

# The State of Innovation in Higher Education

Insights from a Survey of College and University Deans / June 2017



**Academy for Innovative  
Higher Education Leadership**  
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY  
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY



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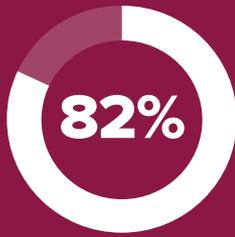
The Academy for Innovative Higher Education Leadership, a partnership between Arizona State University and Georgetown University, is the premier training ground for those who aspire to senior leadership positions in higher education, and those who want to lead organizational change at colleges and universities in the future. To learn more, visit [georgetown.asu.edu](https://georgetown.asu.edu).

## Insights Survey

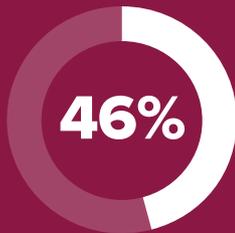
This survey is a partnership between 2U and the Academy for Innovative Higher Education Leadership. It is a periodic survey designed to provide real-time analysis of trends in innovation and higher education from a small group of leaders on college and university campuses.

# Highlights from the Survey

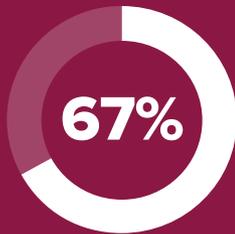
Rarely in the histories of their institutions have the leaders of colleges and universities in the United States been under such pressure to come up with imaginative solutions to a range of emerging challenges that stretch from declining enrollments and stressed budgets to incorporating new technology, especially online learning, into traditional educational structures. The results of our inaugural survey of deans finds that while they are content about the pace of change on their campuses and the value that higher education provides to students for the money spent, they remain worried about the direction American higher education is headed in the future.



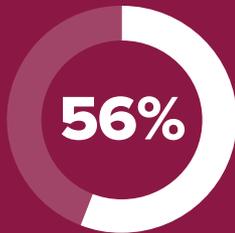
82% of deans say higher education is a good value for the money spent.



46% believe higher education is headed in the wrong direction.



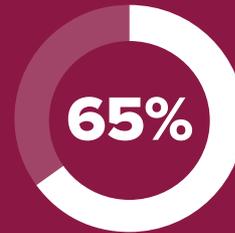
67% describe their institutions as fostering academic innovation.



56% say the pace of change on their campuses is about right.



91% predict they will be offering more online programs in 10 years.



65% believe their campuses will be different in a decade.

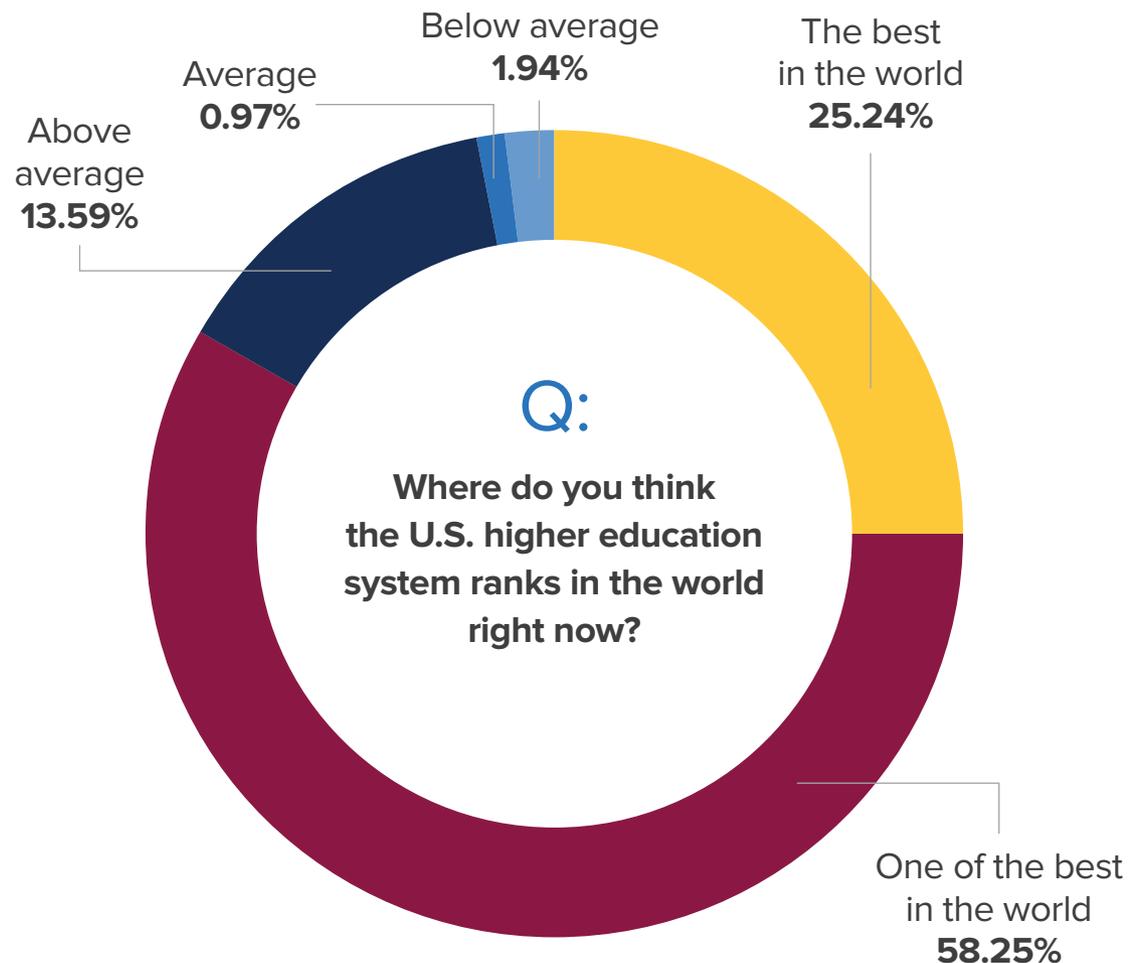


50% say part-time graduate and certificate programs provide the most opportunity for growth in the online space.

Views on  
**Global Competitiveness & Value**

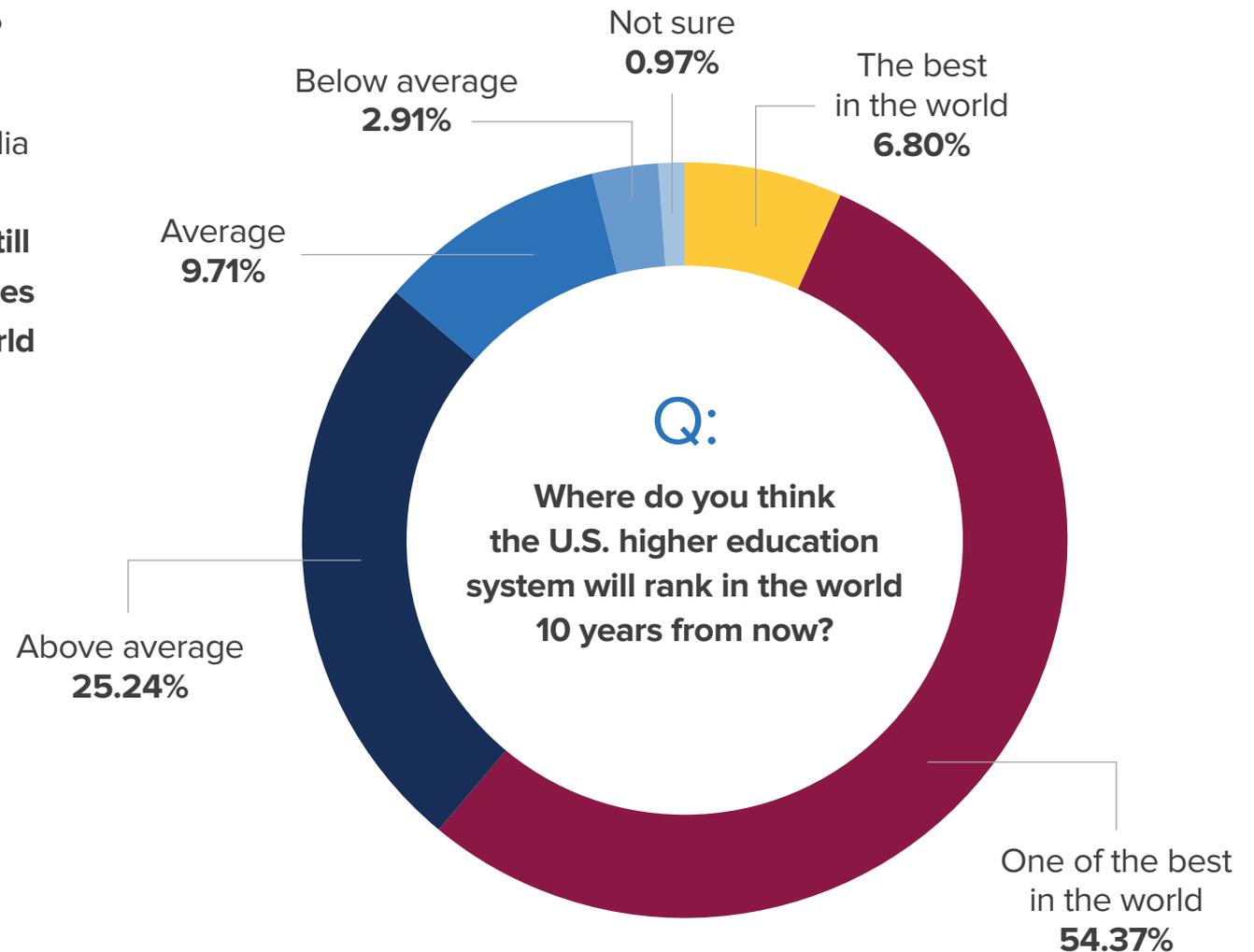
# Despite increasing global competition, deans say American higher education remains among the best in the world...

As more students leave their home countries to earn a degree, as more scholars work worldwide, and as online education crosses borders, the competitive landscape for colleges and universities is greater than ever before. Even so, **a quarter of academic deans believe that the U.S. higher education system is still the “best in the world.”**



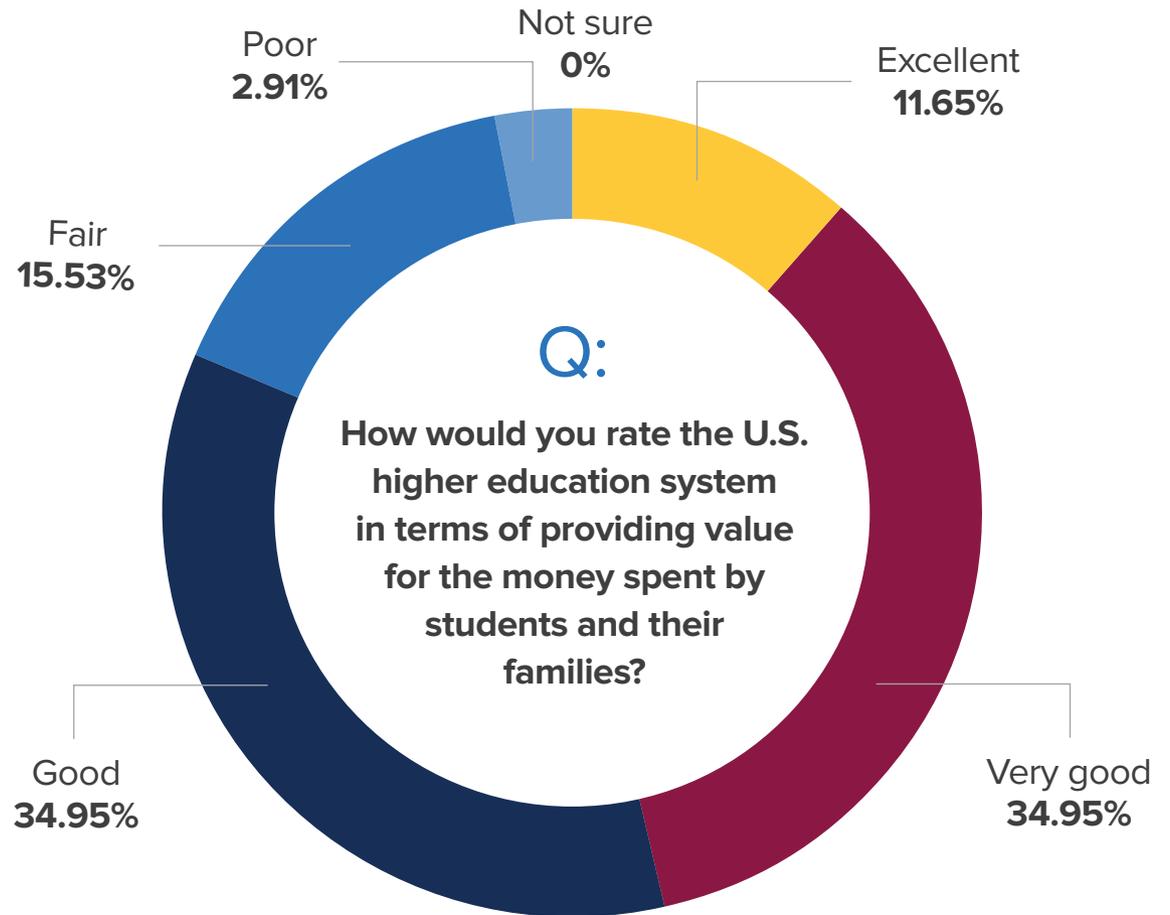
# ...and they're confident that U.S. institutions will retain their position near the top in the decade ahead.

Even as countries like China and India invest in their own higher-education systems, **more than half of deans still believe U.S. colleges and universities will rank among the best in the world ten years from now.**



# Amid ever increasing tuition prices and student debt, most deans still believe that higher education is a good return on the investment.

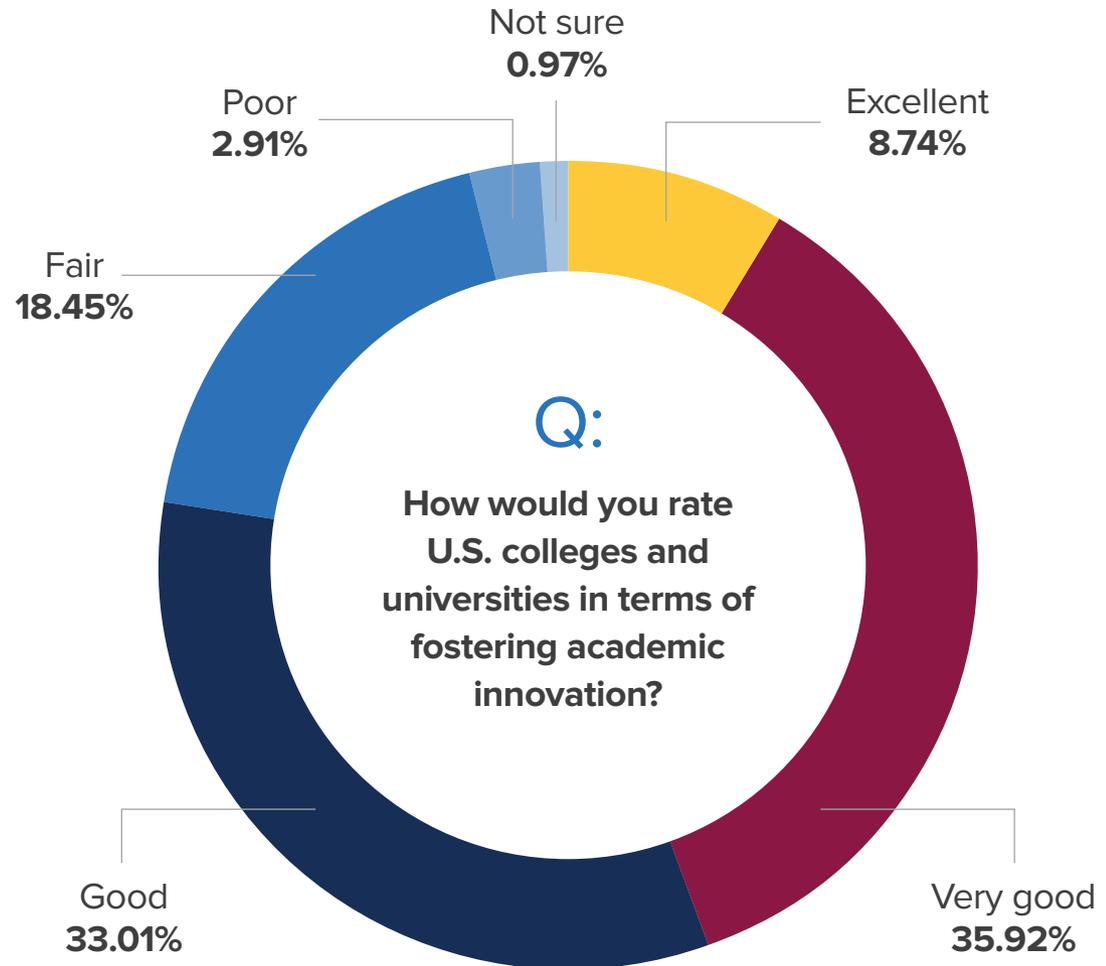
ROI—return on investment—has become a buzzword on campuses in recent years. While the value of higher education remains undisputed, prospective students now come to campuses armed with new tools that track the career and earnings outcomes of graduates. In response, colleges are focusing more on the outcomes of their education and are putting in place programs to better prepare their students for the job market. **For the most part, deans say higher education remains a good financial bet.**



Views on  
**Higher Education Innovation**

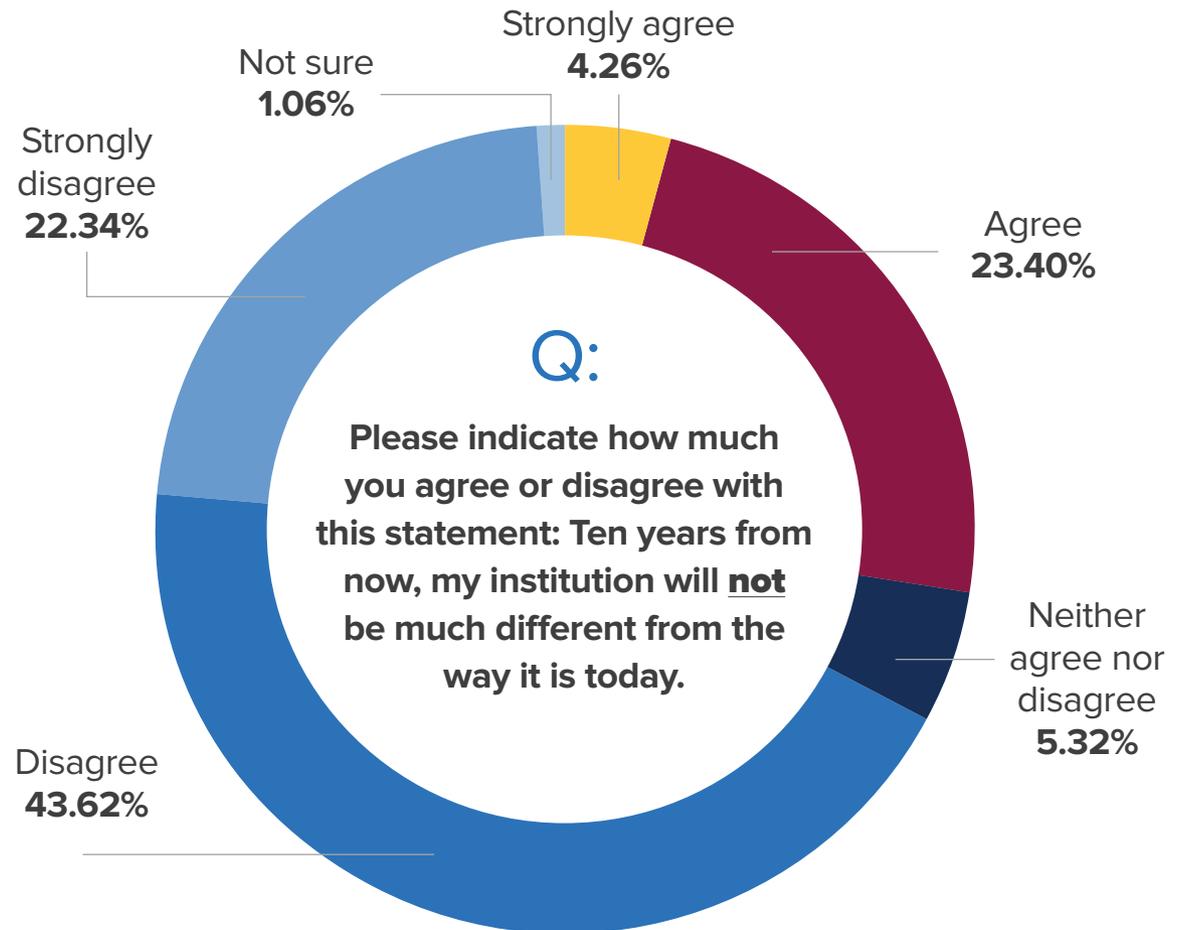
# A majority of deans praise colleges and universities for fostering academic innovation.

Higher education is tradition-bound and those outside of the academy often complain it's too slow to change. But **45% of deans rate U.S. colleges and universities as either “excellent” or “very good” at cultivating academic innovation.**



# A decade from now, more than two-thirds of deans say that their institutions will be much different than they are today.

With advances in learning technologies, a shift in student demographics, and a growing demand from employers for knowledge workers, the decade ahead promises to bring both challenges and opportunities for most higher-education institutions. When they look into the crystal ball, **only 27% of deans say their institutions won't look much different 10 years from now.**



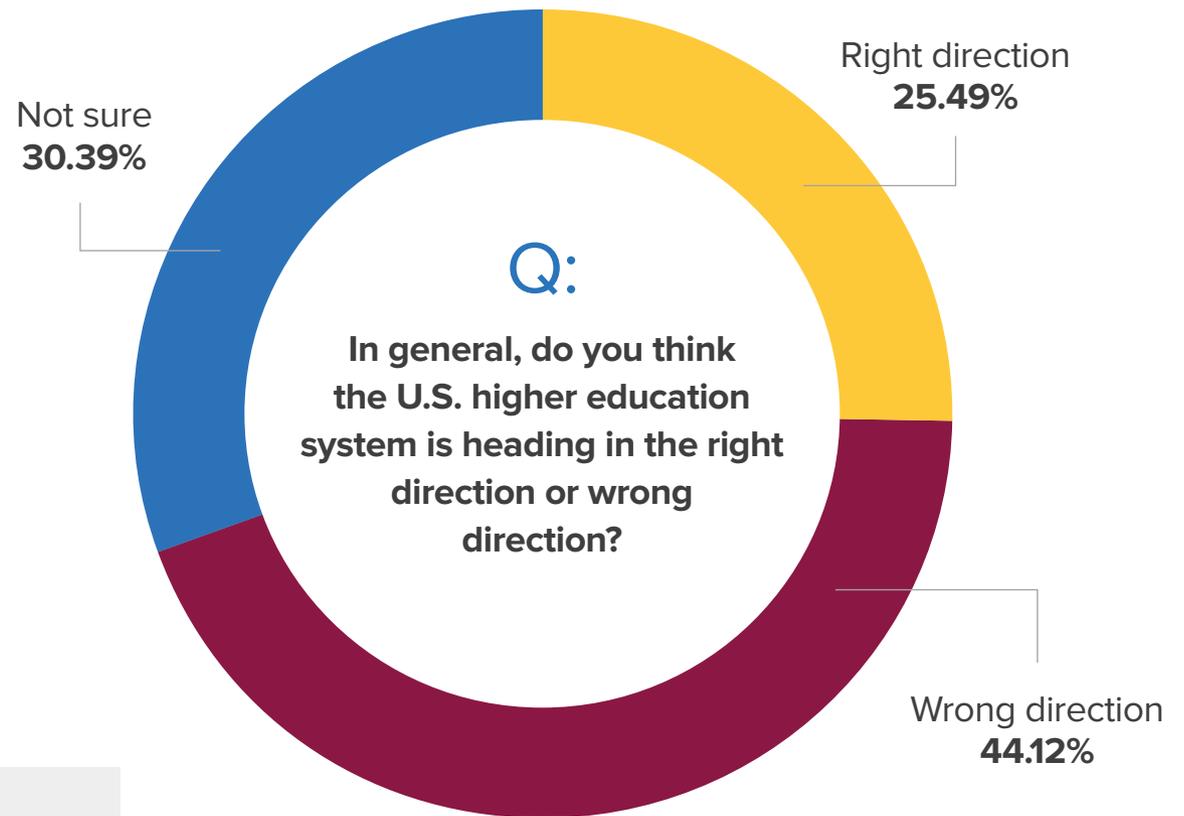
# Despite their upbeat assessment of the value and competitiveness of U.S. higher education, 44% of deans say it is headed in the wrong direction.

American higher education is at a critical juncture in its centuries-long history. State funding is down and costs continue to rise. A new generation of students is beginning to knock on the doors of colleges and universities nationwide. And the promise of technology to improve how faculty members teach and students learn is becoming a reality.

**Change is in the air, but only a quarter of deans think higher education is headed in the right direction.**

## How deans compare?

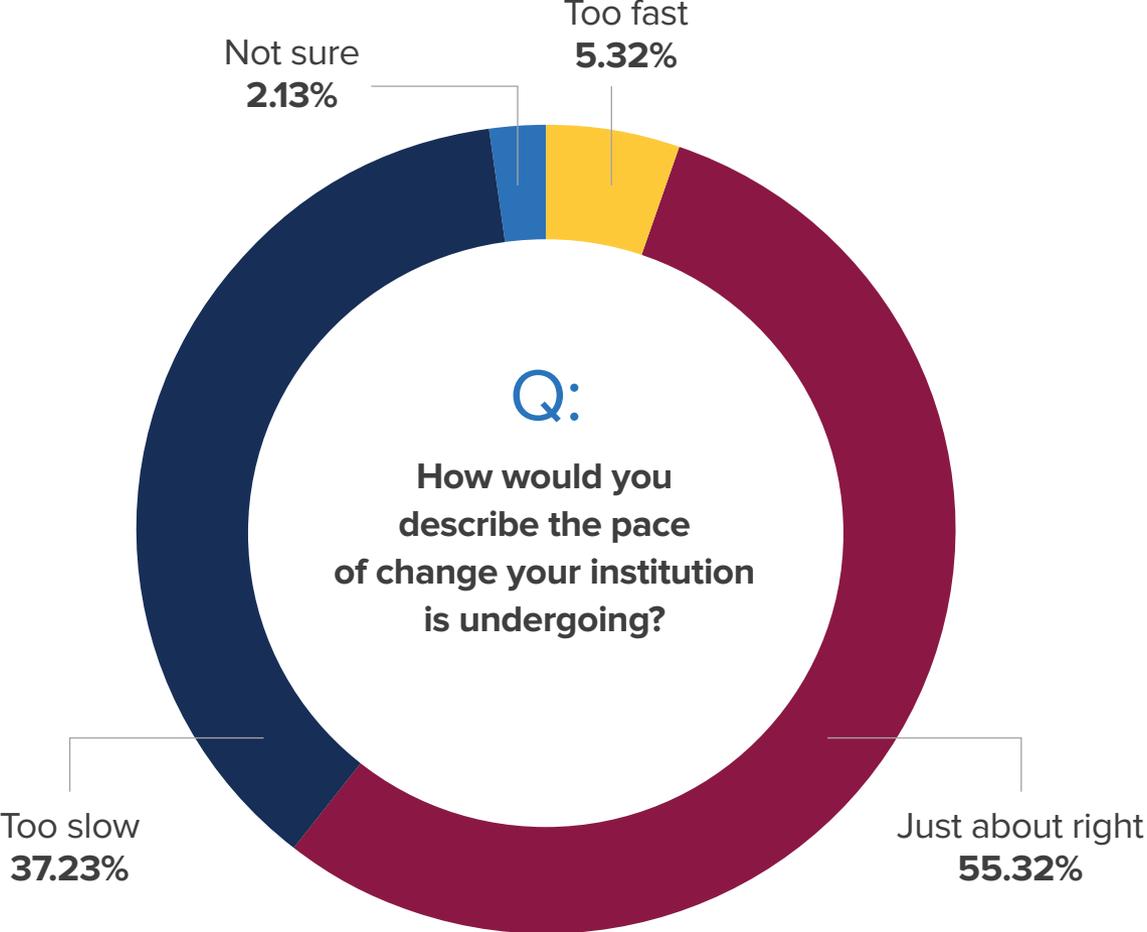
60% of presidents say higher education is headed in the right direction.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> 2014 Chronicle of Higher Education survey of presidents.

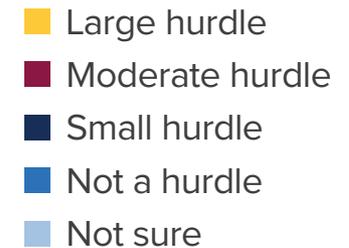
# 37% of deans describe the pace of change at their own institutions as “too slow.”

The increasing proliferation of technology on campuses and the talk of disruption to higher education as we know it has resulted in rising tensions between those who jump on the latest “gaming-changing” advances and those who are skeptical. While slightly more than half of deans say the pace of change at their institution is “just about right,” more than a third believe it’s “too slow.”

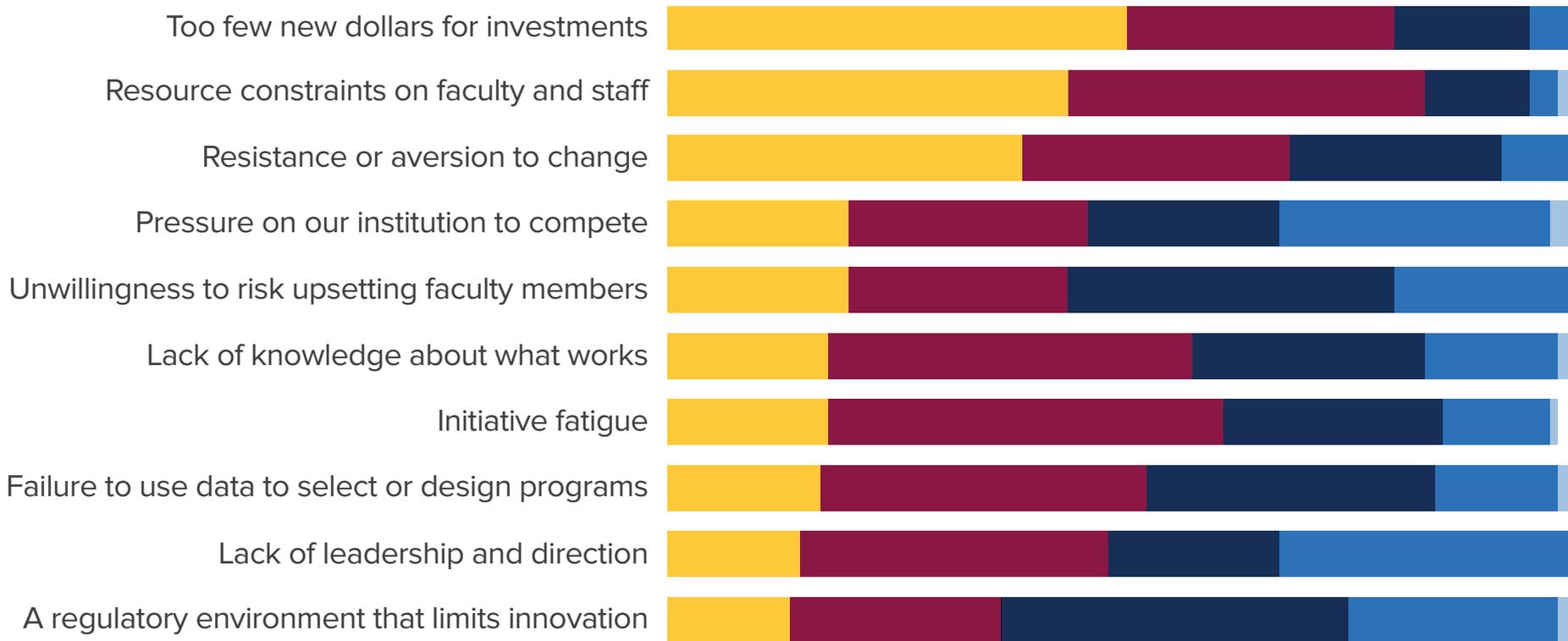


# Biggest hurdle to change? Lack of money

Deans identified their top hurdles to change on campuses. The top three challenges include: **too few new dollars for investments, resource constraints on faculty and staff, and resistance or aversion to change at the institution.**



**Q:** How big of a hurdle is each of the following when trying to make changes necessary to be more innovative?

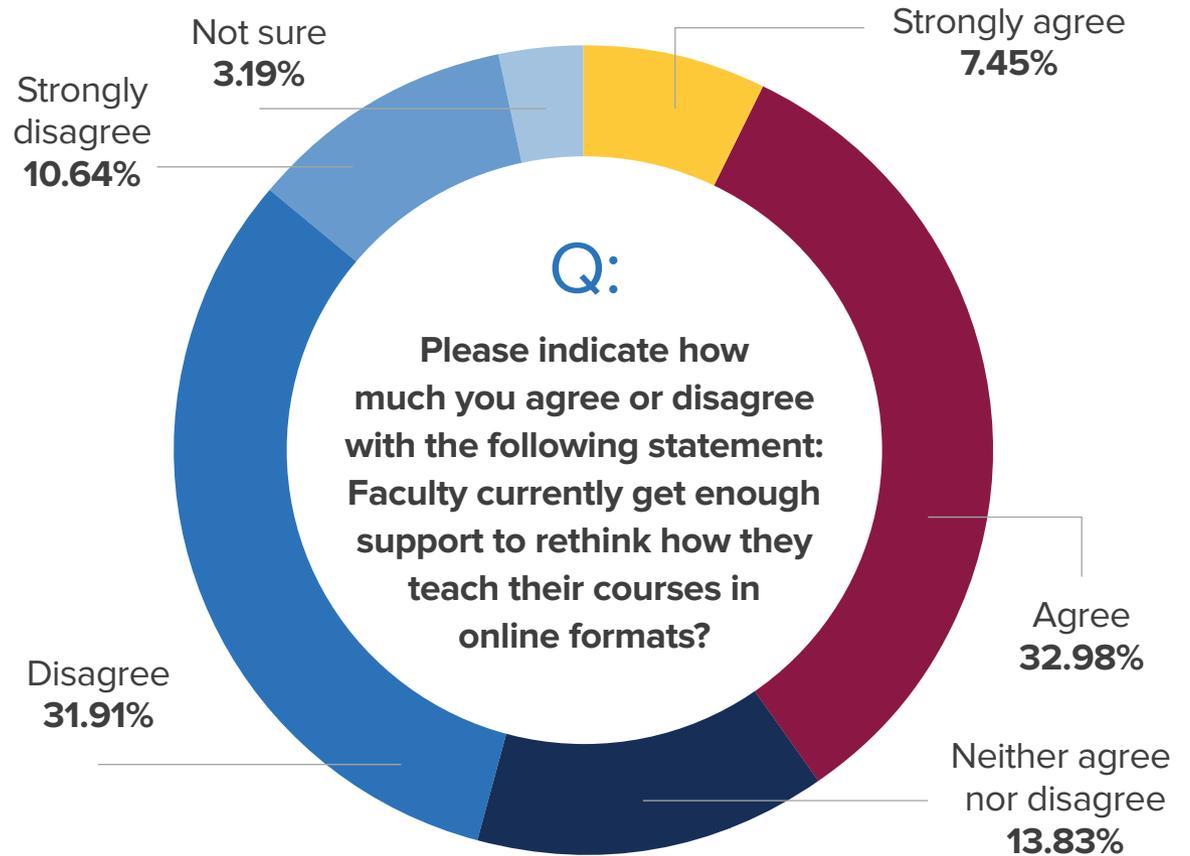


Views on  
**Online Education**

# Deans are divided on whether faculty members get enough support in teaching courses online.

The modern university is now a mix of the analog and the digital world. Students and faculty members expect that everything from courses to books be delivered digitally so they can access information anywhere, anytime, on devices and applications they use every day.

When it comes to teaching with technology, **43% of deans say faculty are getting shortchanged in how much help they get in rethinking their courses.** But opinions on this question are mixed. 40% believe they are getting enough support; 14% are neutral.



## How deans compare?

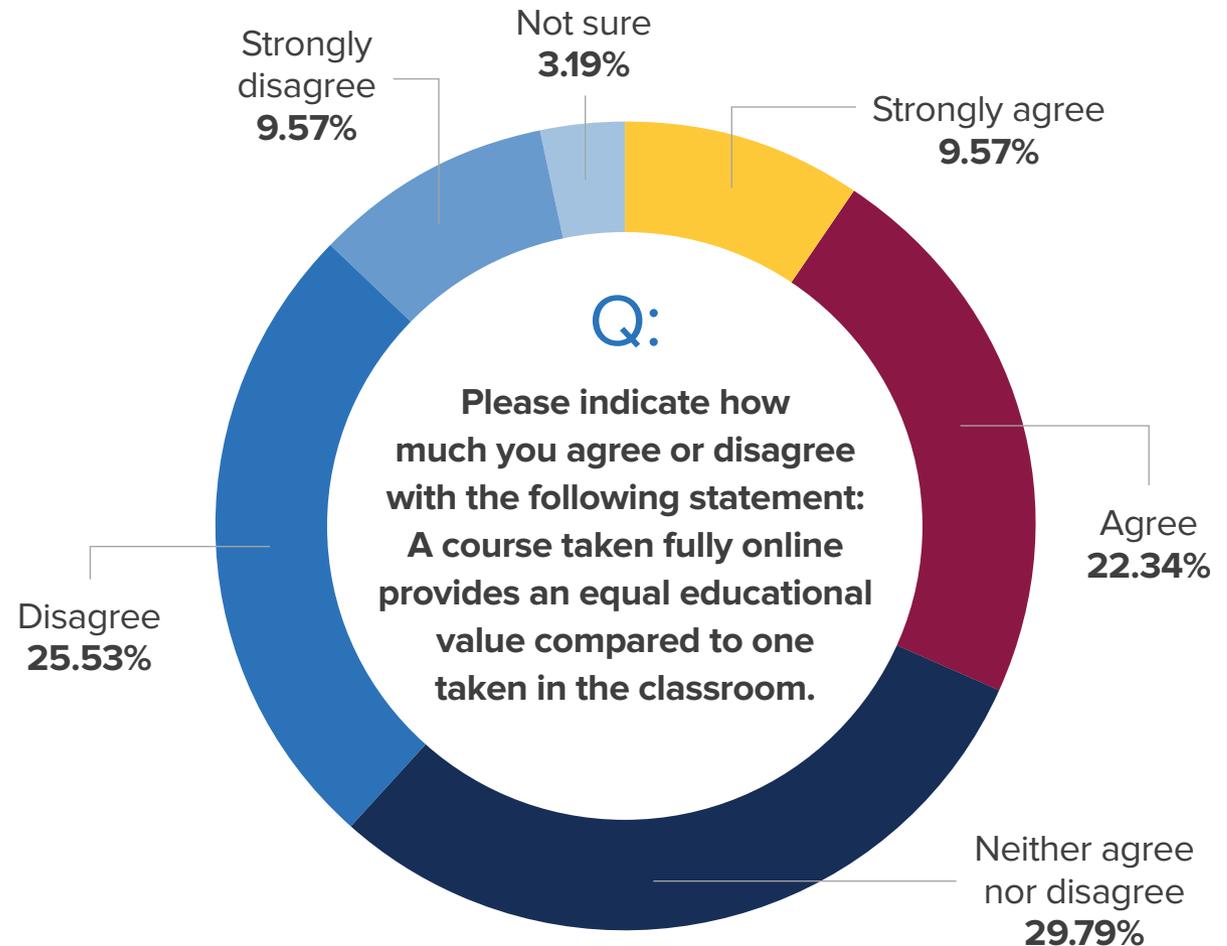
81% of professors think that the amount of training faculty receive before teaching online is an important indicator of quality of online courses.<sup>2</sup>

# The opinions of deans are also mixed when it comes to the quality of online courses.

Nearly half of recent college graduates (those who have graduated in the last decade) have taken at least one online course. Although online education is clearly here to stay, deans remain divided on its quality. **One-third of deans agree online courses are comparable to face-to-face courses, about the same proportion who disagree.** 30% of deans were neutral on the subject.

## How deans compare?

71% of chief academic officers rate the outcomes in online as the same or superior to those in face-to-face instruction.<sup>3</sup>

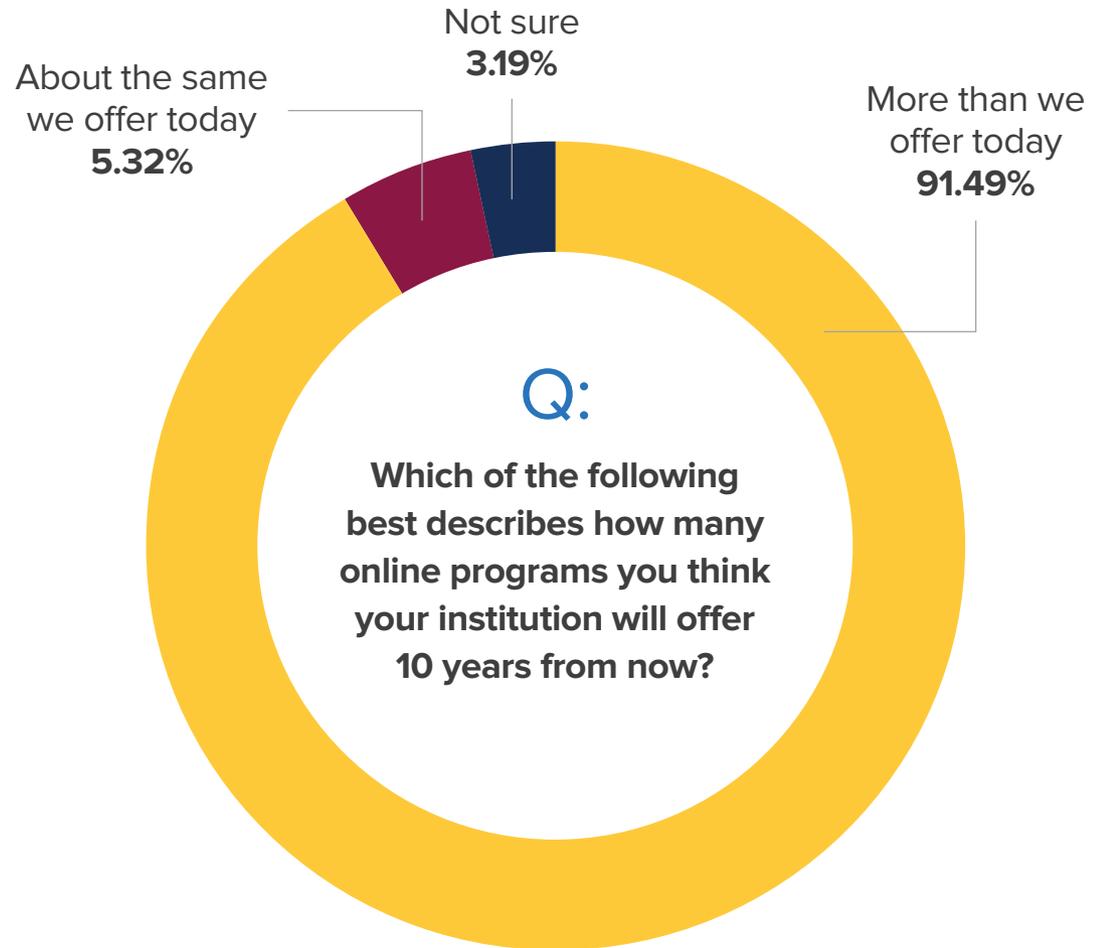


# 9 in 10 deans expect the number of online programs at their institution to increase in the next decade...

As the quality of online courses improve and time-pressed and place-bound adults look for more options to earn a degree, **nearly all of the deans surveyed said their institutions plan to add to their online offerings in the next decade.**

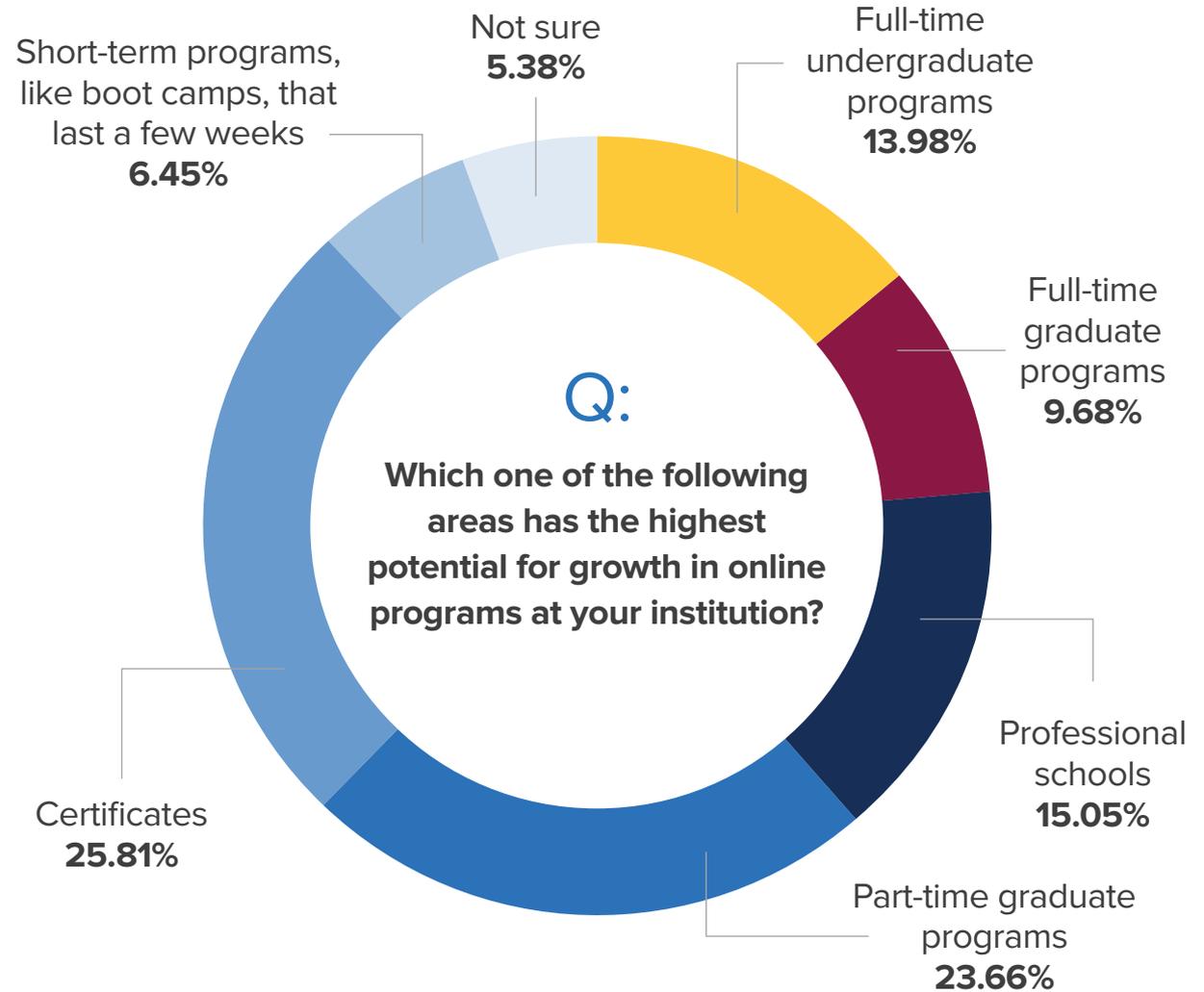
## How deans compare?

82% of provosts report that they are likely to expand online programs in the next year.<sup>4</sup>



# ...with much of that growth likely to come in graduate programs and certificates.

The master's degree is quickly becoming the new bachelor's degree. The number of master's degrees has increased by 250 percent since 1980, rising at a much faster pace than those earning a bachelor's degree. Nearly 30 percent of recent graduates are back in school within two years of getting a bachelor's degree. **No wonder nearly 50% of deans say that part-time graduate and certificate programs provide the most opportunity for growth in the online space.**



## Methodology

The results of this survey are based on responses from academic deans at four-year colleges and universities. Of those invited 109 college officials completed the online survey. 61% of the deans who responded were from public universities and 60% of them have been a dean at their institution for at least five years. The data collection took place in late March and early April 2017.

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