Educational Background, Interests, and Aspirations of College Stop-outs and Drop-outs in MOOCs

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INTRODUCTION

College Stop-outs and Drop-outs
- Individuals who began college or university but left before receiving their degree
- Represent 8 million individuals between ages 25-34 (2007 United States Census)
- >30% college enrollees leave school for at least one semester and may or may not return to finish their degree (Stratton *et. al.* 2008)

The potential of MOOCs for this population
- Act as alternative to traditional education system
- Serve as "stepping stone" to re-enter college
- Help individuals acquire practical knowledge or job-related skills

Research Questions
- What characteristics do current MOOC participants share, and how are they currently using MOOC courses?
- Does participation in MOOCs affect academic confidence, self-efficacy, attitudes towards learning, and/or educational plans in this population?

Importance of Research
- Much research done on factors that cause students to drop-out, comparatively little is known about how students recover and continue learning later in life
- No previous work has focused on this population's MOOC experience
- Could help give appropriate recommendations to this population and aid MOOC developers in designing courses for their use

METHODS

Recruiting Population
- 3 introductory science and statistics Duke Coursera courses were chosen
- Individuals who took these courses from Jan 2014 - Jan 2016 meeting population characteristics were identified based on responses to previous survey
  - Highest level of education "Some College"
  - Not currently enrolled as a student
- Emails were sent inviting them to take a brief survey

Instruments Used
- 10-15 minute survey about educational experience, interest in educational resources and opportunities, and academic engagement.
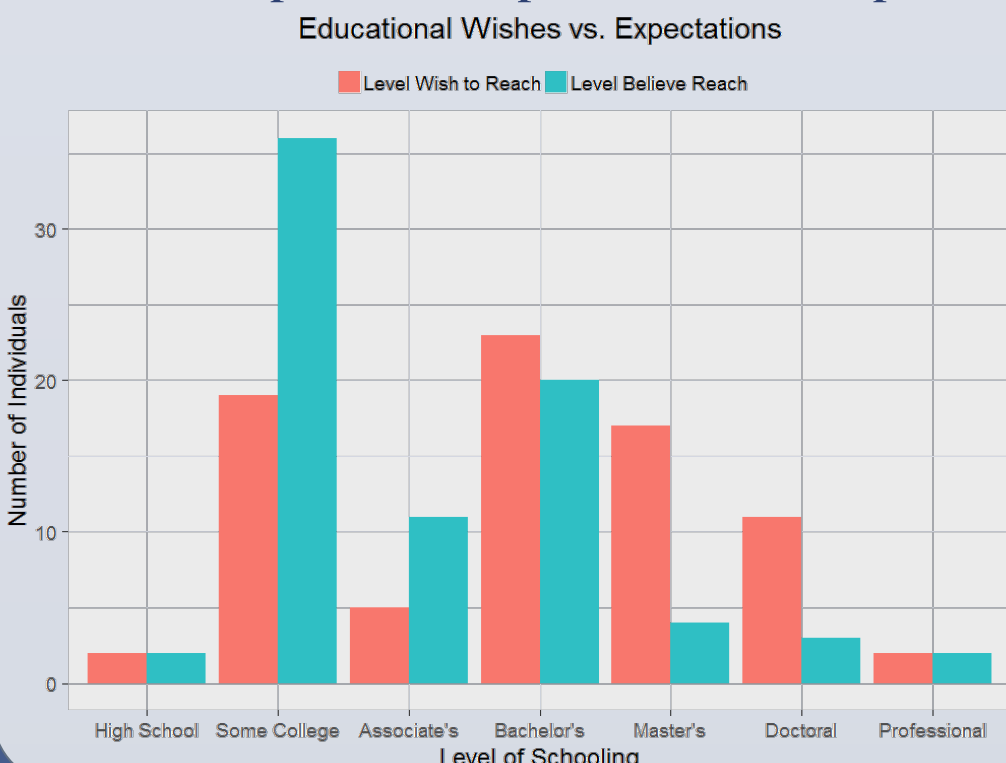
RESULTS

Population Characteristics
- 94 respondents
- 53% male
- Age (range: 25-80, median: 46)
- 14% have been part-time college students
- 80% have been full-time students
- 10% have taken an online class for college credit
- Majority of population have been out of school for many years

Reason Behind Discontinuing Higher Education

Time Since College

Reason	#	%
Financial (difficulty paying tuition)	30	32%
Professional Opportunity	29	31%
Family Responsibilities	24	26%
Other	22	24%
Loss of Interest	21	23%
Academics	7	7.5%
Not Worth Cost	7	7.5%
Medical	6	6.5%
Disciplinary	1	1%

45% of respondents reported that multiple factors contributed to their decision to discontinue.


Educational Wishes vs. Expectations

Educational Goals
- 29% did not want to go further than they already had in formal education.
- 45% were "pessimists"-- believed they would not go as far as they wished to
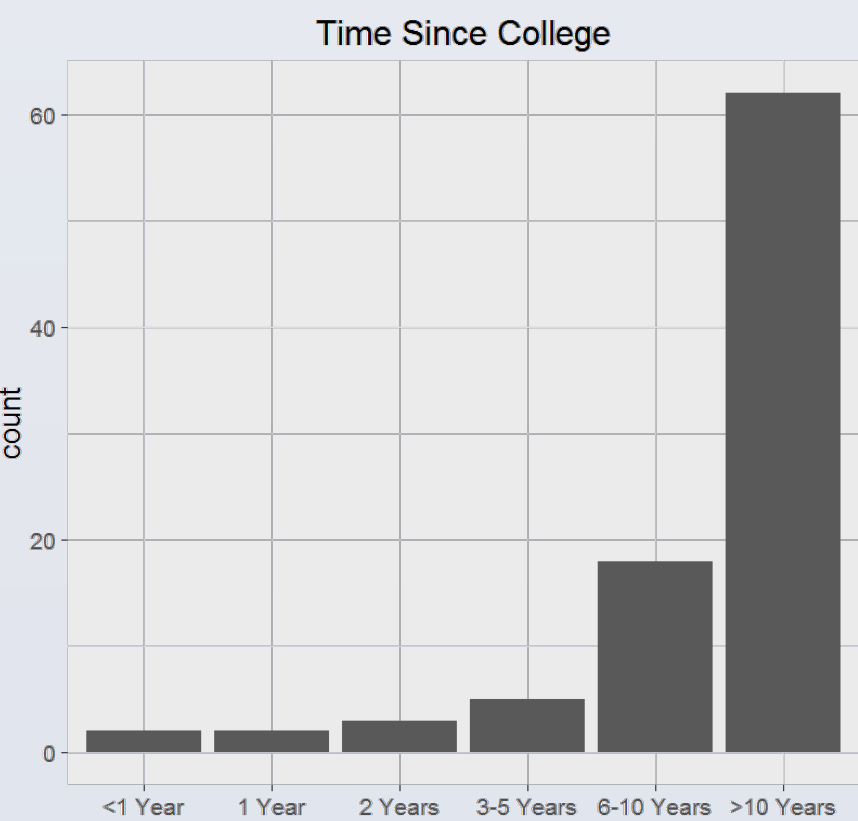
RESULTS (continued)

Interest in Educational Opportunities and Perceived Effect of Coursera Course on these Interests

Interest in Educational Resources and Opportunities
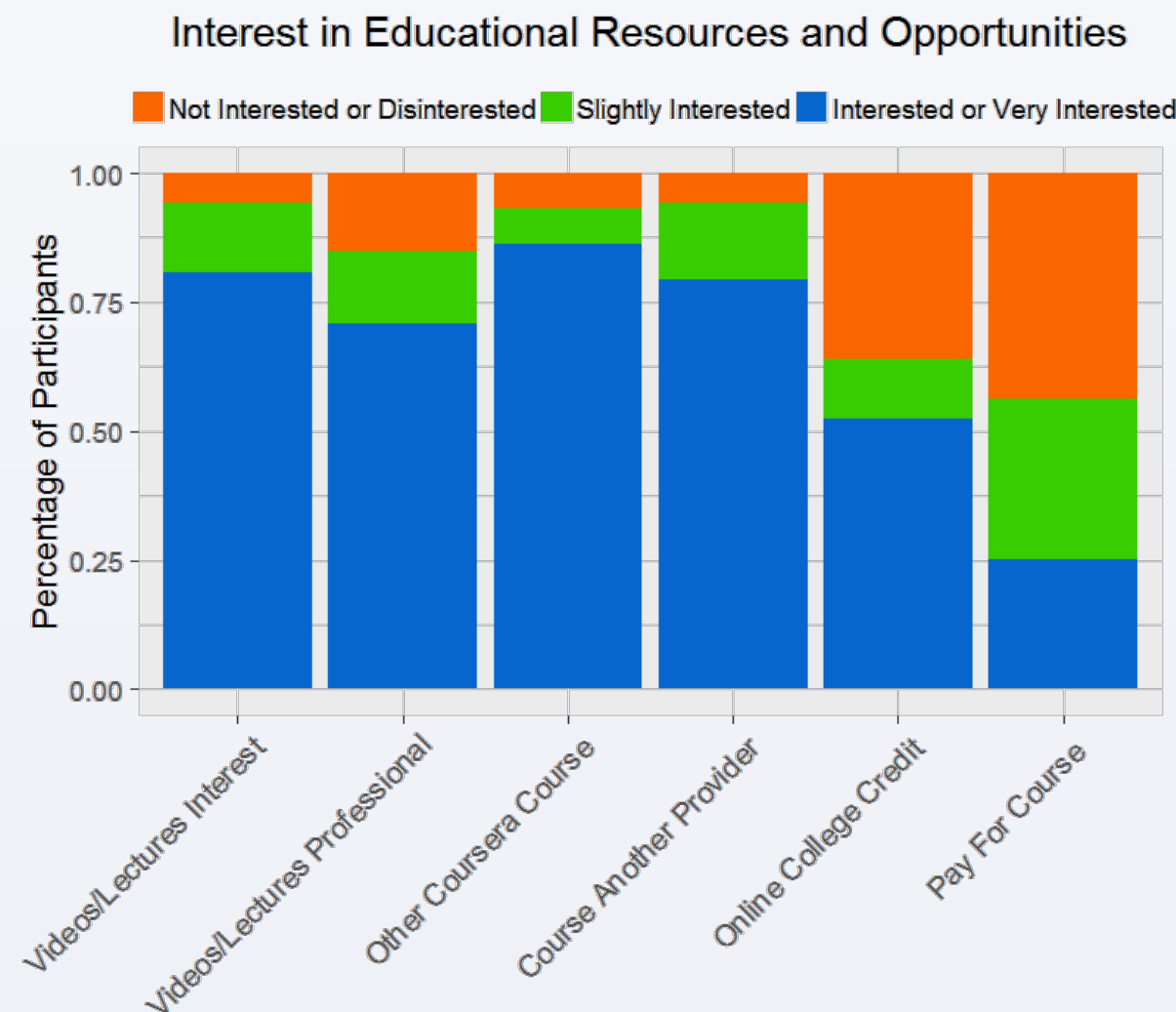
- Over 75% "Interested or Very Interested" in Coursera course and free course from other provider
- There is less interest in online courses for college credit (52%) or paying for a course (25%)
- 72% the population expressed any interest in completing a degree online.
- Only 30% had any interest in returning to school full-time
- 51% expressed some interest in returning part-time

Interest in Educational Resources and Opportunities

Effect on Interest in Educational Resources
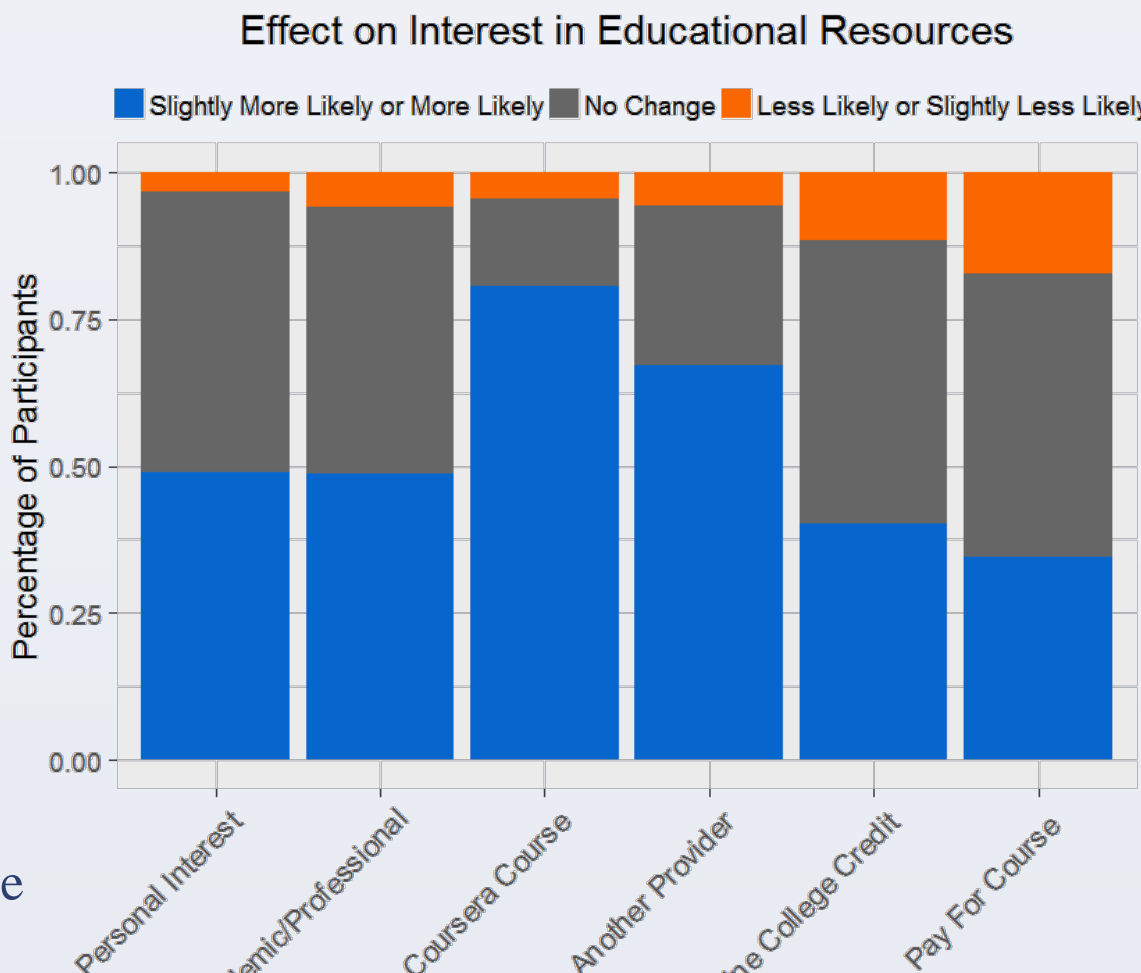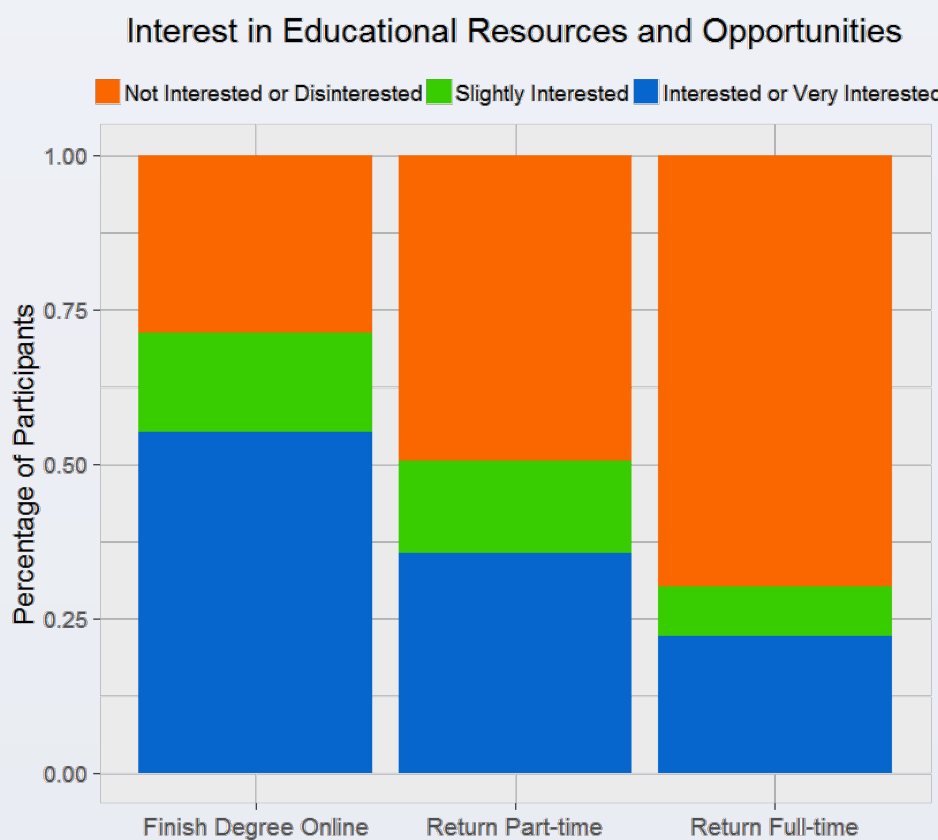
- Participants reported that Coursera course largely made them more likely to or had no effect on their interest in educational videos and courses but 17% reported that the course made them less interested in an online course that requires payment.
- 47% reported that their Coursera course experience made them more likely to pursue an online degree while 10% reported that it made them less likely
- 33% reported that the course increased their likelihood of returning to school part-time
- 26% believed the course made them more likely to return full-time while 16% believed the course made them less likely to return as a full-time student

Effect on Continuing Education
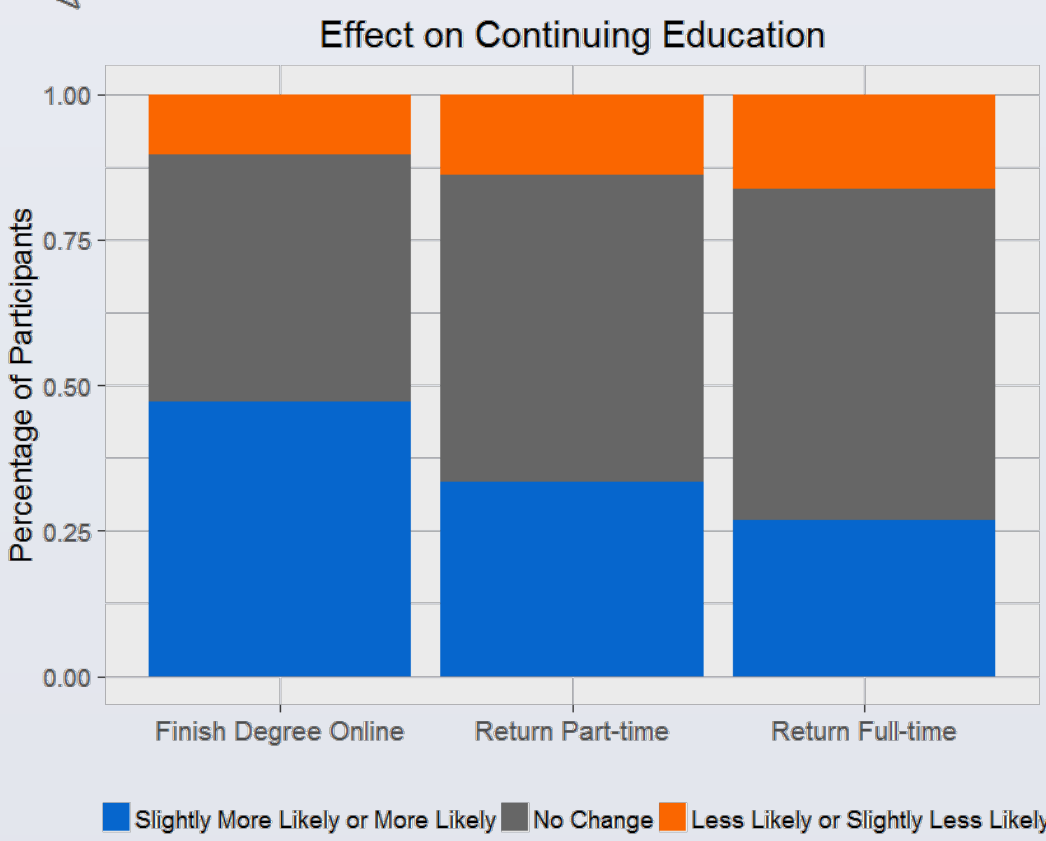
CONCLUSIONS and FUTURE WORK

Conclusions
- Much of population were full-time students who left college or university more than 5 years ago due to a variety of reasons, the most common of which include difficulty paying tuition, professional opportunities, and family responsibilities.
- A significant portion of population believes they will not reach the level of schooling they hope to reach, while 29% do not wish to go any further in formal education.
- Population expressed more interest in lower commitment ways to earn degree (Online degree or Part-time) than returning to school full-time (72% and 51% vs. 31%). Coursera course more likely to increase interest in these alternative methods of receiving degrees.

Future Work
- Connecting results with Duke Coursera pre- and post-course survey
  - Allows for the collection of information regarding motivation behind taking course, expectations, satisfaction with course, and additional demographics
- Similar pre- and post-course survey currently being deployed in courses related to a Data Science business specialization
  - Better gauge influence of Coursera with pre-/post-survey format
  - See if and how members of the target population in professional development courses differ from that of introductory science and statistics courses and the effect of their Coursera experience

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DUKE UNIVERSITY BASS CONNECTIONS

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