

# SJSU Online Strategic Marketing and Communications Plan 2023-24

August 2023

## Situational Analysis

### California Online Learner Landscape

- There are approximately 2.5 million Californians aged 25-54 who have graduated high school but have not completed a bachelor's degree, but have completed at least one full year of college coursework. (California Competes)
- SJSU Online is the first CSU to offer online degree-completion programs in Anthropology and Economics.
- Top competitors in online learning (*U.S. News & World Report* Best Online Bachelor's Programs):
  - University of Florida (#1 tie), Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University–Worldwide (#1 tie);
  - University of Illinois–Chicago (#3 tie), Medical University of South Carolina (#3 tie);
  - Oregon State University (#5);
  - Arizona State University (#6);
  - Ohio State University–Columbus (#7 tie), University of Arizona (#7 tie), University of Central Florida (#7 tie);
  - CUNY School of Professional Studies (#10 tie), University of North Carolina–Charlotte (#10 tie), North Carolina State University (#10 tie).

## SJSU Online Enrollment

- In 2022-23, SJSU Online enrolled 264 students across three enrollment cycles: fall, spring, and summer 2023.
- In its first year, SJSU Online offered 5 programs for students to enroll in: Anthropology, Economics, Interdisciplinary Engineering (which was discontinued in Summer '23), Interdisciplinary Studies, Educational Leadership; and Information Science and Data Analytics.
- In fall 2023, Business Administration was added.
- In spring 2024: Public Health and Public Relations will be added to the offerings to make for 7 total programs open to enrollment.
- SJSU has approximately 7,600 former students in its CRM database that have not completed their degree elsewhere, according to the National Student Clearinghouse. All these students have been contacted to alert them to our offerings.

## Audience:

### **SJSU Primary Audience:**

- Californians aged 25-54, who have graduated high school but have not completed a bachelor's degree, but may have completed at least one year of college coursework (Approximately 2.5 million identified in CA).
- In particular, working adults who may take classes part-time, are self-directed and motivated, results-oriented, require flexibility and want to be met where they are. They also have high expectations because of financial tradeoffs and personal sacrifices.

- Underrepresented minority and low socioeconomic status students who have faced barriers to completing higher education.
- Three primary audiences (Fall 23-Spring 24):
  - Previous SJSU students who did not complete their degree but have some credits (60+).
  - Community college counselors who can advise students
  - Bay Area students familiar with the SJSU brand who did not complete their degree but have some credits.

### **National Online Learner Characteristics**

In the 2022 Best Colleges Trends in Online Student Demographics survey, online learners of interest to SJSU Online can be broken down into three types of students: Career-minded students, lifelong learners, and COVID-19 remote learners.

Because of SJSU Online's 60+ credit requirement, our marketing efforts will focus on the first two types of students: A) Career-minded students and B) lifelong learners. Research by the Parthenon Group defines those groups as follows. [\(Haven Ladd, Seth Reynolds, Jeffrey J. Selingo \(year\). \*The Differentiated University: Recognizing the Diverse Needs of Today's Students.\* The Parthenon Group\)](#)

#### **Career-Minded Students (3 types)**

1. Career starters (18%): Extremely job oriented, price-sensitive, focused on reaching an ideal career position after college in the shortest amount of time. Job placement rate and career services are key.
2. Career accelerators (21%): Typically older, working adults who want to advance their career within their current company or industry. Career counseling and placement is key for them.
3. Industry switchers (18%): Looking to start a career in a different field. Often unemployed or in precarious financial situations. Place high value on institutions link to labor markets.

#### **Lifelong Learners (Academic Wanderers)**

1. Academic Wanderers (8%): Older students who don't know what they want to do, but believe obtaining a degree will open doors for them. Likely to be unemployed or have lower incomes. Least likely to believe they will complete their degree/most at-risk.

### **What motivates these students to pursue a degree online?**

[\(Capranos, D., Dyers, L., Magda, A. J. \(2021\). \*Voice of the online learner 2021: Amplifying student voices in extraordinary times.\* Louisville, KY: Wiley Education Services.\)](#)

- 30% of online learners said achieving personal growth was a leading motivator to enroll
- 26% of learners sought advancement in their current profession
- 25% hoped to improve their job prospects,
- 25% wanted to secure their first professional job
- 22% wanted a salary increase in a current profession

- 22% of online learners were looking to switch into a new career.

### **What do we know about these students?**

According to Best Colleges Trends in Online Student Demographics 2022 survey, the respondents of the survey (n=1,800)

(Venable, M. A. (2022). *2022 Trends in online student demographics*. BestColleges.com.)

- Skewed toward predominantly female (57%); male (41%); Transgender/Non-conforming (<1%)
- between the ages of 25 and 44 (65%);
- studying at the associate's or bachelor's degree level (60%);
- married or living with a partner (52%),
- A parent (60%),
- white (59%), Black (23%), Hispanic/LatinX (9%), Asian (6%)
- Household income <\$25,000 to \$75,999 (68%)
- employed full-time (52%),
- and enrolled full-time in their courses (78%).

### **Where are they located?**

63% of online learners chose a school within 100 miles of their location.

### **How do they research schools?**

Top sources of student research (2022 Best Colleges Online Trends Report)

1. College website
2. Online reviews from students
3. Direct contact with schools
4. Talking to students/graduates

### **FY 2023-24 Marketing Goals:**

1. Deliver a strong marketing mix to ensure all 2024 enrollment goals for seven degree-completion programs are met (Anthropology, Business, Economics, Information Science and Data Analytics, Interdisciplinary Studies, Educational Leadership; Public Health; and Public Relations).
2. Diversify and test new marketing strategies to expand top-of-funnel leads.
3. Evolve the SJSU Online website, as this is the top source of information for prospective students.
4. Establish strong messaging with applicants in-progress to remove roadblocks to completing their application and improve apps-in-progress conversion rates.
5. Incorporate findings from University Marketing and Communications' market research findings on adult learners into our marketing strategy.

## Strategies

Goal 1: Deliver a strong marketing mix to ensure all 2024 enrollment goals are met.

2024 Enrollment goals by major (as of August 2023):

Program	Spring 24	Summer 24	Fall 24
Anthropology	11	17	36
Business Admin	10	10	33
Economics	11	17	36
ISDA	30		90
Ed Leadership	20	10	30
Public Health	25	10	30
Public Relations	25	10	30
Total	132	74	385 (+4 TBD Programs at 25 each)

Channel	Plan	Objective	ROI measure	Budget
Website	Optimize SJSU Online with user testing groups, launch new tuition table, apply modal, and chat bot COM 100.	Awareness, engagement, and Inquiries	Engagement scores on select pages Google Analytics Web inquiry performance/count	TBD per estimate for items listed under Goal 2 strategies.
Digital Ads	Carnegie Agency mix to include PPC, website retargeting by major, social ads (FB/IG/Linked	Awareness and Inquiries	Count of inquiries to apps Cost per conversion Click conversion	\$150,000 over 1 year.

	In).		rate. UTM tags	
Direct Mail	Expand direct mail postcard prospecting.  Direct mail anti-melt campaigns to admitted students.	Awareness and Inquiries  Anti-melt	Count of inquiries to apps  Cost per conversion.	\$25,000
TV Ads	NBC-TV Ads to promote brand awareness.	Awareness	Traffic volume from direct organic Google search	\$30,000.
CRM Email/Text Marketing	Robust 1-year long campaigns to engage inquiries and apps in progress.  Support recruitment/student success with app/admitted student comms.	Convert Inquiries to Apps.  Convert in-progress apps to completion.  Engagement.  Anti-melt.	Campaign analytics (opens/clicks)  Lead engagement scores  Inquiry to apps  Apps in progress to complete	\$2,000 (texting only)
Social Media	Posts for deadline reminders, video content, student testimonials, news.  YouTube and Tiktok Ad tests.	Awareness, engagement, and inquiries	Social media analytics	Free, main SJSU account.
Video	Livestream series, new ad videos, reels, student ambassador videos.	Awareness and engagement.	YouTube channel analytics	Free
News/Earned	Washington	Awareness	Foleon and	Free

media	Square editorial stories.  Newscenter stories.  Traditional news placements.		newscenter story analytics.	
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Goal 2: Diversify and test new marketing strategies to expand top-of-funnel leads.

**Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) honors society test**

Purchase of 1,000-2,000 names of honor roll community college students within California who are seeking to transfer in the next year or two. In addition, we receive a list of 500 PTK advisors who work with these students. Send targeted campaigns to these purchased leads to test conversion. Cost: \$2,500

**LinkedIn Digital Ads Test**

Pilot digital advertising and carousel ads targeting adults with no bachelor’s degree on LinkedIn. Ads will run from Feb.-May 2024 in order to push applications for both the summer and fall of 2024. If these leads convert at a strong rate (and/or stronger than FB/IG leads), we would expand spending from just four months to a longer period in 2025. Price: \$12,000

**Enhanced Direct Mailing (Postie)**

Outreach to prospect a larger pool of Californians via direct mail. Postie, a digital-forward direct mail agency, allows SJSU Online to build look-a-like audiences based on our existing applicants. Then, they layer other consumer data on top of this and match back to similar, new prospects whom we can mail postcards to. They have proposed a plan to drop 80,000 postcards over one year, with an anticipated response rate of 1% or higher. This could potentially yield 600-800 more applications for SJSU Online. Or we also could target postcard mailings based off of website activity, for example a student who has been to our website and clicked on our apply button could receive a postcard encouraging them to submit an application soon. Cost: \$16,775-\$48,087 (depending on strategy).

Goal 3: Evolve the SJSU Online website, as this is the top source of information for prospective students.

**Website Net Price Calculator**

Recent university research indicates that price and finances are top concerns among adult learners. The Net Price Calculator is a federally mandated tool for undergraduate admissions groups to feature on their website. We propose creating a similar tool on our SJSU Online

website that would help an adult learner estimate their costs based on variables, such as how many credits they think will transfer, cost per unit by program, and how long they'd take to complete the degree. Price: TBD – Creative Circle contractor to help code.

**Website Chatbot**

Implement Comm100 chatbot and integrate with Element451 CRM to enhance and streamline user experience.

**Apply Now Modal**

Clarify and simplify the apply now button, and include a way to track whether more traffic goes directly to Cal State Apply or to our Steps to Apply page.

**Website featured-degrees component**

As program offerings expand, potentially even to other types of degrees, we need a web component that will feature multiple programs in a fair and equal way. Currently all programs are listed in a drop-down menu and our homepage features visual blocks in a row that limits only three showing before the user has to scroll. We won't be able to use a drop-down menu in our navigation once our program offerings expand. We want to develop a web component that will allow us to feature many programs in a user friendly way so as to give equal exposure to all our offerings. Price: TBD – Creative Circle contractor to help code

Goal 4: Establish strong messaging with applicants in-progress to remove roadblocks to completing their application and improve apps-in-progress conversion rates.

We will leverage analytics from Liasion (Cal State Apply) to identify specific areas of the application that are left incomplete by many students. As such, we have identified the following areas for improvement.

Section	% Incomplete	Problem	Solution
Required Courses	53%	Must enter all courses ever taken one-by-one. Many adult learners don't know or recall.	Message students to have unofficial transcripts in hand prior to completing the application. Also, ask CO if this could be optional.
General Education	54%	Cannot complete this section if leave required courses empty.	See above.

EOP	55%	SJSU Online students don't qualify for EOP.	Ask CO if this can be removed. If not, message students on how an SJSU Online student should complete.
Financial and Parental Info	45%	Many SJSU Online students don't fit into the questions asked here.	Message students on how to answer this section in the apps in progress workflow.
Program Materials	83%	<p>Checkbox in this section asks students to affirm they have entered every course, and says if they haven't they will be denied.</p> <p>We also ask for a 100 word personal statement.</p>	<p>Improve messaging around how to enter courses.</p> <p>Assess if the 100-word personal statement is limiting applicants from completing.</p>

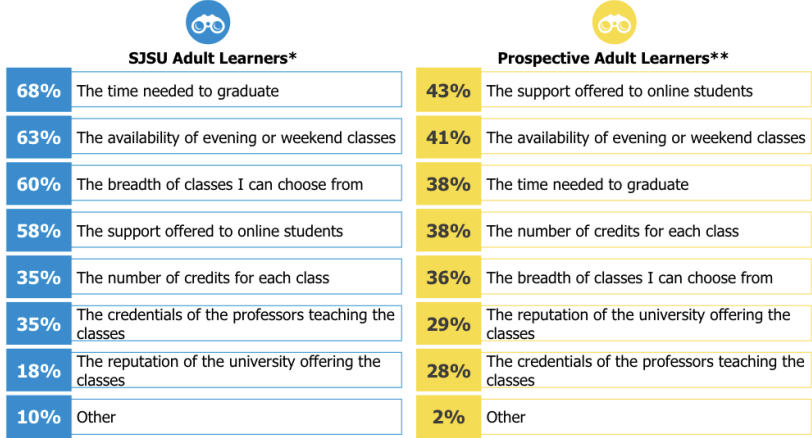
Goal 5: Incorporate findings from University Marketing and Communications' market research findings on adult learners into our marketing messaging.

Executive Summary of UMC Marketing Research ([link](#))



# When evaluating online courses, adult learners look at multiple factors

## ONLINE COURSE EVALUATION



\*Interpret with caution, small base less than 100  
 \*\* very small base less than 50  
 Q.25: Which of the following are the most important criteria for you when evaluating online courses? (Base = Interested in completing degree online)

# ADULT LEARNERS

### Messages Shown:

- R. San José State University online brings your career goals within reach, through 100% flexible online courses taught by our world-class faculty.
- S. Become San José State University Smart through SJSU Online. It's smart for your career, smart for your wallet, and smart for your professional profile.
- N. Join the 300,000 alumni in the Spartan Network who have transformed their lives through San José State University by finishing your degree with SJSU Online today.
- H. Bring the Silicon Valley to you by resuming your higher educational journey at SJSU Online and joining the university's alumni network of 300,000 Spartans who are innovators, entrepreneurs, and leaders.
- W. When you complete your degree online with San José State University, you are opening yourself to a world of possibilities in Silicon Valley and beyond.

## As adults, they have limited time and resources to invest.

They need a program that adjusts to their possibilities AND assures them they will develop the skills needed to advance their career or make the change they are looking for.

Makes it possible

**Affordability and flexibility** are key to make it happen

Makes it valuable

**Quality of education** makes the difference. Provides the tools to achieve their goals

*"A strong education is, in my opinion, understanding the concepts and the broad strokes of my discipline and how to apply them."*

### Quality education means:

- An education that challenges you and makes you grow.
- Allows you to understand concepts and apply them to your work.
- Provides you with skills that help you succeed.
- Particularly with online courses, it means going beyond what one could learn by reading and watching lectures on their own.

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## Since juggling different activities as a working adult is challenging, knowing their goal is attainable and will lead to more possibilities increases interest.

Prestige is a nice to have but not critical

- At this point of their life **prestige is less relevant**.
- However, knowing they are expanding their knowledge and skills through a prestigious institution program is an important plus.

Alumni Network

- Belonging to a large network of successful alumni **reinforces the value** of enrolling in a SJSU online program.

SJSU helps them succeed

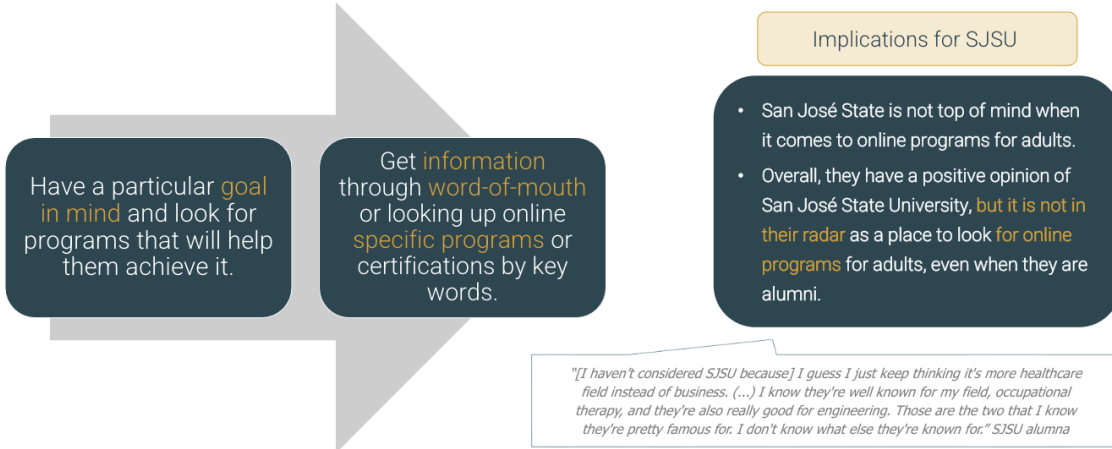
- Getting a sense of how SJSU could help them succeed **feels personal and appealing**.

*"[Reputation is not that important] For me, it's about the quality of the education. (...) And I've learned in the time since then that people don't care where the diploma comes from. It's just, oh, you have a master's; oh, you have a license."*

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## Adult learners look for higher education offers that address their specific interests or needs.

They tend to search by programs not universities.



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## Key elements that trigger curiosity and invite to learn more about SJSU:



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**R. San José State University online brings your career goals within reach, through 100% flexible online courses taught by our world-class faculty.**

**What resonates:**

- *Online brings your career goals within reach* suggests SJSU understands their circumstances and adapts to them making their goals attainable.
- *100% flexible online courses* is especially powerful, it means that regardless their multiple occupations it is possible; which is inspiring and encouraging.

**Potential appeal but ambiguous:**

- *World-class faculty* suggests high quality education, being taught by specialists in their field that will take students far beyond what can be learned by oneself, which is strongly appealing.
- But it seems too vague and needs more information to explain and back up the statement.

*"I think mentioning that they have a world-class faculty is probably one of the most important things to consider when choosing a school. What makes a school better or worse than others is how their faculty is. And world-class really makes me think that they're superior to the other schools."*

*"It sounds good on paper, but I'm not sure what it really means. It's kind of one of those phrases that are a little empty. Because what does world class even mean?"*

**S. Become San José State University Smart through SJSU Online. It's smart for your career, smart for your wallet, and smart for your professional profile.**

**What resonates:**

- *Smart for your wallet* speaks to an important concern. By being affordable it also makes it attainable.
- *Smart for your career* suggests good quality education that will enable you to make the move you want; it gives you the tools and skills you need to achieve it.

**Potential appeal but ambiguous:**

- *Smart for your professional profile* is not clear what it refers to. It can imply SJSU being a well-regarded university, but this is not evident for everyone.

**Watchout:**

- It can feel like a marketing phrase, making some feel guarded.

*"Saying that it's smart for your career, smart for your wallet, and smart for your professional profile, those are all the things that are probably most important to people who want to get their degree. For me, it is."*

*"The whole become San José State University smart thing (...) sounds too catchy (...) It kind of annoys me"*

**H. Bring the *Silicon Valley* to you by *resuming your higher educational journey* at *SJSU Online* and *joining the university's alumni network* of *300,000 Spartans* who are innovators, entrepreneurs, and leaders.**

**What resonates:**

- *Resuming your higher educational journey* is broad enough to encompass all different motivations and goals.

**What's compelling:**

- "*Joining...leaders*" goes a step forward implying where SJSU education can take them with high quality education.
- The "*innovators, entrepreneurs and leaders*" describe the Silicon Valley spirit without limiting it to a region or tech.

**Watchout:**

- *Silicon Valley* is not something they aspire to in and of itself. It's strongly related to tech / tech companies which narrows down the relevance.
- *Spartans* is not clear for everyone and only seems to add a sense of belonging to those very familiar with it.

"The other thing I like about this one is the innovators, entrepreneurs, and leaders, because that comes after Silicon Valley and that leads me away from thinking that it's just a tech college. I mean, entrepreneurs and leaders, entrepreneurs and innovators still reads kind of techie to me, but something about innovators, entrepreneurs, and leaders together makes me feel like I could fit into that group, and it's not just a programming school."

"I'm not sure what the Spartan network means. So that's a little confusing. Are there multiple schools in the Spartan network? (...) I'm not really a sports person, so I don't care about like the teams, not a big to me."

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**W. When you *complete your degree* online with *San José State University*, you are *opening yourself to a world of possibilities* in *Silicon Valley* and beyond.**

**What resonates:**

- *Complete your degree* online suggests it's feasible, makes it more attainable and encouraging, and SJSU makes it happen for you.
- *Opening yourself to a world of possibilities* refers indirectly to the quality of education they will get and its value. It will help them achieve their goal.
- It's broad enough to encompass people who didn't finish their degree, who want to advance their career and those who want a career change.

"The fact that they're emphasizing career in Silicon Valley is a deterrent to me because I don't have any interest in living or working in the Silicon Valley again. We lived there for, I think two years and it was very high paced and not for me. So that's kind of a negative to me."

"Sounds like you could achieve your dreams, like you could open up your future."

**Watchout:**

- *Silicon Valley* links it to tech and computer science fields, making people think it's not an option for tech unrelated fields or becomes less relevant if they are not looking to join local tech companies.

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## CONCLUSIONS

1. Messages referring to being 100% flexible (R) and being affordable (S) are the ones triggering more interest.
2. Quality of education is key for adult learners, and it is what adds value to SJSU. It's important for people to know they will go beyond what they could learn by reading and watching lectures on their own for online programs.
3. Affordability and flexibility make higher education within reach; good quality and effective education make it a good investment.
4. Mentioning "Silicon Valley" could be limiting. However, mentioning characteristics associated with it, such as innovators, leaders and entrepreneurs conveys the Silicon Valley spirit in a compelling and appealing way.
5. SJSU online offers for adult learners are not widely known. People would need to know more about programs in different fields to consider it.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Convey SJSU has 100% flexible online programs that are affordable and attainable.
2. Combine this with elements that are inspiring and compelling, and that are focused on what a SJSU degree could mean for students, for their potential and goals due to its quality of education.
3. Have elements that are encompassing of different goals and stages in higher education (finishing a degree, starting something new or career change).
4. Avoid references that could convey a limited offer (in terms of study fields, interests, or work opportunities).

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