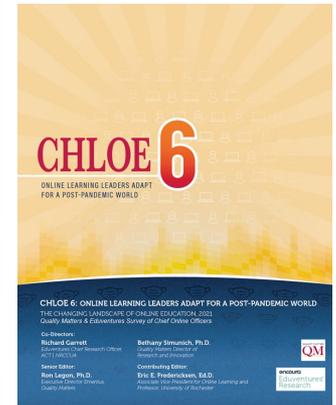
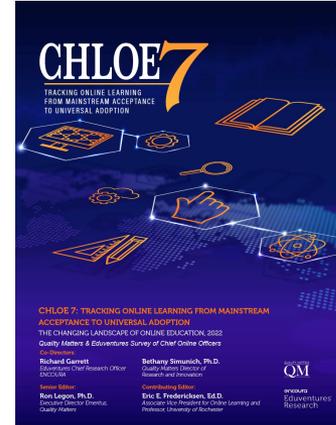
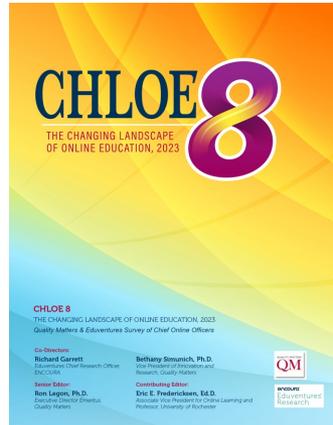
Bethany Simunich, Ph.D.
CHLOE Co-Director and Quality Matters VP of Research and Innovation



Eric E. Fredericksen, Ed.D.
CHLOE Contributing Editor Assoc. Vice President for Online Learning & Professor, University of Rochester



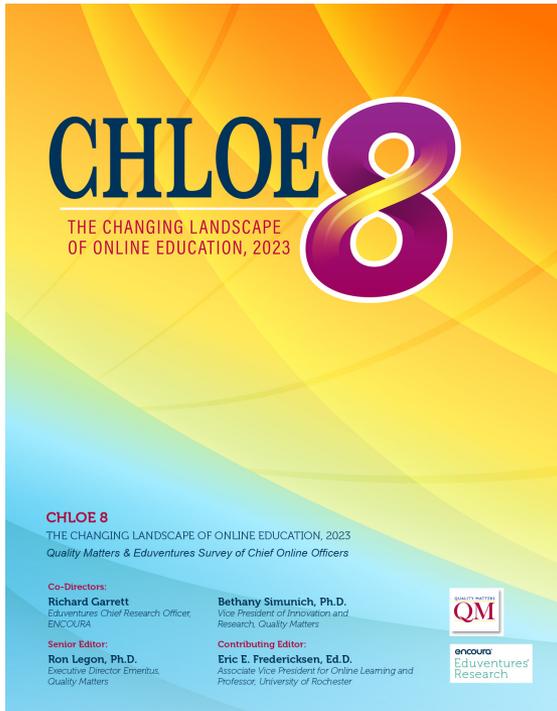
Robert Ubell
Senior Editor, CHLOE9



THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

CHLOE

of ONLINE EDUCATION



- Today's Online Learning Profile
- Shifting Online vs. In-Person Enrollment, 2021-2022
- Strategic and Resource Implications of Rising Online Demand
- Strategies for Online Development and Growth
- Faculty Readiness for Online Design and Teaching
- Support for Faculty Engagement in Online Design and Teaching
- Support for Online Students
- Realities and Opportunities of Online Quality Assurance
- Online Learning Technologies and Capabilities



UNIVERSITY *of* ROCHESTER

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

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Online & Institutional Strategy

- Relative alignment
- Online strategy rationales and goals
- Different market emphases

Organization & Services

- Staffing: key roles; hiring challenges
- Re-run past centralization, integration, outsourcing questions
- Anticipated federal “Third Party Servicer” expansion

Design, Teaching & Support

- AI- early direction, impact, potential
- RSI concerns and innovation
- Online market competition- how to stand out?

Funding, Cost & Pricing

- Funding and revenue models
- Online tuition trends
- Budgetary trends and COO authority



Thank you ... questions?

eric.fredericksen@rochester.edu

A National Study of Online Learning Leaders
in US Higher Education

<https://olj.onlinelearningconsortium.org/index.php/olj/article/view/1164>

A National Study of Online Learning Leaders in US Community Colleges

<https://olj.onlinelearningconsortium.org/index.php/olj/article/view/1458>

The CHLOE Project

<https://www.qualitymatters.org/qa-resources/resource-center/articles-resources/CHLOE-project>

Interview with Inside Higher Education

<https://www.insidehighered.com/opinion/blogs/learning-innovation/2024/01/18/three-questions-u-rochesters-eric-fredericksen>

