

New Hampshire ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

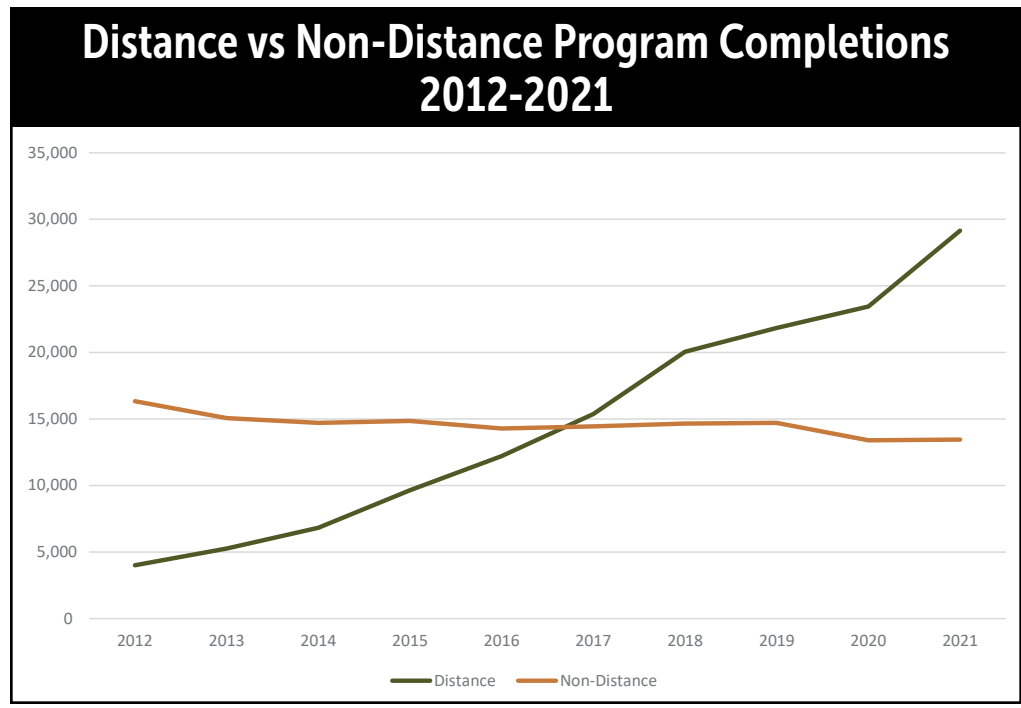
December 2023

Franconia - Flume Gorge PHOTO CREDIT by Christina Minniti Mushrooms in Winter Pillsbury State Park PHOTO CREDIT by Christina Minniti Tubing at Gunstock PHOTO CREDIT Winter Pine Cones Pillsbury State Park PHOTO CREDIT by Christina Minniti

The Online Trend in Post-Secondary Education

Online post-secondary education programs have been increasing in popularity with more students opting to complete their desired degree through distance learning programs. While some may argue the coronavirus pandemic's need for virtual education was responsible for the increase in distance learning programs, this is not the case. Since 2012, online program completions at New Hampshire colleges and universities have seen a continuous increase while in-person options have decreased or remained statistically unchanged, increasing by less than five percent year-over-year. In 2017, online programs overtook in-person programs for total number of completions and has remained ahead ever since by progressively larger amounts. The biggest increase in online program completion occurred between 2017 and 2018 with the number of students completing online degrees increasing by 4,682 (30.5 percent).

For six years, completers of in-person programs had been hovering around 14,500, until 2020, when completions decreased by nine percent during the first year of the pandemic. In 2021, in-person programs failed to bounce back, as only 50 more completions were obtained, an increase of just 0.4 percent.



Source: Lightcast Developer, New Hampshire Employment Security

By Degree

The addition of online programs at many degree levels and institutions has provided many more opportunities to those looking to obtain post-secondary education. Most notably, online programs offering an associate's, bachelor's, or master's degree have had the largest impact. Since 2017 at least 50 percent of all annual completions in those degrees were obtained via an online program.

Online programs had the biggest effect on master's degree programs, as total completions have nearly quadrupled between 2012 and 2021 and nearly 80 percent of master's degree completions were attained through online programs. Total bachelor's degree completions have also more than doubled between 2012 and 2021 due to an increase in use of online programs. The number of in-person bachelor's programs remained at

approximately 8,000 completions each year, while 2021 online program completions doubled, including a 25 percent increase from 2020 to 2021. Associate's degree programs have seen a slow decrease in total in-person completions per year compared to bachelor's and master's programs that have remained consistent over time.

Those choosing to acquire a certificate or doctoral degree still prefer in-person programs, likely due to the amount of hands-on training typically required for these types of programs that cannot be obtained via an online course.

SNHU's Dominance

With over 200 online college degree programs, Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) has been the leader in providing online programs. In 2021, 68 percent of all New Hampshire institution post-secondary completions, ranging from certificate to doctorate

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level, were granted via online programs. Between all programs and post-secondary levels 27,014 completions were obtained from SNHU in 2021, accounting for 63 percent of total completions and 93 percent of all online program completions. This is a staggering figure when second place totaled 4,347 completers at the University of New Hampshire's Main Campus, which accounted for only ten percent of all completions. With a wide variety of programs, SNHU serves over 170,000 students throughout the U.S. in online programs and over 3,000 on campus.¹

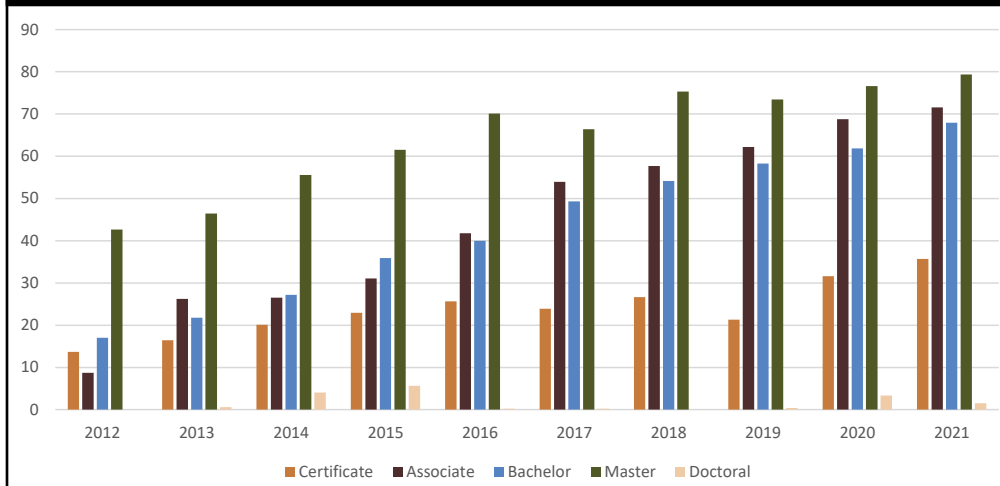
By Academic Discipline

Five academic disciplines made up 75 percent of all 2021 online program completions at institutions in New Hampshire. These disciplines were computer and information sciences and supportive services, liberal arts/general studies, psychology, health professions, and business, management, and marketing services. Of these five disciplines, business accounted for 37.5 percent of all 2021 online completions. When compared to all non-distance 2021 completions, online programs had at least twice as many completions in these disciplines overall. The largest difference in 2021 came from liberal arts/general studies, where online completions outnumbered non-distance completions ten to one.

In other disciplines, in-person programs accounted for most or all completions. Biological and biomedical sciences, engineering, and culinary, entertainment, and personal services programs all had no distance completers in 2021, while more than 60 percent completers in education and social sciences programs were in non-distance programs.

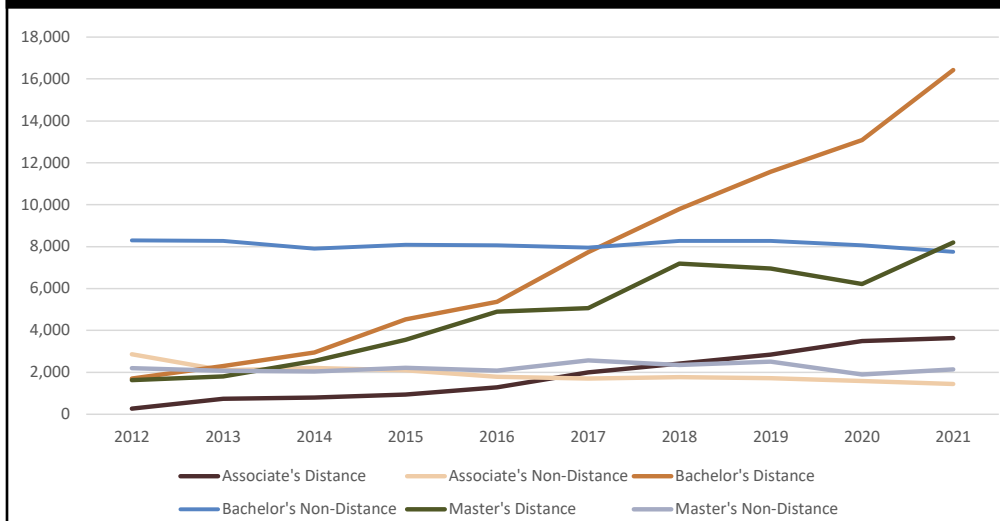
These programs generally require hands-on work and specialized equipment that a distance program could not replicate. Culinary programs typically require professional kitchen facilities, and engineering and science disciplines generally include laboratory work. Education degrees often include in-classroom teaching experience. In education and social sciences programs, distance learning was more prevalent

Percent of Degree Completed in Distance Program



Source: Lightcast Developer, New Hampshire Employment Security

Degree Program Distance vs Non-Distance



Source: Lightcast Developer, New Hampshire Employment Security

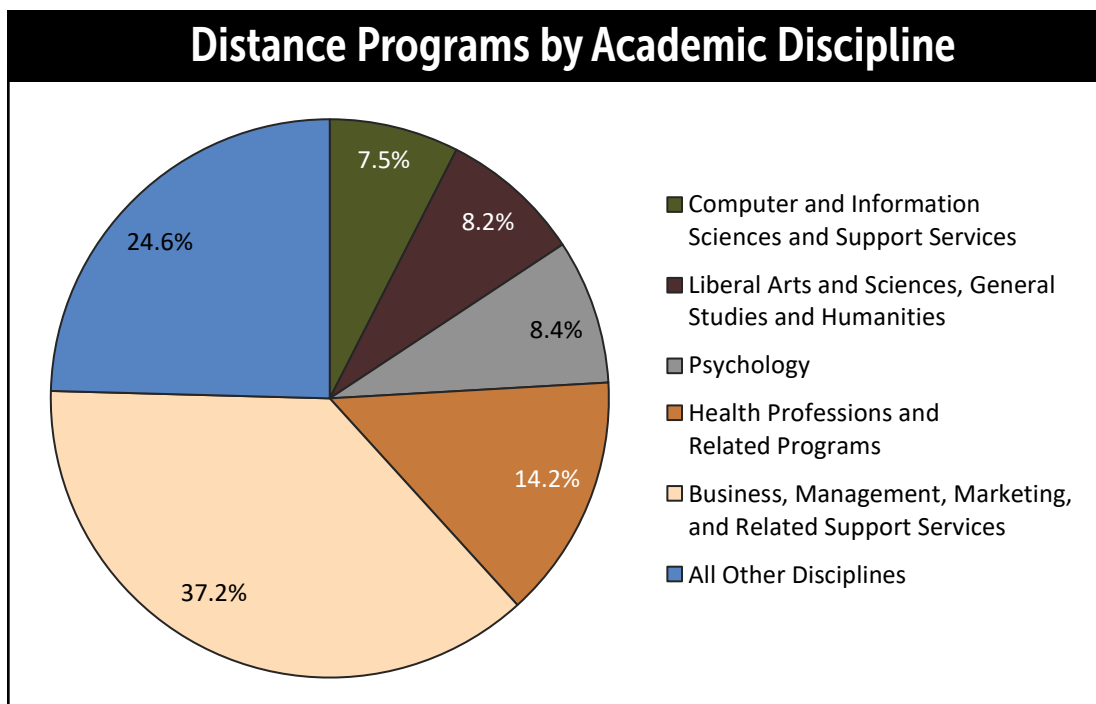
in master's degree programs, while associate's and bachelor's degree programs were more likely to be non-distance.

Many teachers work towards a master's degree while teaching, which illustrates one of the advantages of distance programs. Distance programs can be a more flexible option for students balancing college or university with career and/or family constraints. For these "nontraditional" students, full-time in-person college might not be feasible. In the 2015-2016 academic year, the average U.S. student enrolled in a distance bachelor's degree program was 32 years old, and 84 percent were of those students were employed.²

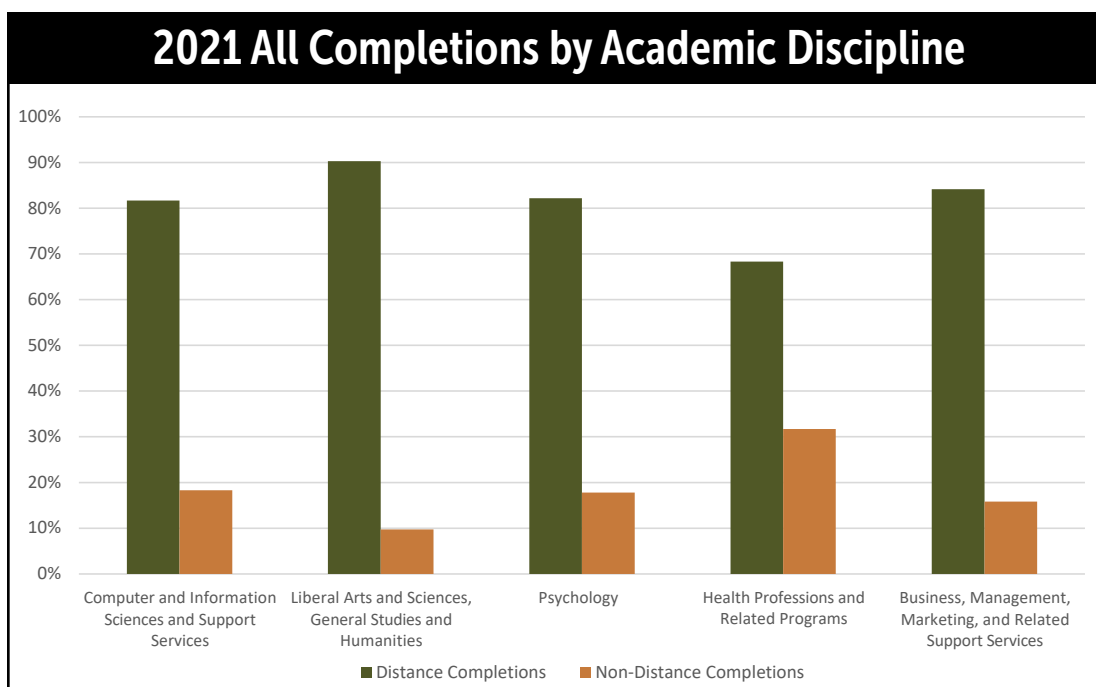
– Cailee King, PACIA Program Specialist

¹ (Southern New Hampshire University, 2023)

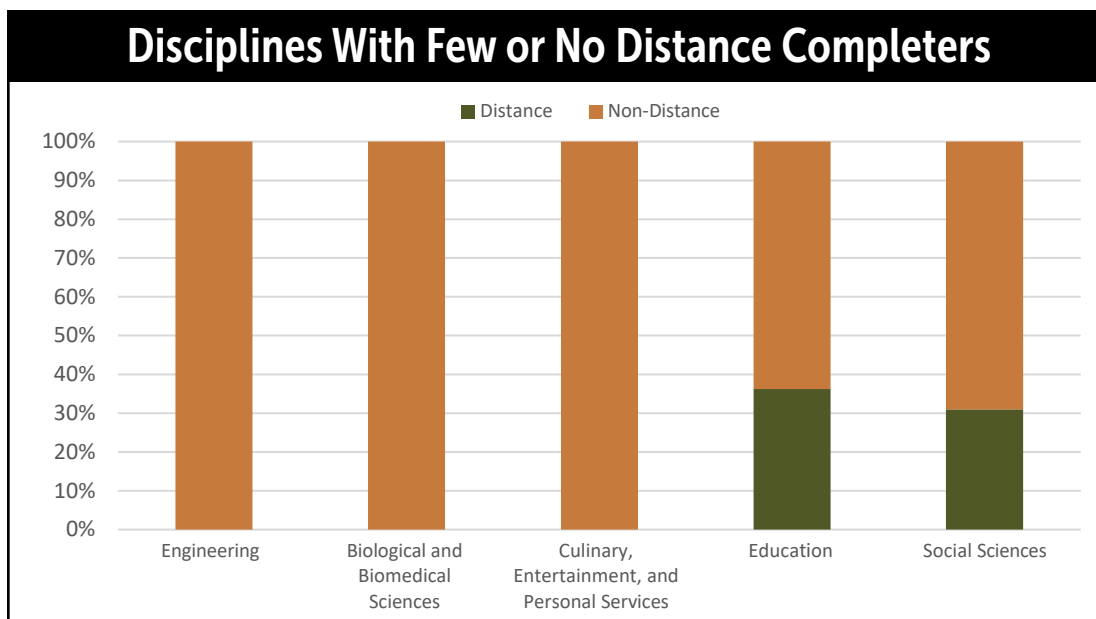
² Jordan Friedman, U.S. News Data: The Average Online Bachelor's Student, U.S. News, April 4, 2017. <https://www.usnews.com/higher-education/online-education/articles/2017-04-04/us-news-data-the-average-online-bachelors-student>.



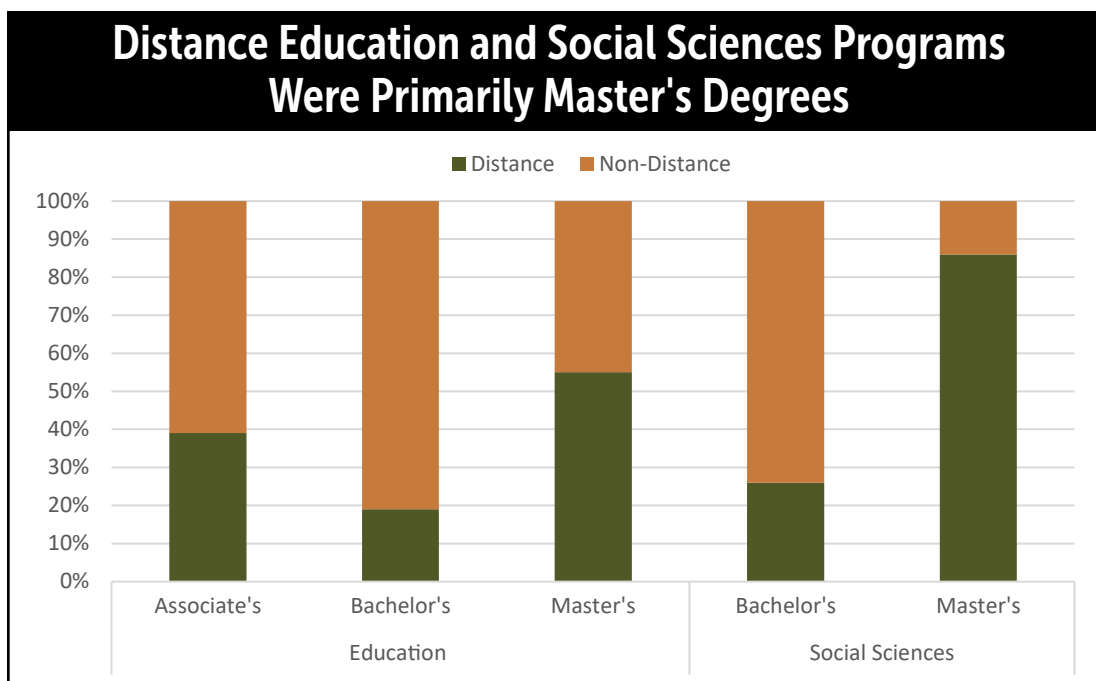
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