The Digital Toolbox – How Students Discover, Engage & Learn from Digital Resources

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Column Editor's Note: For this issue we've provided an infographic to be used as our column. All data reflects results from a national survey conducted in September 2025 by FINN Partners on behalf of OverDrive. — SR

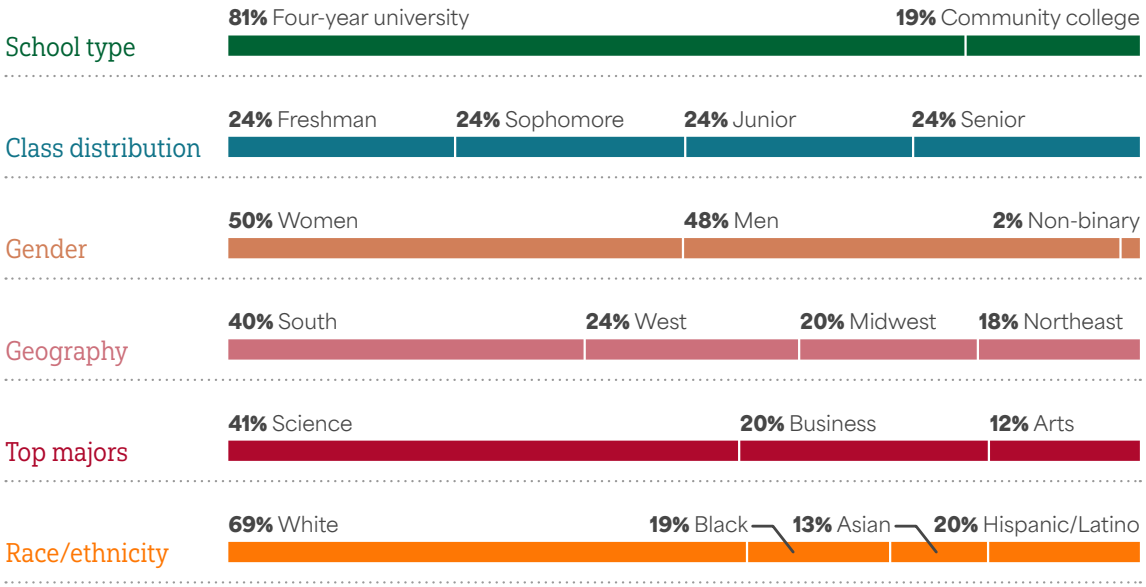
Our infographic details how undergraduates increasingly seek flexible, engaging, and multimedia-rich learning experiences driven by digital tools. Based on a survey of 500 U.S. students, it shows that learners value dynamic content formats, inclusive perspectives, and interactive approaches that move beyond traditional lectures. The findings emphasize the important role faculty play as well as peers in guiding discovery of digital resources, while also pointing to rising expectations for seamless, tech-enabled features. Overall, the infographic underscores a shift toward more personalized, accessible, and visually driven learning environments.

The Modern Student Playbook: What Undergrads Really Want in Digital Learning

Who We Surveyed

MEET THE CLASS

Sample overview: 500 students



The New Student Mindset

TODAY'S STUDENTS EXPECT DYNAMIC, INCLUSIVE LEARNING

Top learning expectations:

90% want course materials reflecting **diverse voices**

84% expect **dynamic learning** beyond lectures

85% value using **multiple media types** (podcasts, videos, social content)

89% want **alternatives to essays** (projects, portfolios, presentations)

87% say **films help them learn**

88% value **lively discussion** and **respectful debate**

How Students Discover Digital Tools

FACULTY ARE THE GATEKEEPERS

75%

from **professors**

58%

from **friends/classmates**

15%

from **librarians**

14%

from **department heads**

Student Learning Archetypes

5 STUDENT TYPES SHAPING THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

The Visual Vlogger

37%

loves:

49% real-life examples

46% videos

25% diagrams

motto:

"Show me, don't tell me."

The Kinesthetic Constructor

35%

loves:

31% labs

30% physical models

32% experiential learning

motto:

"If I can't touch it, I don't trust it."

The Textual Traditionalist

19%

loves:

32% textbooks

22% e-books

25% text summaries

motto:

"Just print the PDF and back away slowly."

The Auditory Anchor

10%

loves:

17% audio lectures

10% audiobooks

10% text-to-voice

motto:

"If I can listen while moving, I'm winning."

The Feature Finder

30% want content recommendations

35% already use AI summaries

motto:

"I'm not lazy — I just optimize."

Digital Tool Usage & Feature Expectations

STUDENTS ARE POWER USERS OF DIGITAL FEATURES

- ✅ Offline access **36%**
- ✅ Cross-device sync **32%**
- ✅ Customizable display **35%**
- ✅ Accessibility features **34%**
- ✅ AI summaries **35%**

Major opportunity:

30%

want **recommendation engines** for books/content

The Streaming & Multimedia Opportunity

FILM AND VIDEO ARE CORE LEARNING TOOLS

Only

44%

of schools provide access to **digital film/documentary tools**

But

87%

of students say **film helps them learn**

Videos are most used in LMS platforms (52%)

How Instructors Actually Use Digital Tools

FACULTY ARE ALREADY TEACHING THE WAY STUDENTS WANT TO LEARN

They make heavy use of:

Pre-recorded lectures

Discussion forums

Project-based learning

Interactive activities

Tools are most often embedded into **assignments** and **used during class**

Asynchronous content is king– **reliability and device sync matter**

The Big Takeaways

THE FUTURE OF LEARNING IS FLEXIBLE, VISUAL, AND PERSONALIZED

1. Students want **multimedia-rich, hands-on learning**.
2. Demand for **diverse voices** in content is nearly universal.
3. Discovery is the greatest opportunity: students want **smart recommendations**.
4. Digital features like **offline access** and **AI summaries** are now baseline expectations.
5. Students want learning that **moves, speaks, and connects**.