



# The Online Student

## Illinois Virtual Campus

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# Questions to ask

As universities and businesses move toward the use of online instruction, there is need to discover how to make this alternative both more attractive and viable for different populations. We need to ask the following questions:

- Who are the students attracted to online instruction?
- What skills and qualities should or must one possess as a distance student?

# Demographics of the Online

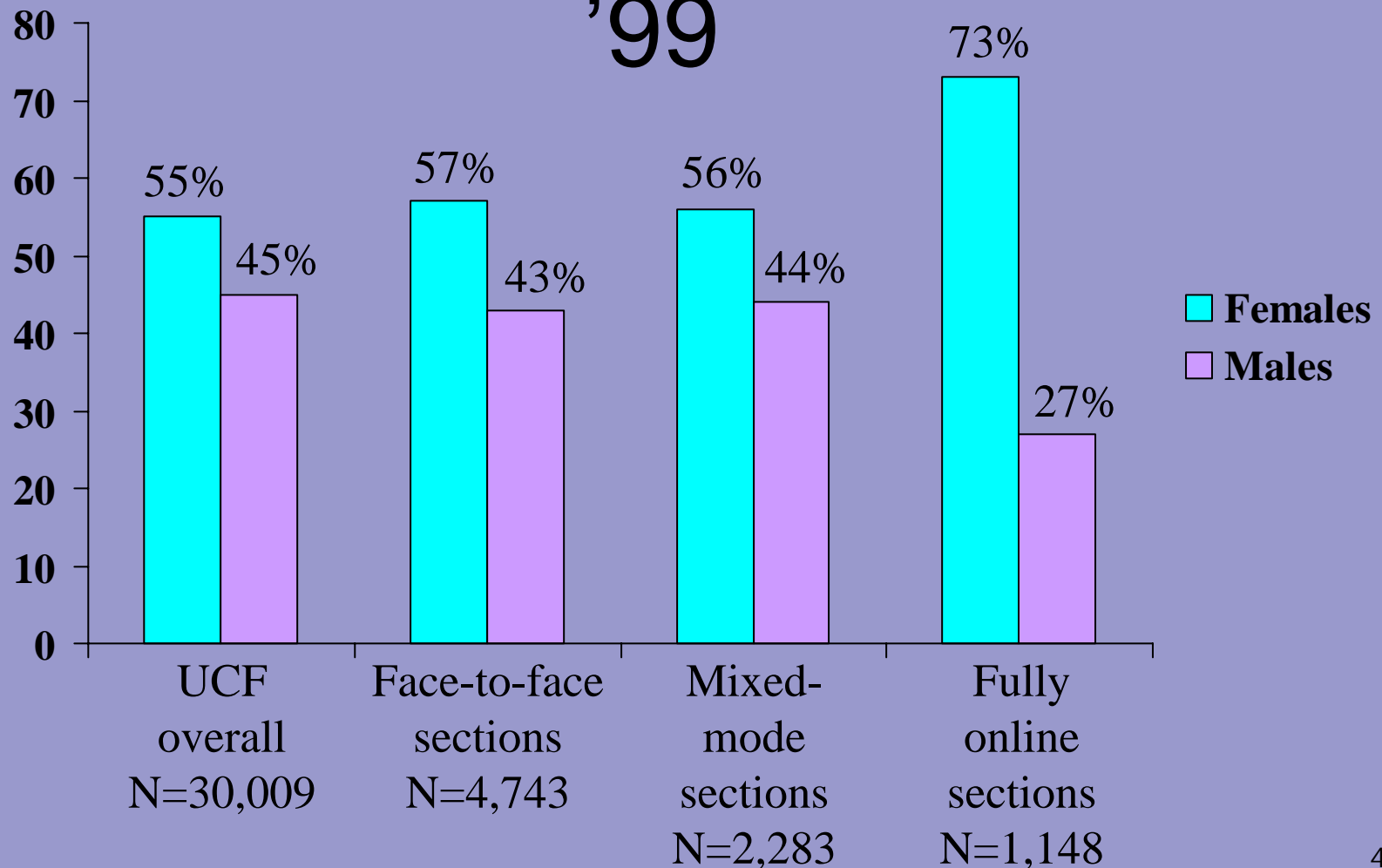
## Student:

### **Gender**

- Fully online courses consistently have more females than other modalities.
- Clayton reports that “61% of the online students are female.”

# The University of Central Florida

## Gender of Students - Spring '99

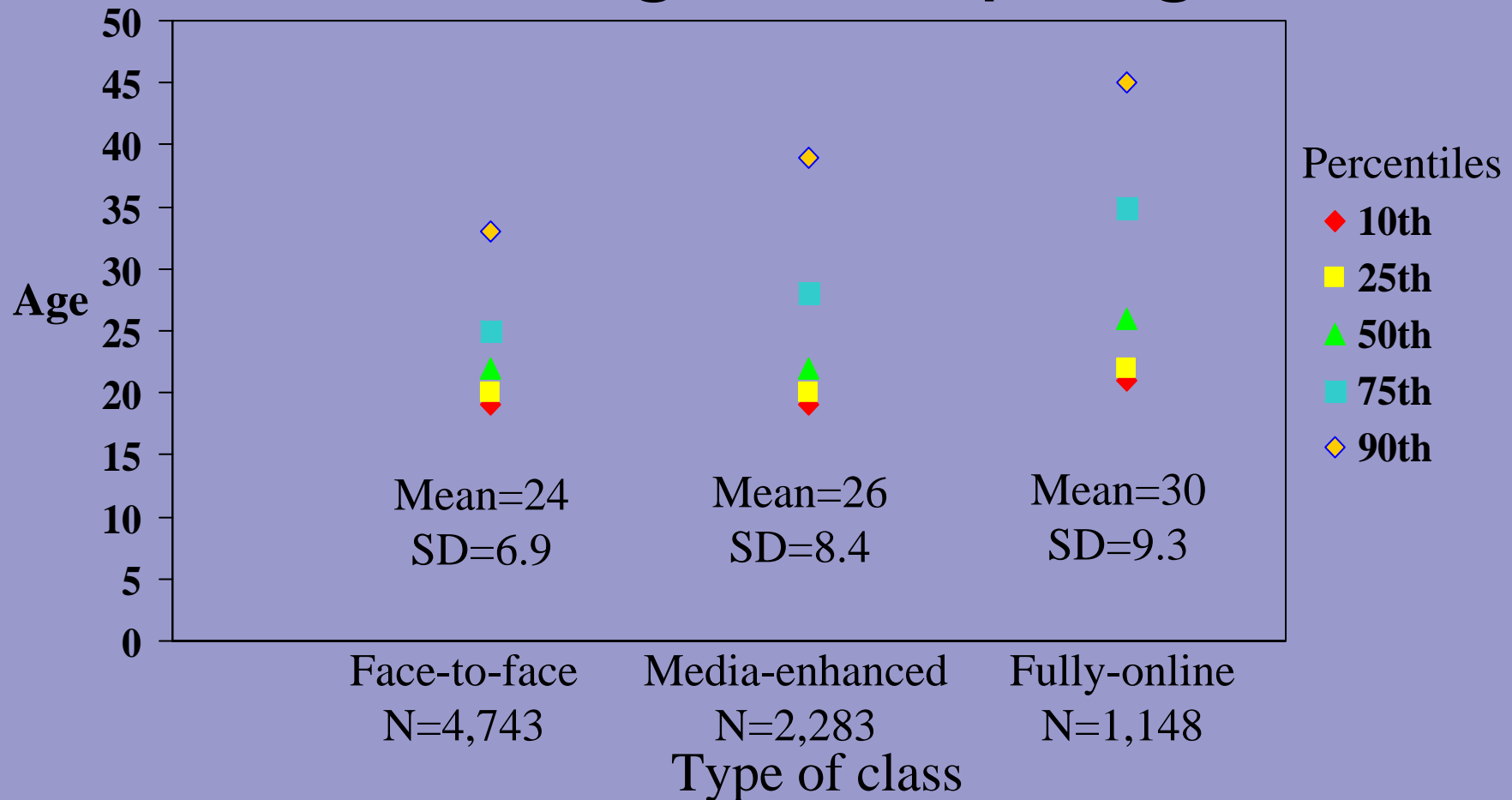


# Demographics of the Online Student:

## Age

- Online students tend to be older than students in face-to-face courses.
- However, it is reported in “A Survey of Traditional and Distance Learning Higher Education Members” by the National Education Association’s survey “the largest percentage of courses (38%) have an equal mix of students over and under 25 years of age.”

# The University of Central Florida Student Ages -- Spring '99

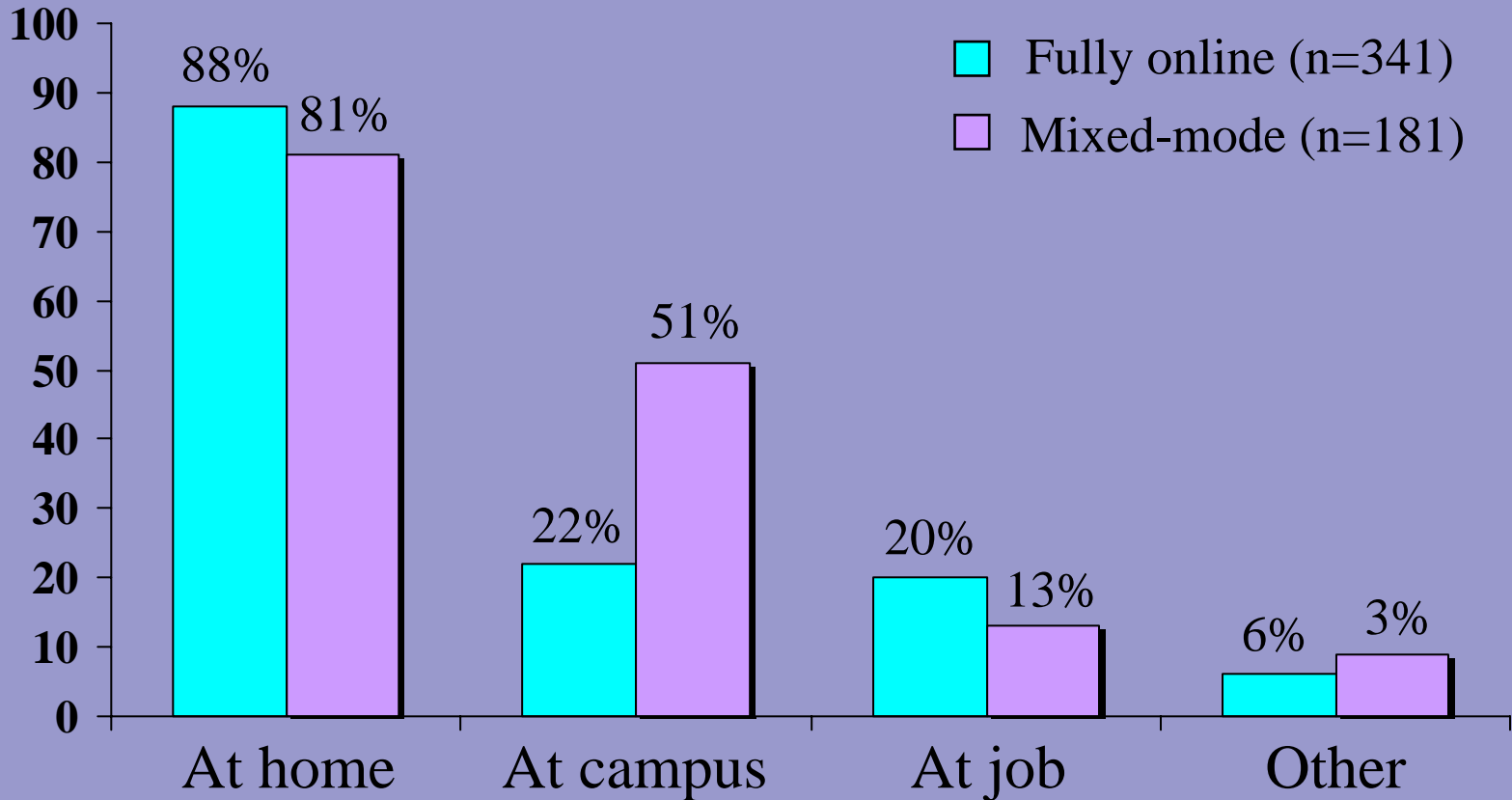


# Demographics of the Online Student:

## **Geographical Location**

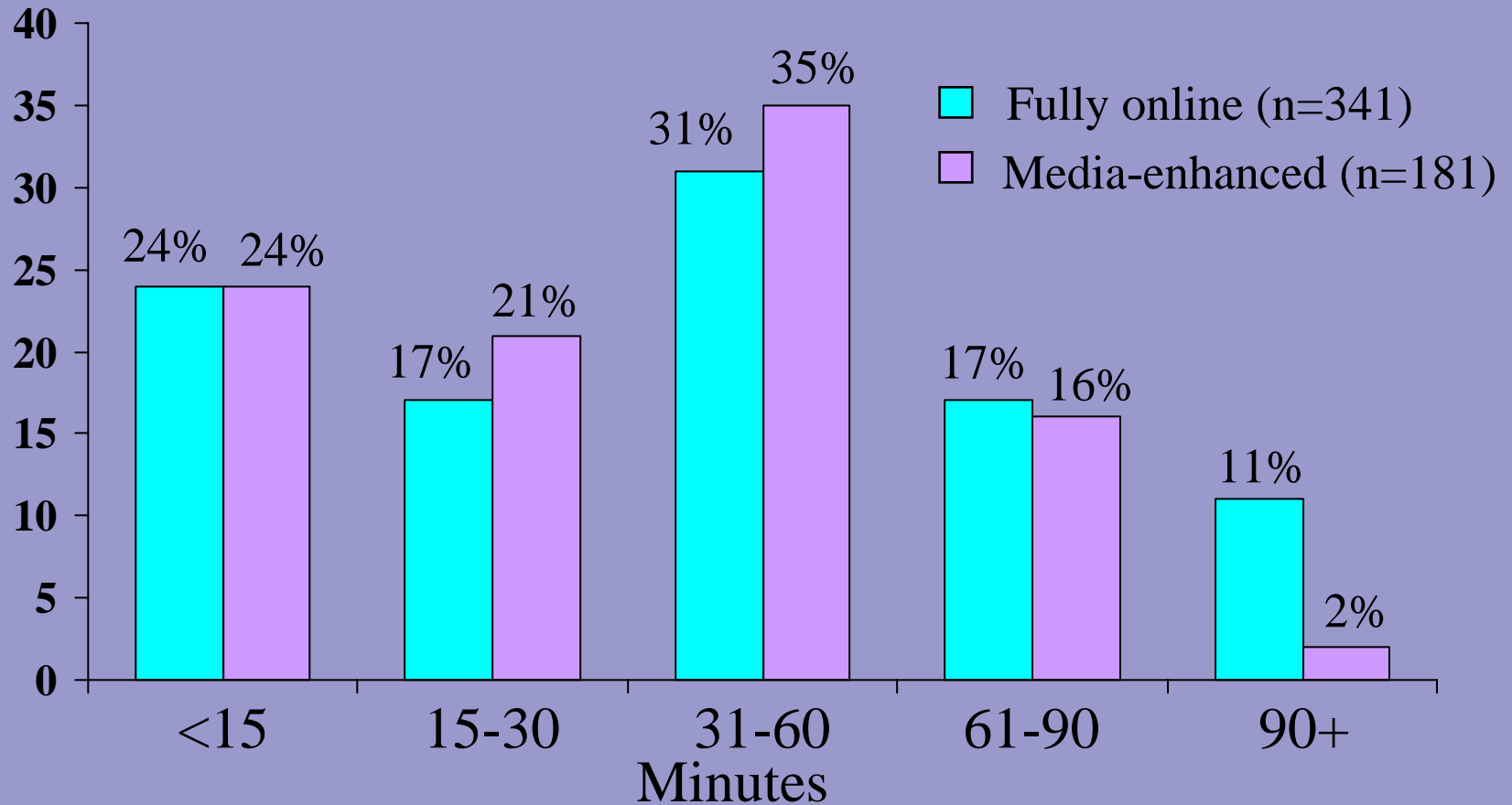
- Online Students most often use computer in the home to access online course.
- Students who take online courses are NOT necessarily located far away from campus.

# The University of Central Florida Location of Student Computers





# The University of Central Florida Drive Time to UCF Campus



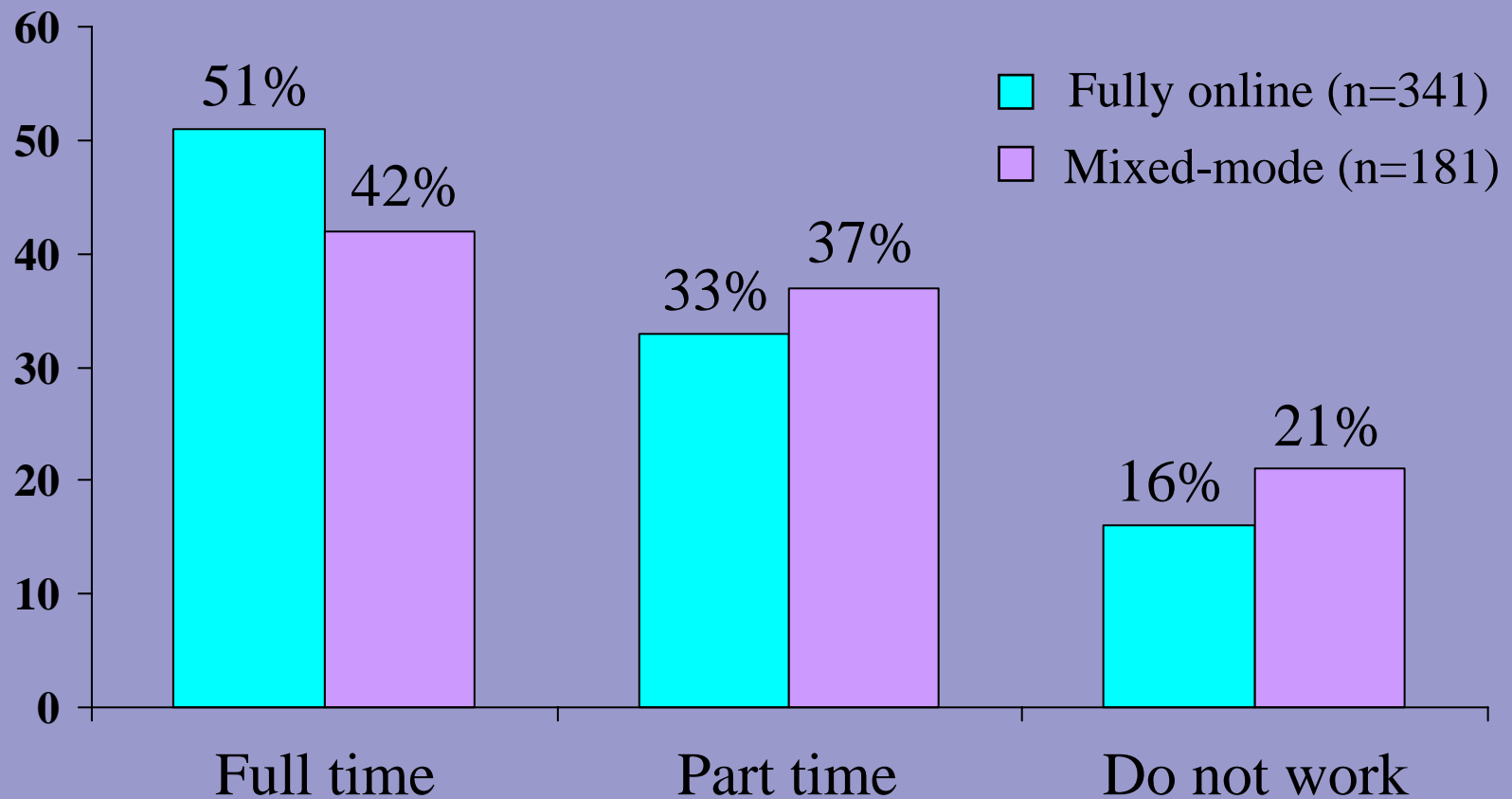
# Demographics of the Online

Student:

## **Employment**

- Most online students are employed full-time

# The University of Central Florida Employment Status



# Attitudes and beliefs of Online Students

## Positive Aspects

### ■ Flexibility and Convenience

Guernsey [8] found that a large number of distance education students were either already registered in regular classes, or were trying to work full- or part-time while earning degrees. Richards and Ridley [9] found that logistics was the second most common reason for enrolling in online courses. Hiltz [10] reported that 69% of students felt that the courses in the virtual classroom were "more convenient" than traditional courses. Richards and Ridley [9] found that distance education as the only alternative, was the third most common reason for enrolling in online courses.

# Attitudes and beliefs of Online Students

## Positive Aspects

### ■ Access/Interaction with Instructor

Students perceive that they receive more individual attention from instructors [8]. Studies [11] have shown that student attitudes toward distance education can be significantly affected by facilitating some degree of interaction among students and teachers. Hiltz [10] found that 71% of students who had just completed an online course felt that asynchronous learning networks provided better access to their professor.

# Attitudes and beliefs of Online Students

## Positive Aspects

### ■ Better Performance

Students perceive that they would get better grades than in a face-to-face course [8]. Koch [12] states that distance education students earned higher grades than students in conventional versions of the same classes. Bee [13] found that students who participated in web-based instruction felt that they improved their course performance.

# Attitudes and beliefs of Online Students

## Positive Aspects

### ■ Collaborative Learning Environment

Barreau, Eslinger, McGoff, and Tonnesen [14] found that students reported they formed good working relationships, felt equality in their contributions, and felt that groups enabled them to produce higher quality projects. Students prefer engaging in small group discussion or interactive question and answer as opposed to viewing lectures [11]. Hiltz [10] found that only 15% did not "feel more involved in taking an active part" in a virtual class; and that 55% felt more motivated to work hard on their assignments because others would be reading them. Hiltz [10] also found that only 20% agreed with the statement, "I would not take another online class," while 52% disagreed. Asynchronous learning environments allow more time to compose responses to questions [15].

# Attitudes and beliefs of Online Students

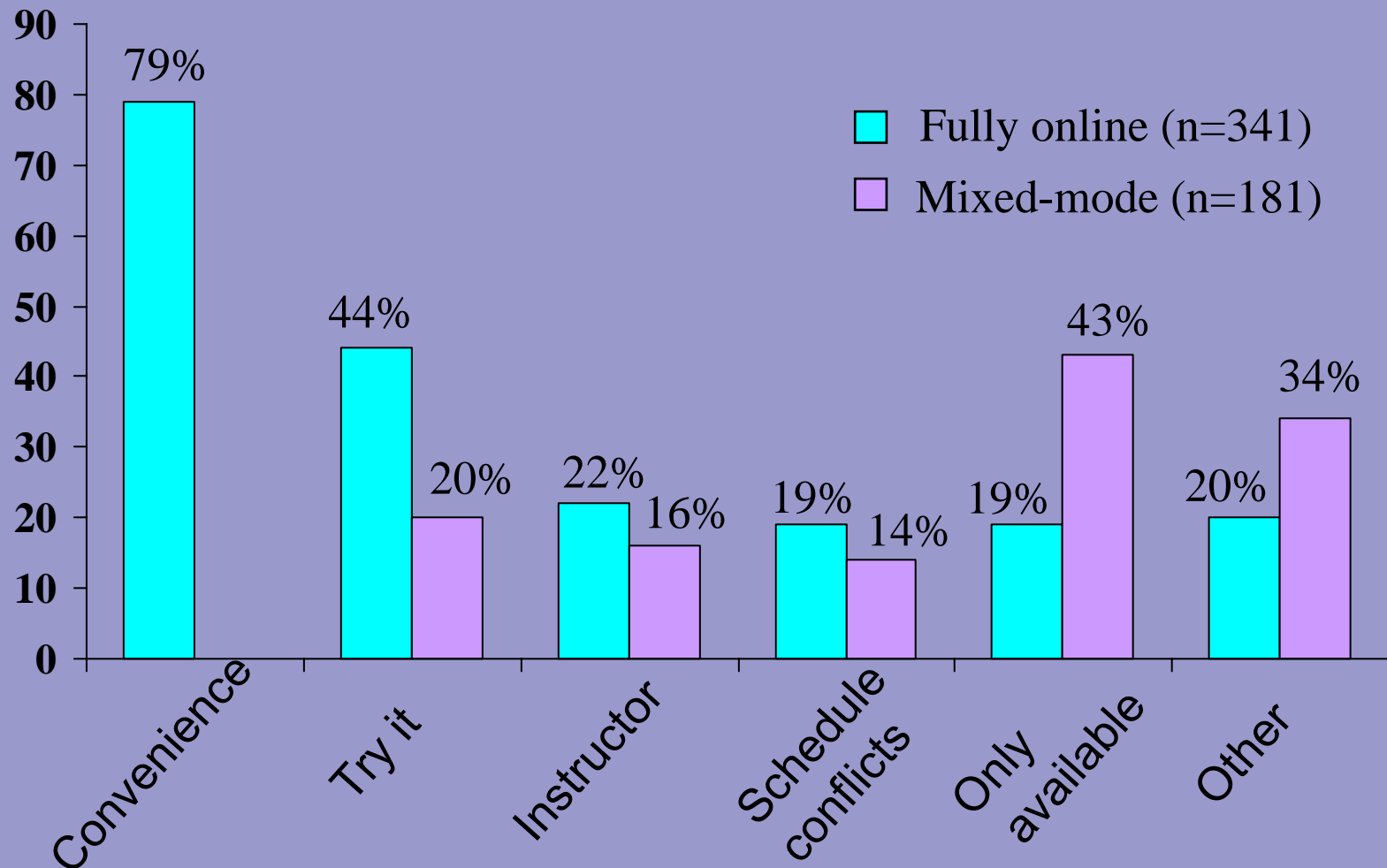
## Positive Aspects

### ■ Positive Learning Experience

Barreau, Eslinger, McGoff, and Tonnesen [14] state that students found the time spent on class (1 to 27 hours per week) was worthwhile. Barbrow, Jeong, and Parks [16] and Foell and Fritz [17] found that students overall attitudes toward computers in distance education classes were positive. Those who have taken distance courses have generally responded positively to the experience and would recommend it to other students [11]. Richards and Ridley [9] found that 79% of students rated their experience in online courses as "excellent" or "good." Hiltz [10] reported that 58% of students felt that the virtual classroom increased the quality of education (20% felt it did not).



# The University of Central Florida Reasons for enrolling



# Attitudes and beliefs of Online Students

## **Negative Aspects**

### ■ Limitations on Interactivity

Guernsey [8] states that younger students had difficulties with online courses and felt that they needed to be with a "live person." Larson [18] cites some students' need for face-to-face interaction. Hiltz [10] reported that the majority (59-64%) of students felt that they made new friendships in courses with a face-to-face element, whereas only 33% of the virtual classroom-only students agreed.

# Attitudes and beliefs of Online Students

## **Negative Aspects**

### ■ Technological Problems

Students new to a particular technology may initially exhibit some concern about the role of technology in the learning experience. If this occurs, these students typically demonstrate a reluctance to actively participate in the distance classroom areas [11]. Mastrian and McGonigle [19] found that the most frequent negative comment related to the overall experience was the early frustration with the use of the computer

# Attitudes and beliefs of Online Students

## Negative Aspects

### ■ Increased Workload

Barbrow, Jeong, and Parks [16] found that students' attitudes were positive with the exception of the amount of time it took to learn new software. Gifford [20] stated that the majority of students felt that more time was spent on the Internet-based class than in the regular classroom. Hiltz [10] reported that only 13% of students in the virtual classroom agreed (67% disagreed) with the statement, "I didn't have to work as hard for the online class." Barreau, Eslinger, McGoff, and Tonnesen [14] reported that students sometimes felt overloaded with information; Guernsey [8] found that students felt online courses required more work.

# Attitudes and beliefs of Online Students

## **Negative Aspects**

- **Lack of Logistical Support (administrative and technical)**

Larson [18] has found that lack of availability of course resource materials was a negative aspect of distance learning. Hiltz [10] found that 40-50% of students had difficulty accessing course materials due to busy signals at the dial-in. Hiltz [10] also reported that 52% of virtual students felt that it was easier to fall behind in virtual classes due to the ease of postponing or procrastinating.

# Attitudes and beliefs of Online Students

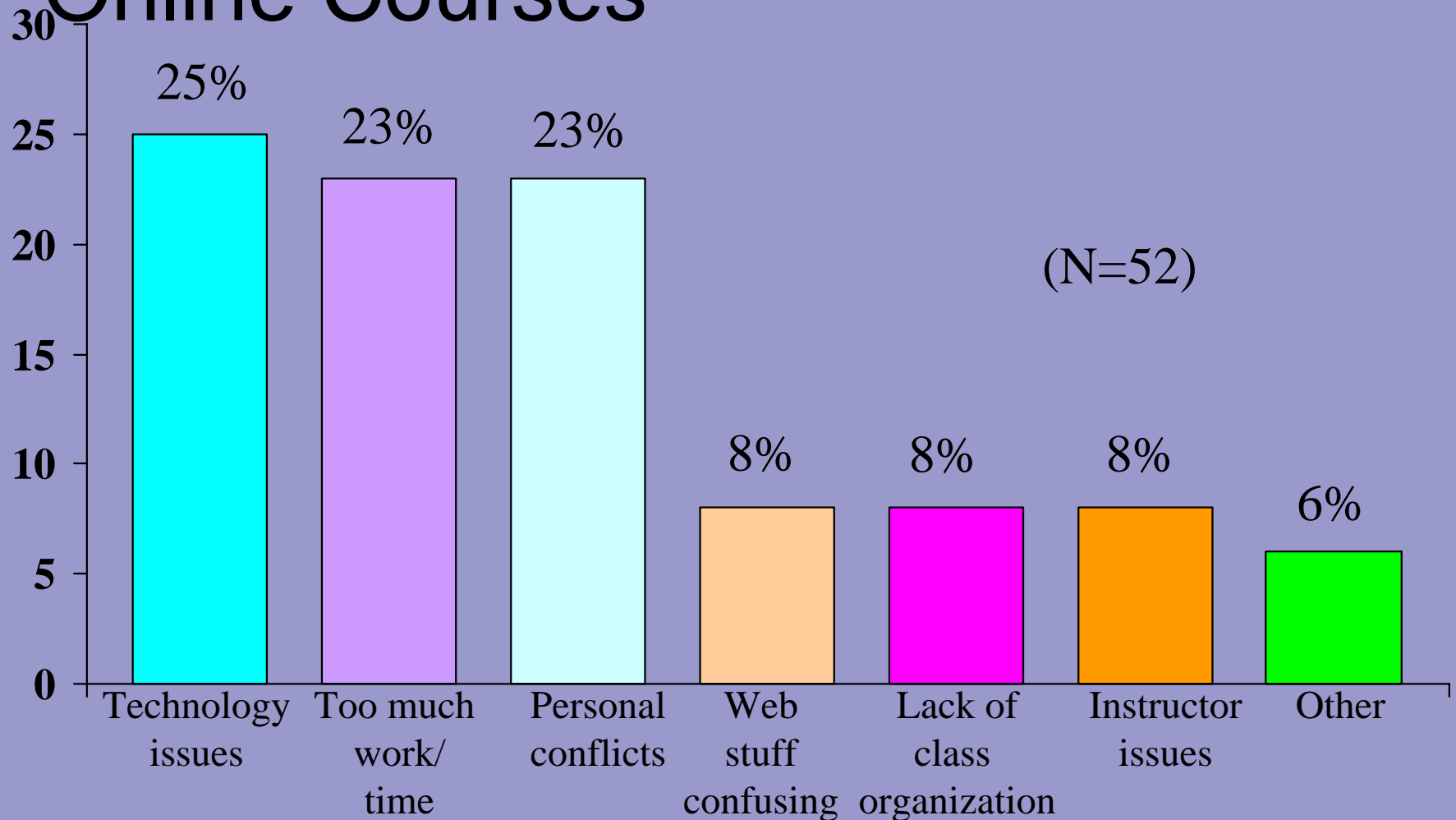
## **Negative Aspects**

- Costs (equipment, online phone charges, etc.)

Bee [13] found that students who chose not to take advantage of auxiliary materials placed on the Web felt that the university should provide financial assistance to offset the associated costs of going online. Hiltz [10] found that 13% of students indicated that access to a PC was a serious problem.

# The University of Central Florida

## Reasons for Withdrawing From Online Courses



# Advice Students Would Give to Others Considering an Online Course

- Keep up and don't procrastinate
- Attend the orientation
- Be disciplined
- Develop your computer skills
- Ask for help
- Keep in touch with the professor
- Check the forum daily