



## **The College Union Experience**

Skyfactor Research Note

## The College Union Experience

Student unions occupy a unique position in higher education. They are often designed to be a central hub for campus activities, services, and student life in general. While they aim to maintain a campus-wide sense of community, they must also meet the needs of a diverse array of students. As students change, college unions must strive to keep pace with evolving tastes and needs. As such, data highlighting not only how and why students are using college unions but also the perceptions of their experience are vital to improving college unions.

This research note details findings from the ACUI/Benchworks College Union/Student Center Assessment of over 16,000 students from 35 colleges and universities in the United States. In particular, this research note explores the college union experience, including information about who uses college union facilities and for what, satisfaction with various aspects of college unions, and concepts that relate to overall measures of college union effectiveness.

### Key Points:

- College union visitors skewed undergraduate, female, full-time enrolled, and members of organizations
- The most popular reasons for visiting college unions were to eat, study and meet others
- The college union aspects visitors were most satisfied with related to union staff, bookstore staff, and union cleanliness
- The concepts with the strongest relationships to overall program effectiveness were to degree to which the union contributed to key learning outcomes, provided entertainment, and had quality staff

### Key Questions:

1. Who visits college unions?
2. When and why do students visit college unions?
3. How satisfied are visitors with various aspects of college unions?
4. What concepts relate to high perceptions of college union effectiveness?

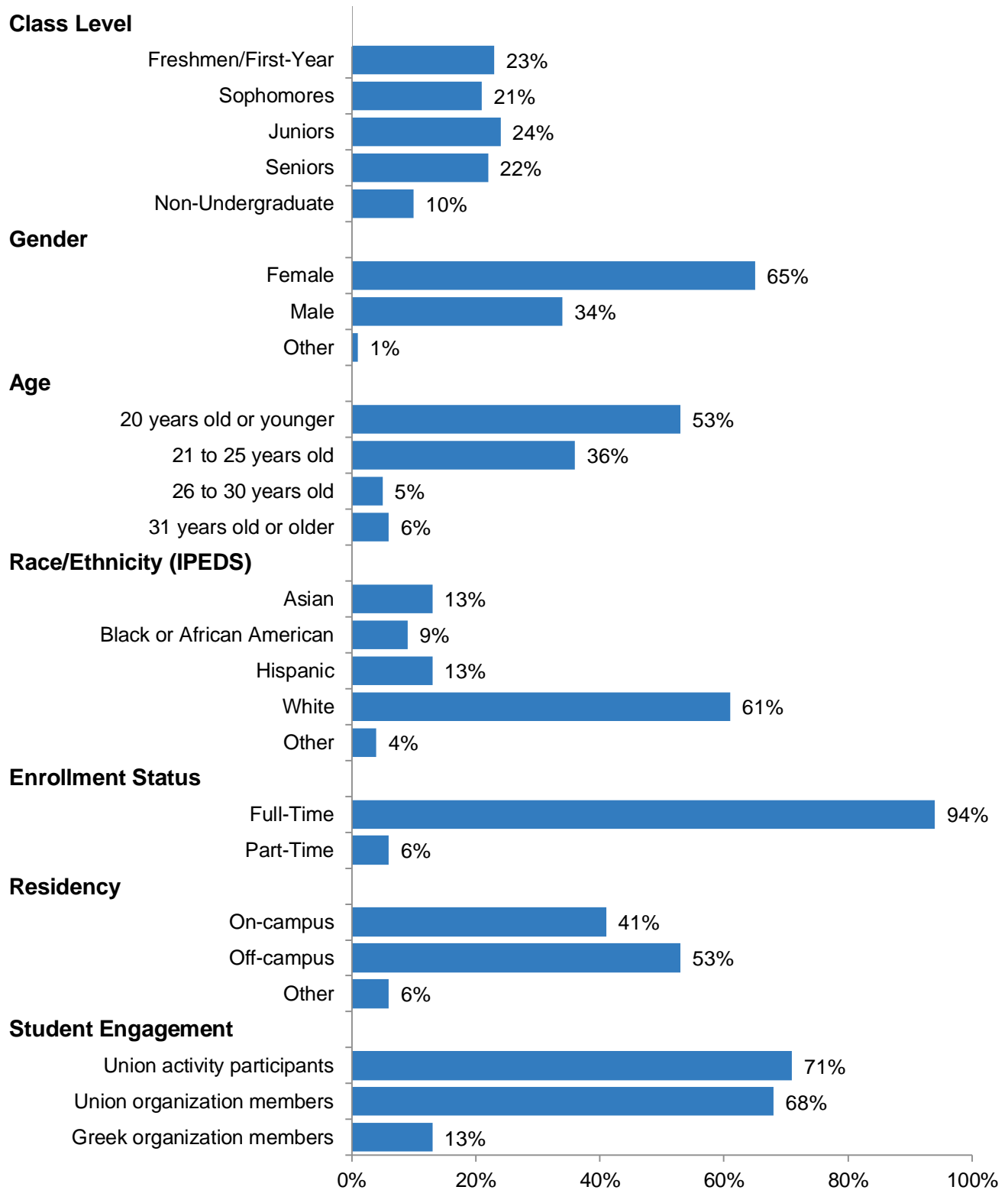
### Who Visits the College Union?

Figure 1 displays the breakdown of the college union visitor population by a variety of demographics, including class standing, age, gender, residence, and participation in various types of organizations and activities. On a high-level, there were several statistics which stood out:

- **Age** – The college union visitor population skewed young, as over 50% of visitors were 20 or younger and another 36% were between 21 and 25 years old.
- **Gender** – The majority of college union visitors—65%--were female.
- **Residence** – While 41% of college union visitors reported living on-campus, the majority—53%-reported living off-campus.
- **Enrollment Status** – 94% of college union visitors were full-time students.
- **Organization Membership** – The majority of college union visitors both participated in union activities and were members of union organizations. But, less than 15% of visitors were members of Greek organizations.

## Figure 1: Union Visitor Demographics

Distribution of college union visitors across key demographic questions in the ACUI/Benchworks College Union/Student Center Assessment

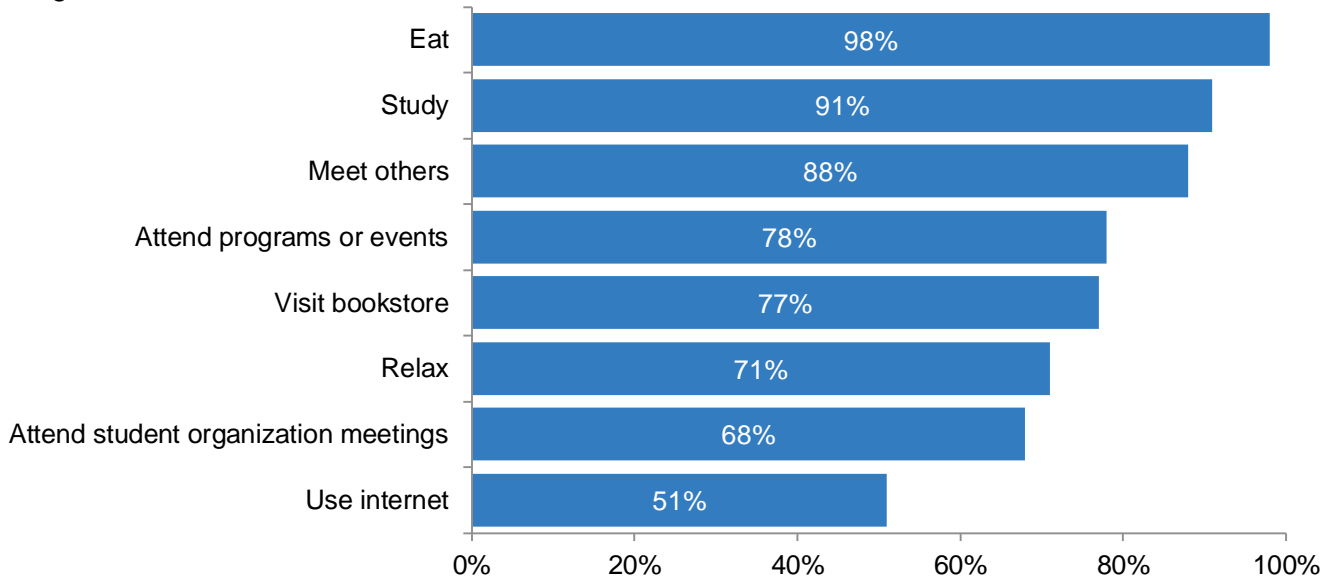


## When and Why Do Students Visit College Unions?

Figure 2 displays the top reason visitors indicated they visited the college union. Respondents could pick up to three from a list of 16. The responses in figure 2 are those where at least 50% of visitors indicated it was a top reason for visiting the union.

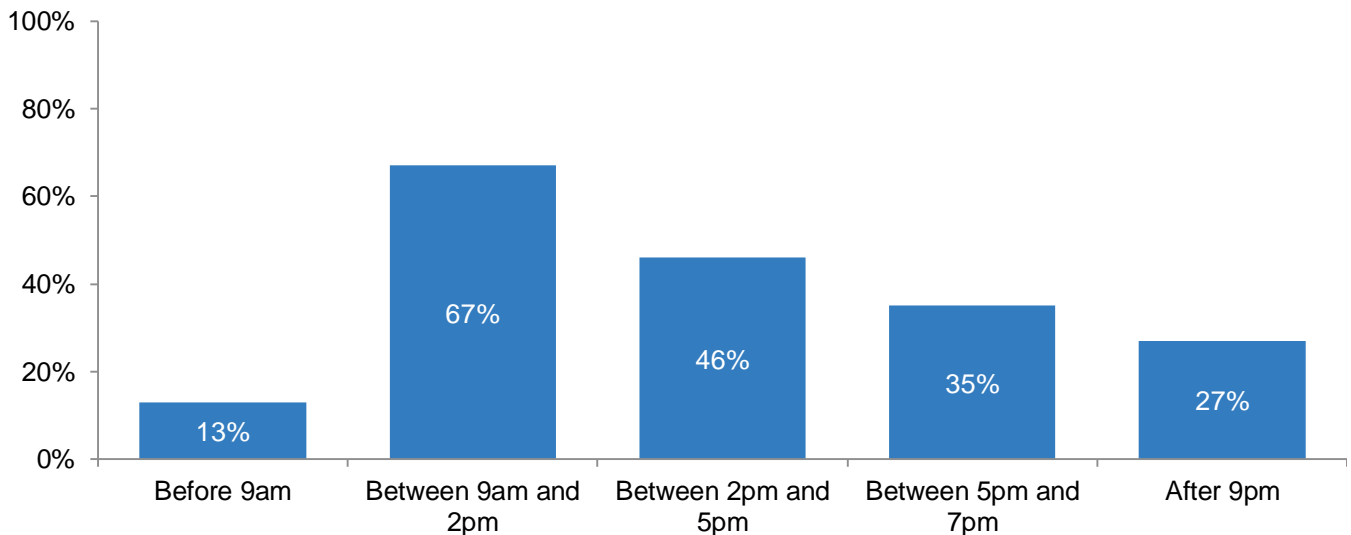
### Figure 2: Top Reasons for Visiting College Unions

Percentage of college union visitors who reported reason was in top three of why they visited the college union



### Figure 3: Timing of College Union Visits

Percentage of college union visitors indicating they typically visit the college union in each block of time (Students could select all that apply)



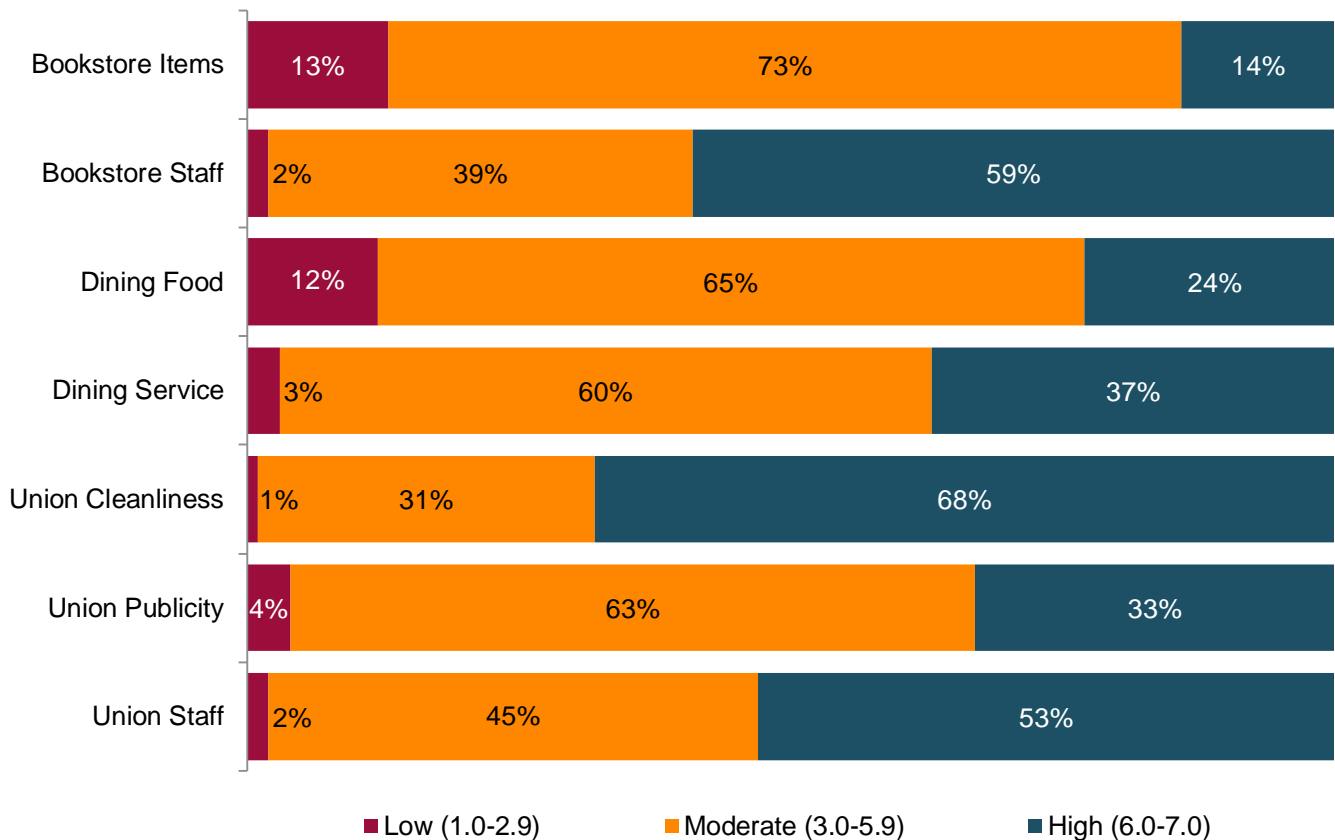
## How Satisfied Are Students With Various Aspects of College Unions?

Generally, college union visitors reported moderate to high satisfaction across a variety of survey factors. Survey factors are a group of scaled survey questions that are related to each other both statistically and in their concepts. Each student who responded to the survey has a score for each factor, which is the mean value of all responses for that student in the particular factor.

Figure 4 displays the distribution of scores for seven satisfaction factors on the ACUI/Benchworks College Union/Student Center Assessment. The factor scores are grouped into three buckets: low (mean score 1.0-2.9), moderate (mean score 3.0-5.9), and high (mean score 6.0-7.0). The factors with the greatest percentage of students with a high factor score were those relating to staff and union cleanliness. Generally, most students scored in the moderate range across all satisfaction factors.

### Figure 4: Factor Score Distributions: Measures of Satisfaction

Percentage of union visitors averaging low (1.0-2.9), moderate (3.0-5.9), or high (6.0-7.0) scores on satisfaction factors in the assessment



### Overall Program Effectiveness

The Overall Program Effectiveness factor measures overall student perceptions of the college union, including but not limited to satisfaction with and value of. Figure 5 displays the distribution of responses to questions in the Overall Program Effectiveness factor. The question related to overall satisfaction

with the college union had the highest percentage of visitors responding “6” or “7,” indicating high satisfaction. But, most respondents indicated moderate levels of satisfaction across the different questions in this factor.

**Figure 5: Overall College Union Program Effectiveness**

Percentage of college union visitors responding “Not at all” (1 or 2), “Moderately” (3, 4, or 5), or “Extremely” (6 or 7) to questions related to overall college union effectiveness

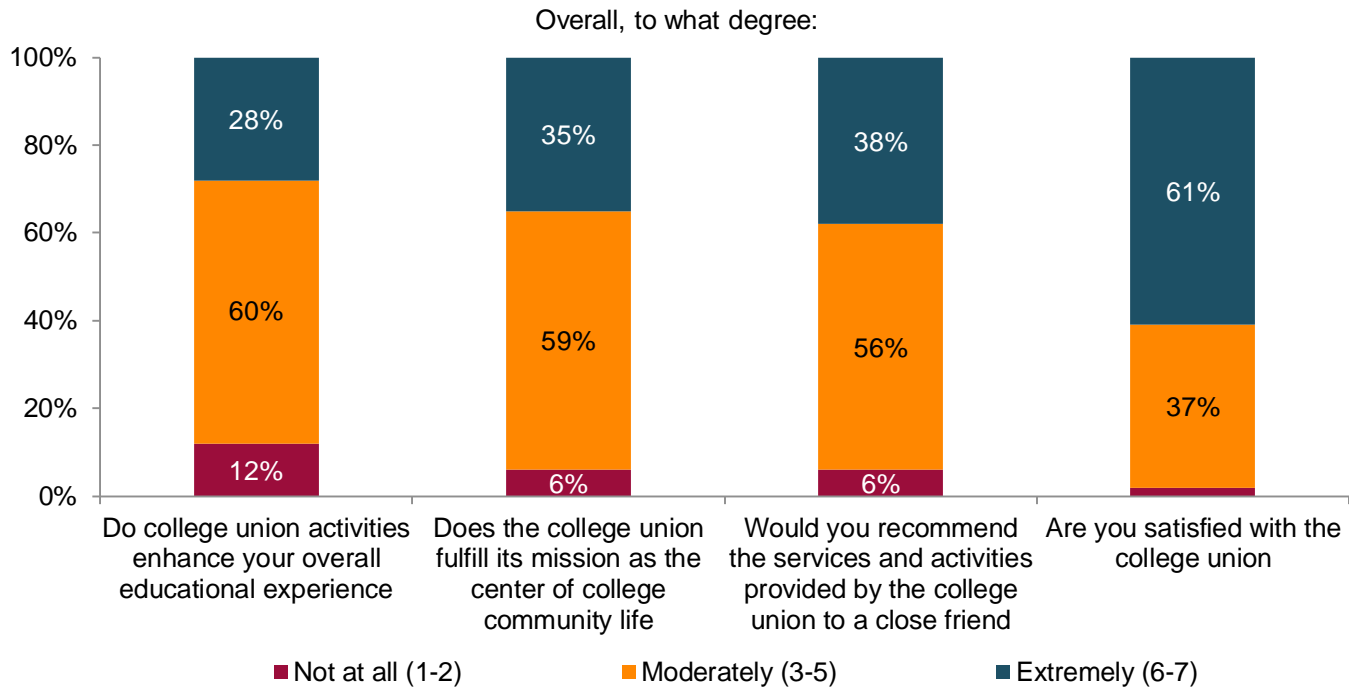
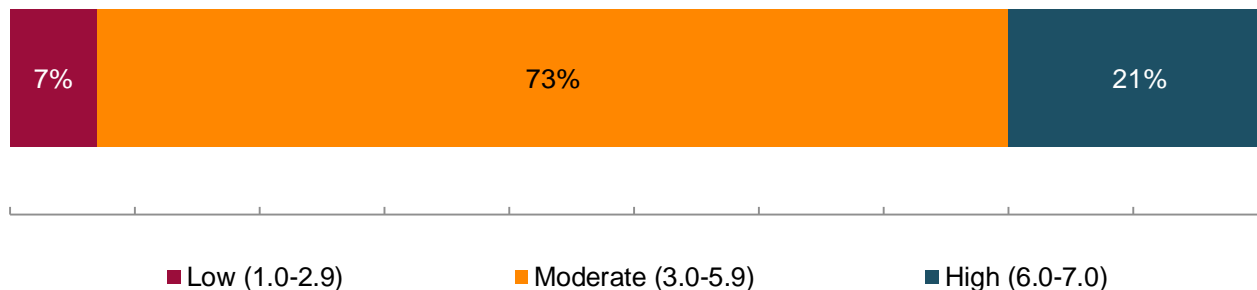


Figure 6 displays the bucketed average scores of college union visitors across all questions from the Overall Program Effectiveness factor. Responses were grouped into low (average score of less than 3), moderate (average score between 3 and 5.9), and high (average score 6 or higher). Over 70% of respondents averaged a “Moderate” Overall Program Effectiveness factor score.

**Figure 6: Overall Program Effectiveness Factor Distribution**

Average score on the overall program effectiveness factor, grouped by low (mean score 1.0-2.9), moderate (3.0-5.9), and high (6.0-7.0) factor scores



## What Factors Relate to High Perceptions of College Union Effectiveness?

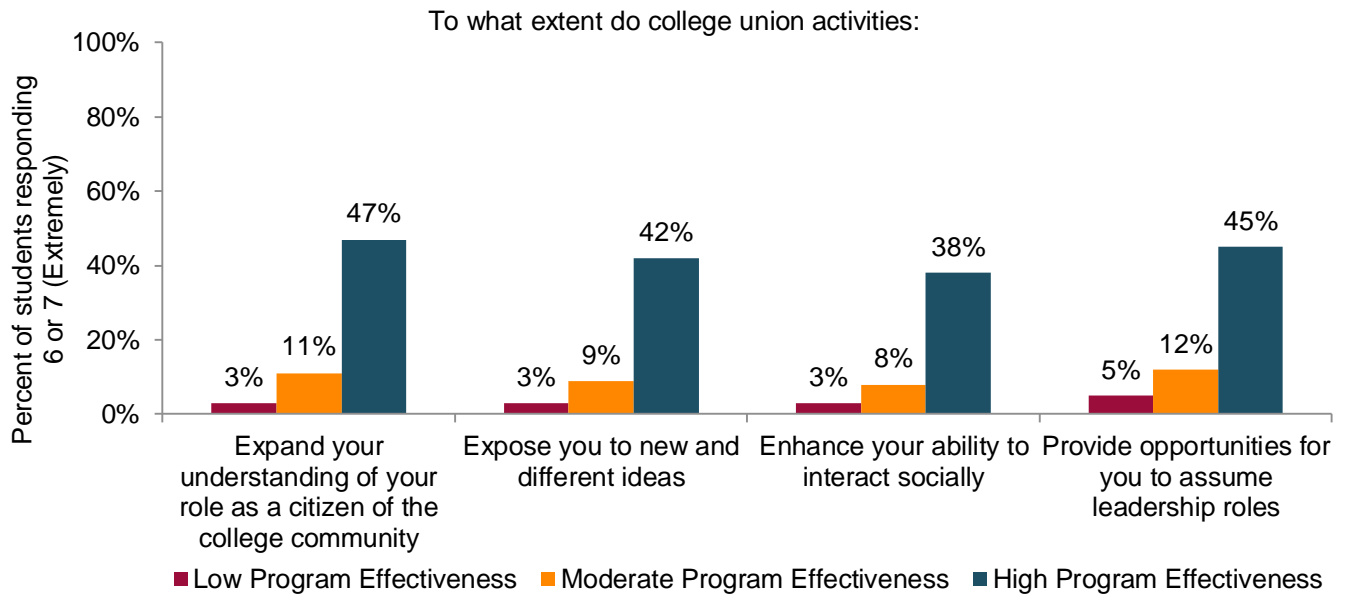
The analysis for this note identified factors that had strong relationships with overall perceptions of college unions. These factors were identified through both bivariate correlations and linear regression analysis.

### College Union Enhanced Life and Leadership

The College Union Enhanced Life and Leadership factor measured the degree to which college union activities contributed to key learning outcomes, such as exposure to new ideas, interactions with different people, and expanding knowledge. Figure 7 displays the relationship between some questions in this factor and the Overall Program Effectiveness factor. Overall, students who scored high on the Overall Program Effectiveness factor were far more likely to report that their college union experience enhanced key outcomes.

#### Figure 7: College Union Enhances Life and Leadership

Percentage of students responding “Extremely” (6 or 7) on questions related to the union enhancing life and leadership by overall program effectiveness factor score.

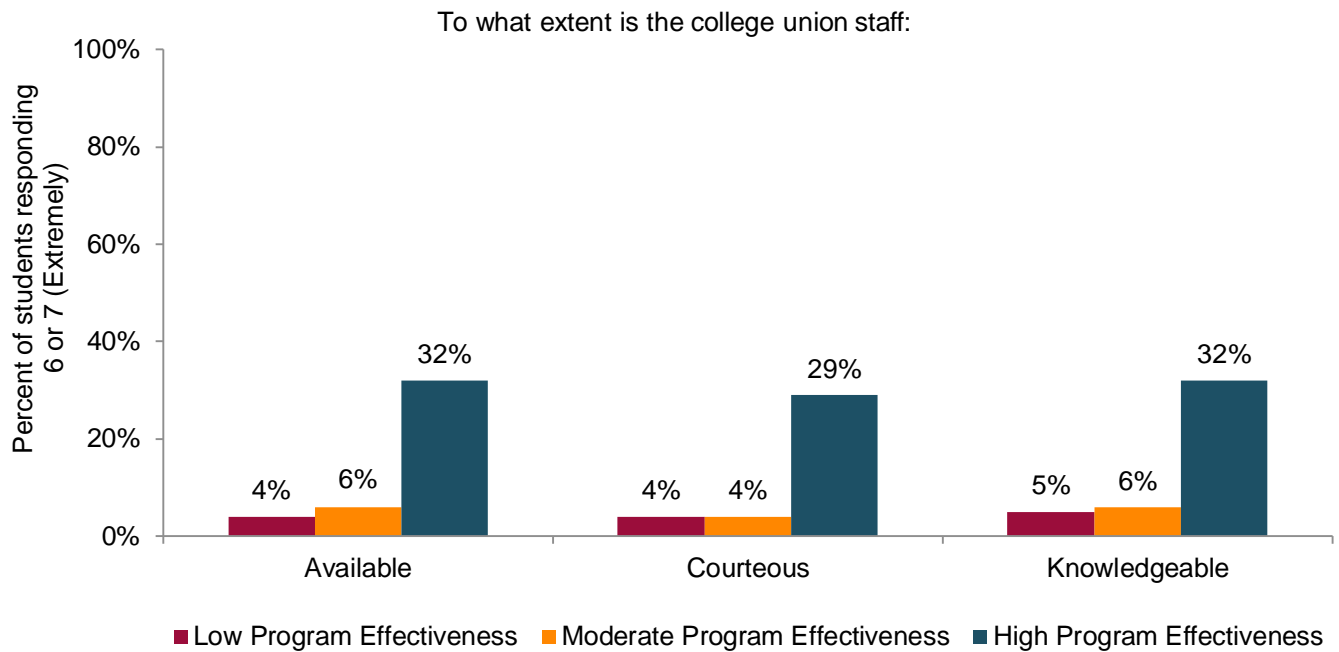


### College Union Staff

The College Union Staff factor measured the degree to which college union visitors were satisfied with the college union building staff related to their courteousness, knowledge, and availability. Figure 8 displays the relationship between the three questions in this factor and the Overall Program Effectiveness factor. Overall, students who scored high on the Overall Program Effectiveness factor were more likely to report high satisfaction with college union staff than students with low satisfaction.

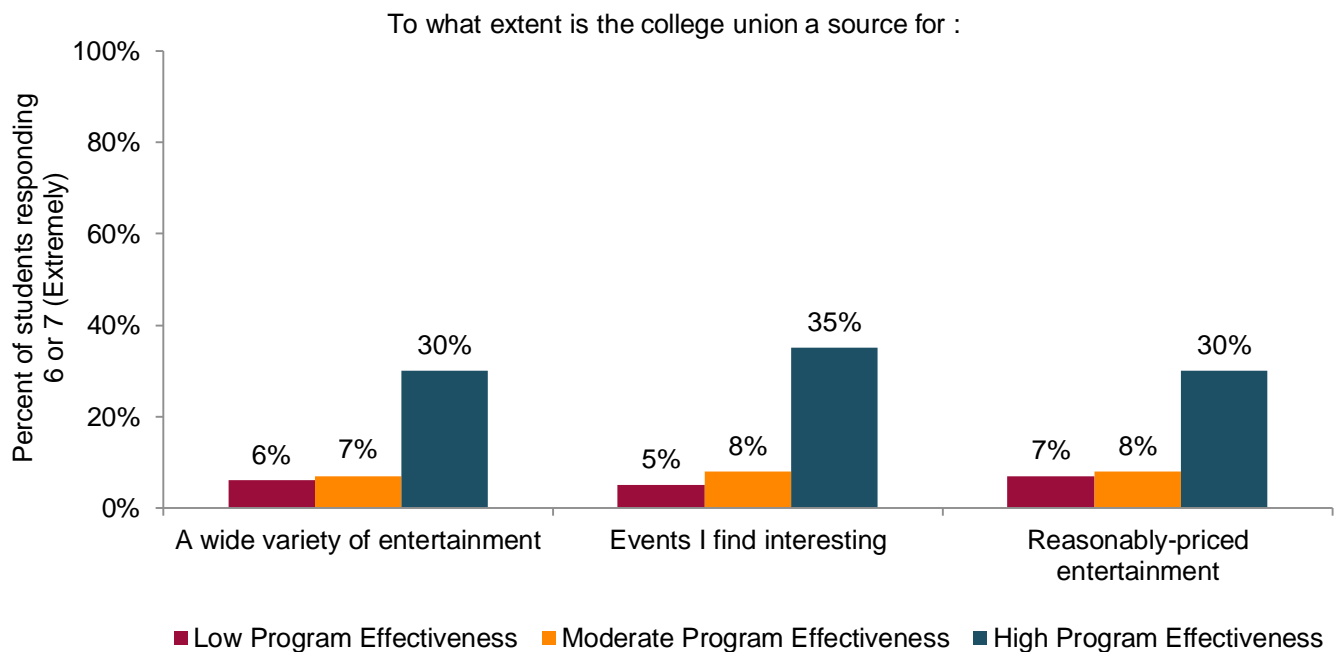
### Figure 8: College Union Staff

Percentage of students responding “Extremely” (6 or 7) on questions related to satisfaction with college union staff by overall program effectiveness factor score.



### Figure 9: College Union is a Source of Entertainment

Percentage of students responding “Extremely” (6 or 7) on questions related to satisfaction with the union being a source of entertainment by overall program effectiveness factor score.





## College Union is a Source of Entertainment

The College Union is a Source of Entertainment factor measured the degree to which college union visitors indicated their union is a source of events and entertainment that were interesting, of great variety, and affordable. Figure 9 displays the relationship between three of the questions in this factor and the Overall Program Effectiveness factor. Overall, students who scored high on the Overall Program Effectiveness factor were more likely to report high satisfaction with the union being a source for a variety of entertainment options.

### Conclusion

Student unions face the unique challenge of serving the diverse needs of hundreds (perhaps thousands) of students while concurrently fostering a sense of community for the institution. Data from the ACUI/Benchworks College Union assessment highlighted a host of key insights related to the college union experience, in particular:

- College union visitors are diverse, in particular by academic class standing, campus residence, race, and age
- College union visitors frequent unions primarily for food, studying, opportunities to make connections, and other services
- While college union visitors reported moderate to high satisfaction with most measures, the highest levels of satisfaction were with building staff and cleanliness
- The concepts that related most strongly to overall union perceptions related to learning outcomes, unions being a source of entertainment, and satisfaction with union staff

## About the Data

The data used in this research note is from the 2017-2018 ACUI/Benchworks College Union/Student Center Assessment. The survey was designed by the survey development team at Skyfactor in partnership with the Association for College Unions International (ACUI). The survey measures satisfaction and learning related to college unions and assesses why non-visitors choose to not visit the union. For this study, we examined a sample of 14,640 students from 35 colleges and universities in the United States who indicated they visited their college union during the 2017-2018 academic year.

## About Skyfactor

Since 1994, Skyfactor (formerly EBI MAP-Works) has been dedicated to improving retention, student success, and the quality of the college student experience. Our products and services have empowered over 1,500 college and universities to positively impact student development, learning, retention and satisfaction through the Mapworks student success and retention system, and through Benchworks national benchmarking assessments.

Mapworks is a research-based, comprehensive, student retention and success platform created through a partnership between Skyfactor and Ball State University. It capitalizes on Ball State's 20+ years of experience with the original Making Achievement Possible (MAP) program and Skyfactor's expertise in national benchmarking assessments. Mapworks leverages predictive analytics to identify at-risk students. It presents that information in a format that makes it easy for an institution's faculty and staff to focus on the needs of students early in the term and to have a positive impact on student success and retention.

Benchworks includes over 50 easy-to-use student affairs and academic affairs program assessments. These assessments are rooted in accreditation and professional standards and are designed to support a culture of continuous program improvement. Assessment reports include longitudinal data, the ability to benchmark against peer institutions, and interactive dashboards that enable rapid identification of critical issues.



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