



How Does Involvement in Student Organizations Relate to Learning Outcomes?

Skyfactor Research Note

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Higher education researchers have long understood the role involvement play in supporting student success. Classic higher education theorists, including Astin, Tinto, Pascarella, Terenzini, and Kuh have cited involvement, peers, social cohesion, and leadership development as positive influences in such areas as commitment, satisfaction and academic performance.

To that end, this research note explores the relationship of student organization membership to the broader student experience using a dataset of over 9,000 undergraduate student leaders from over 20 institutions.

Key Questions:

1. How many organizations are students involved in?
2. Are students who participate in student organizations more likely to achieve key learning outcomes than students who do not participate in student organizations?
3. Is there a relationship between the number of organizations a student is involved in and key measures of learning and satisfaction?

Key Points:

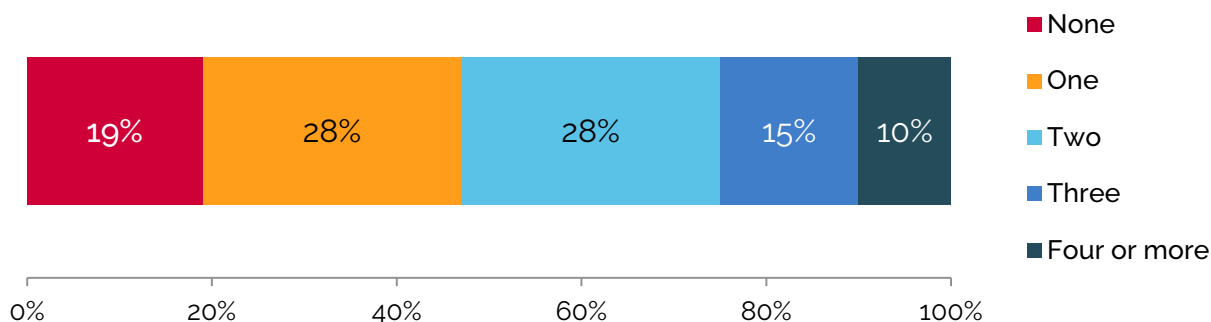
- Four out of five students report being currently involved in at least one student organization
- Students who are involved in at least one organization are more likely to report high level of learning related to their college experience than students who do not participate in organizations
- There is a positive relationship between measures of learning and satisfaction and the number of organizations a student is currently a member of

How Many Organizations are Students In?

Of the students who participate in student organizations, just over one third participate in only one, while another third participate in two and the remaining third participate in three or more (see figure 1 below for the exact distribution).

Figure 1: Number of Student Organizations

Responses to the question "How many student organizations are you currently involved in?"



Organization Involvement and College Learning Outcomes

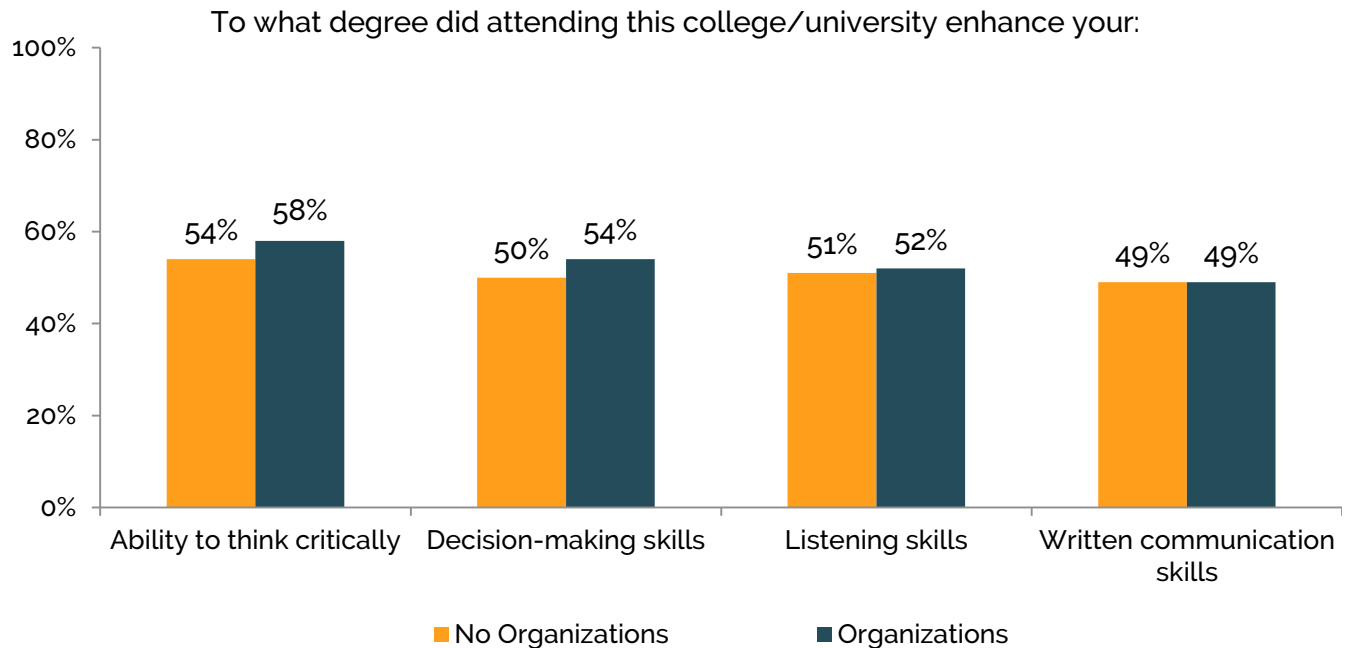
Part of the analysis for this study compared students who participated in at least one student organization to those who did not participate in any student organizations, in particular on a set of broad learning outcomes of a typical college experience. In general, students who participated in at least one student organization were more likely to report high learning outcomes related to their broader college experience than students who did not participate in any student organizations.

Practical Competencies

The practical competencies factor is a measure of the degree to which students say their college experience enhanced that their university experience enhanced skills such as critical thinking, decision making, and communication. Figure 2 displays the percent of students responding six or seven on a seven-point scale (“Extremely”) on questions in the practical competencies factor by whether or not they were involved in any student organizations. Overall, students who participated in student organizations were slightly more likely to report that their college experience enhanced practical competencies. But, both participants and non-participants in organizations were just as likely to report their college experience enhanced their written communication skills.

Figure 2: Practical Competencies and Organization Membership

Percentage of students responding six or seven on a seven-point scale (“Extremely”) on practical competencies factor questions by whether or not they were in a student organization.

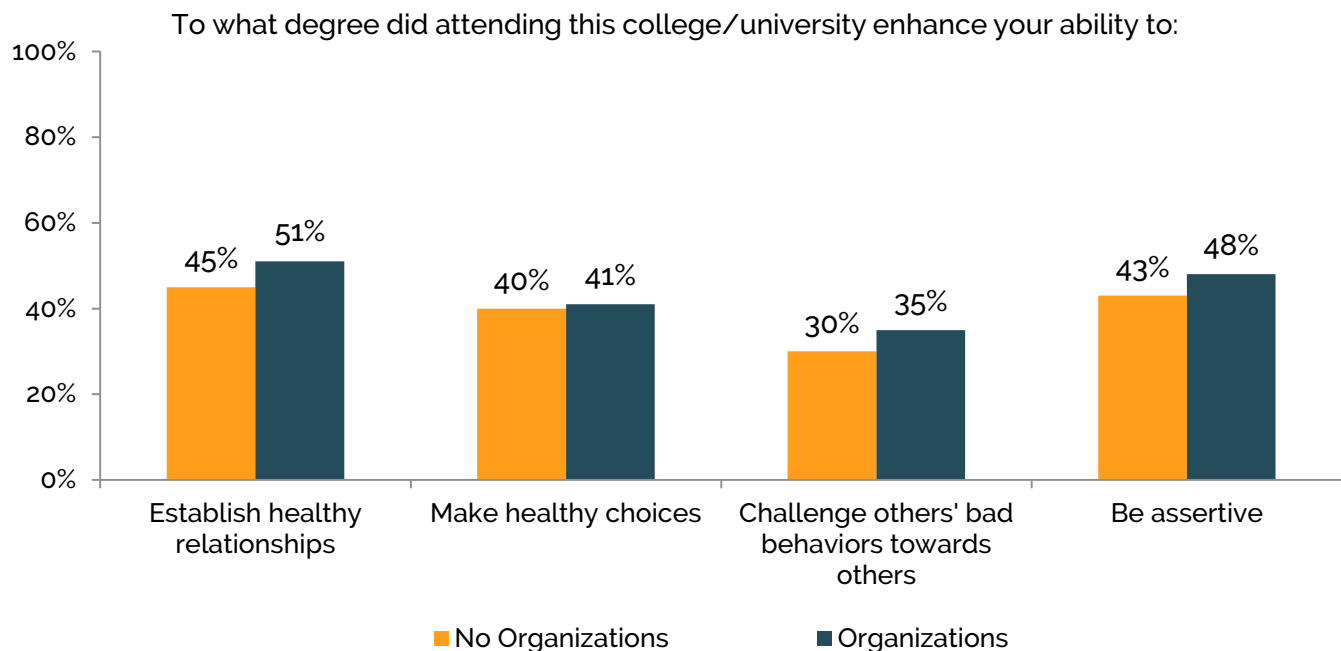


Interpersonal Relationship Skills

The interpersonal relationship skills section measures the degree to which students say their college experience enhanced their ability to establish relationships, make healthy choices, and challenge bad behaviors of others. Figure 3 displays the percent of students responding six or seven on a seven-point scale (“Extremely”) on questions related to interpersonal relationship skills by whether or not they were involved in any student organizations. Overall, students who participated in student organizations were more likely to report that their experience enhanced these skills.

Figure 3: Interpersonal Relationship Skills and Organization Membership

Percentage of students responding six or seven on a seven-point scale (“Extremely”) on interpersonal relationship skills questions by whether or not they were in a student organization.



Personal Competencies

The personal competencies factor is a measure of the degree to which students say their college experience enhanced skills such as articulating personal values, awareness of talents and limitations, and respect for others. Figure 4 displays the percent of students responding six or seven on a seven-point scale (“Extremely”) on questions in the personal competencies factor by whether or not they were involved in any student organizations. Overall, students who participated in student organizations were slightly more likely to report that their college experience enhanced personal competencies.

Figure 4: Personal Competencies and Organization Membership

Percentage of students responding six or seven on a seven-point scale ("Extremely") on personal competencies factor questions by whether or not they were in a student organization.

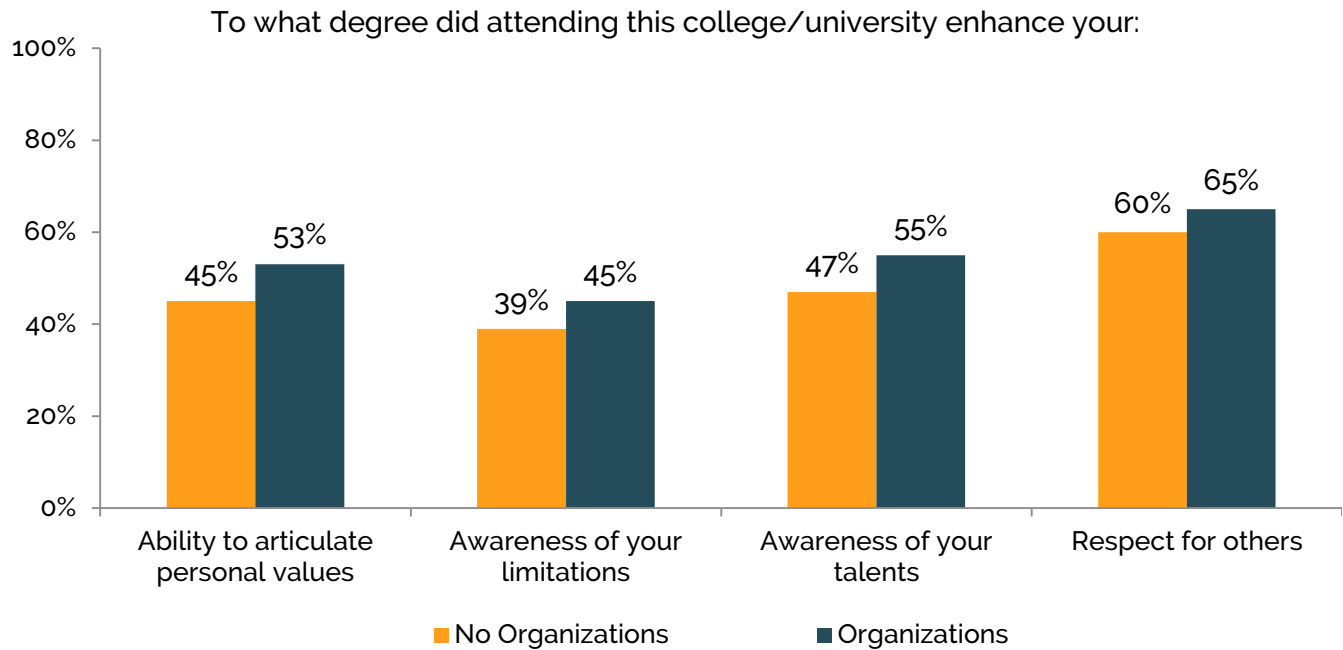
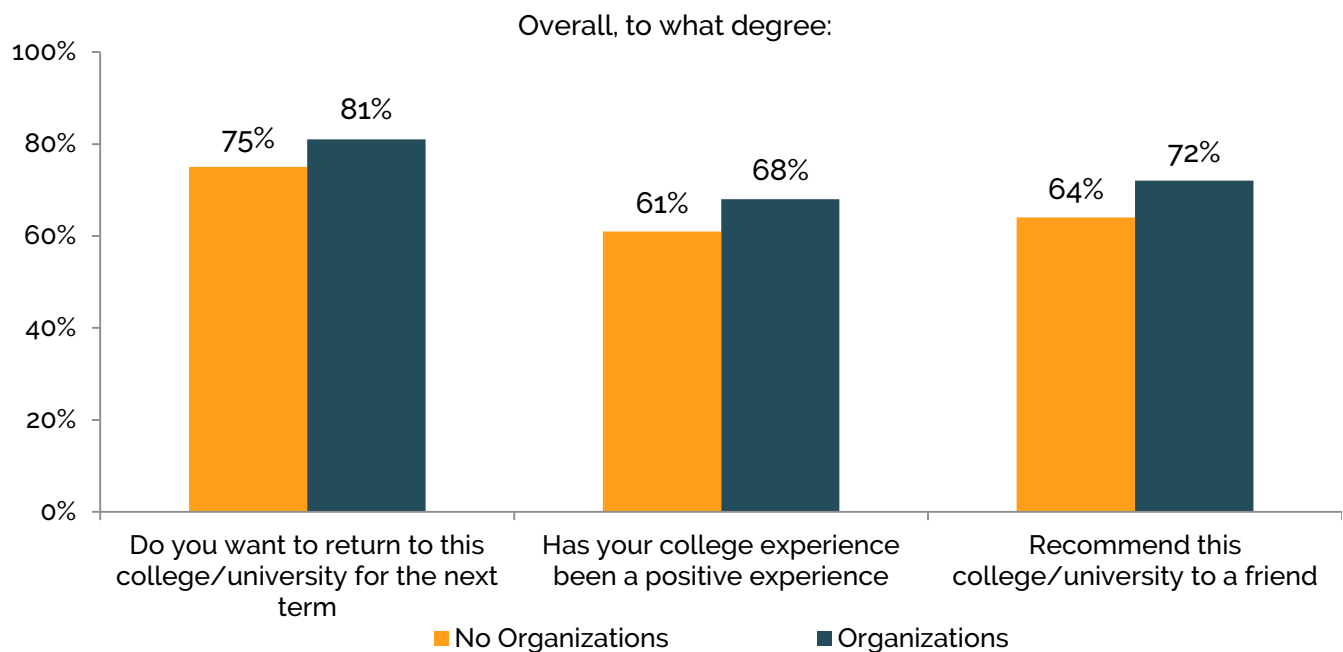


Figure 5: Overall College Experience and Organization Membership

Percentage of students responding six or seven on a seven-point scale ("Extremely") on overall college experience questions by whether or not they were in a student organization.



Overall Experience

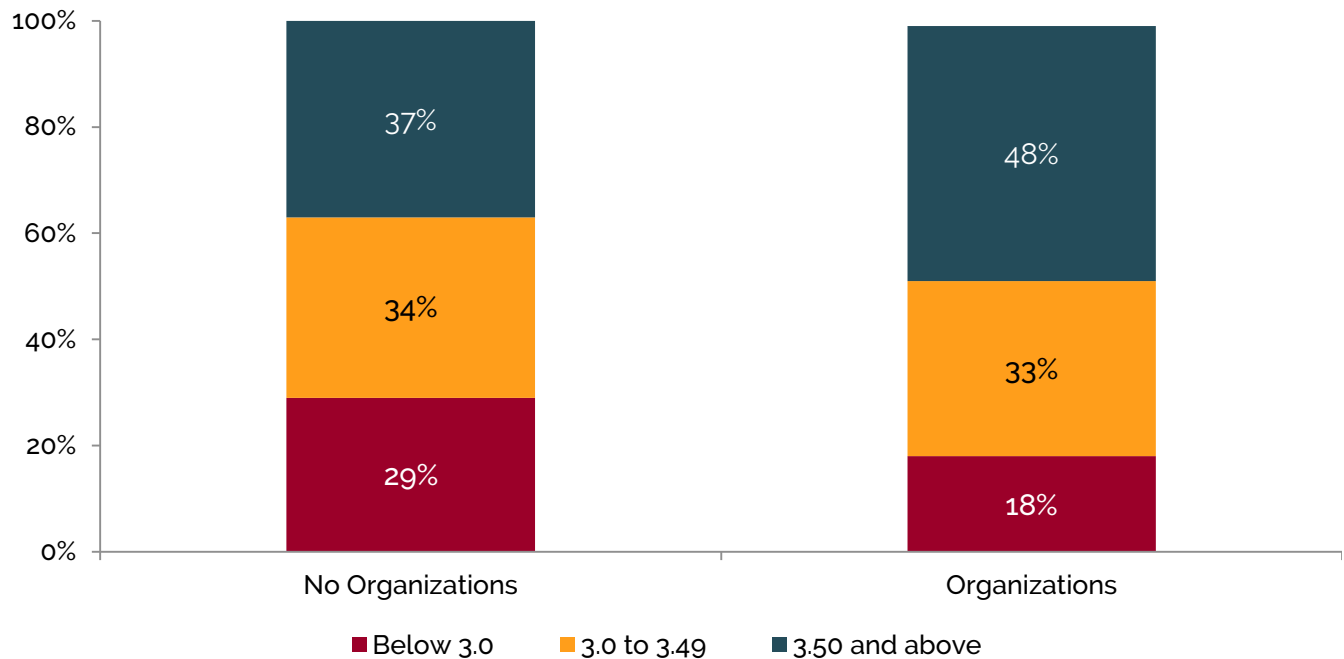
Figure 5 displays the percent of students responding six or seven on a seven-point scale (“Extremely”) on questions related to students’ overall college experience by whether or not they were involved in any student organizations. Overall, students who participated in student organizations were more likely to report high satisfaction with their overall college experience.

Academic Performance

Figure 6 displays the breakdown of a survey question asking students their current cumulative GPA by whether or not students were involved in any student organizations. Overall, students who reported participating in at least one student organization were more likely to report a high cumulative GPA compared to students who did not participate in a student organization.

Figure 6: Cumulative GPA and Organization Membership

Distribution of self-reported cumulative GPA for students by whether or not they were in a student organization.



Number of Organizations and Student Learning

Students who indicated that they participated in student organizations were also asked a series of questions to determine their satisfaction with their organization involvement as well as an assessment of learning outcomes from attending activities as part of student organizations. We explored the results by comparing students by number of organizations they were involved in to see if there is a relationship between the number of organizations a student was involved in and measures of learning and satisfaction.

Student Activity Learning Outcomes

Students who were members of organizations were asked questions regarding the extent to which attending organization activities enhanced a broad range of learning outcomes. Figures 7 and 8 display the percent of students responding six or seven on a seven-point scale (“Extremely”) on questions related to student activity learning outcomes by the number of student organizations they were members of. Overall, students involved in more student organizations were more likely to report that attending activities positively influenced key learning outcomes.

Overall Organization Experience

Figure 9 displays the percent of students responding six or seven on a seven-point scale (“Extremely”) on questions related to students’ overall perceptions of student organization membership by the number of student organizations they were members of. Students involved in more student organizations were more likely to report high levels of satisfaction regarding their student organization experience on campus.

Overall College Experience

Figure 10 displays the percent of students responding six or seven on a seven-point scale (“Extremely”) on questions related to students’ overall college experience by the number of student organizations they were members of. Students involved in more student organizations were more likely to report high levels of satisfaction with their overall college experience.

Figure 7: Activity Learning Outcomes and Number of Organizations

Percentage of students responding six or seven on a seven-point scale ("Extremely") on student activity learning outcome questions by the number of organizations they were involved in.

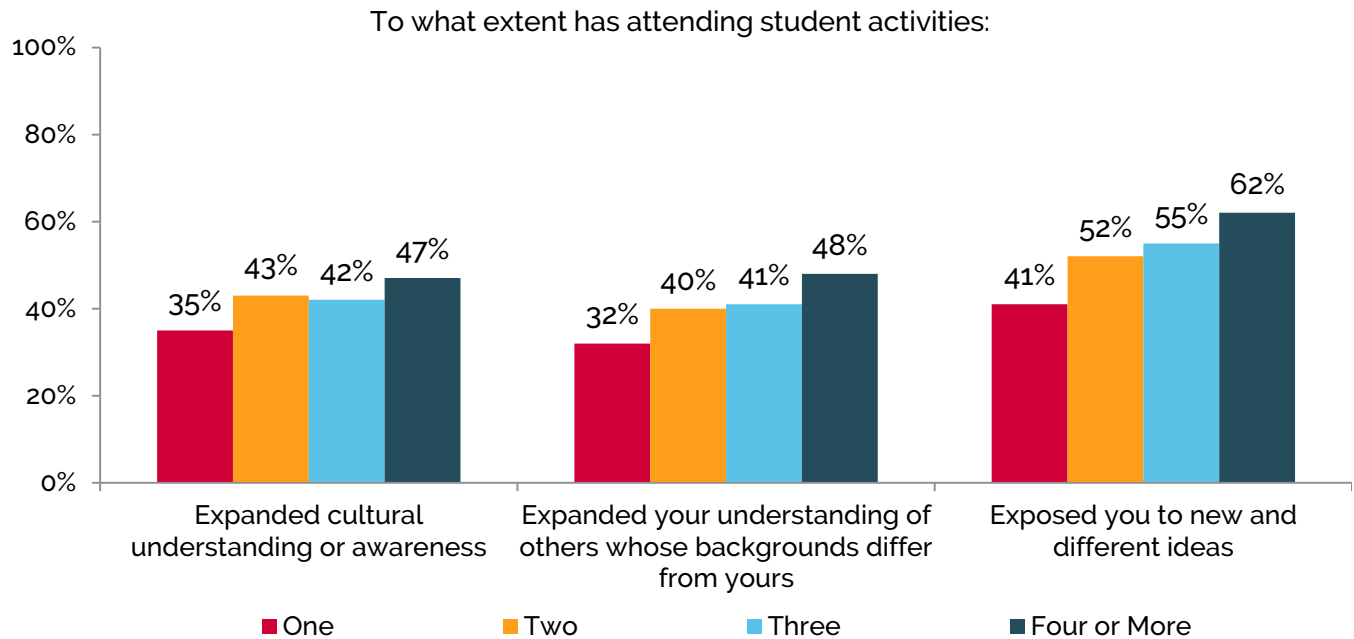


Figure 8: Activity Learning Outcomes and Number of Organizations

Percentage of students responding six or seven on a seven-point scale ("Extremely") on student activity learning outcome questions by the number of organizations they were involved in.

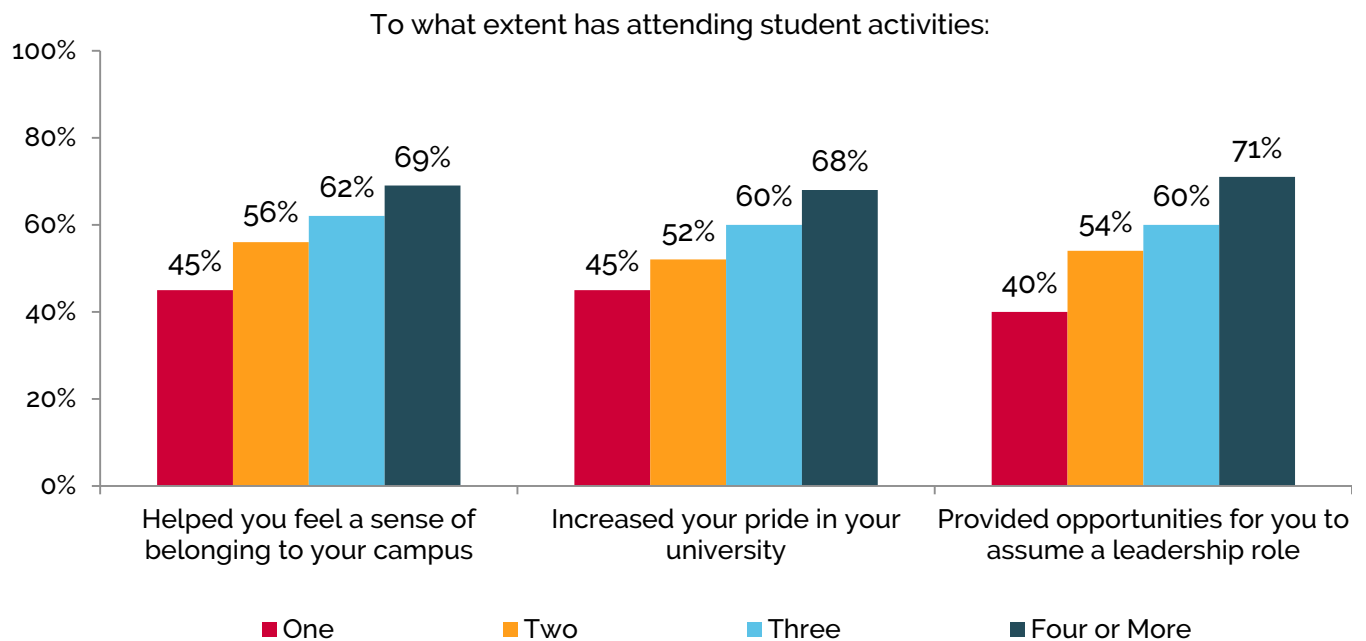


Figure 9: Overall Organization Experience

Percentage of students responding six or seven on a seven-point scale ("Extremely") on overall student organization experience questions by the number of organizations they were involved in.

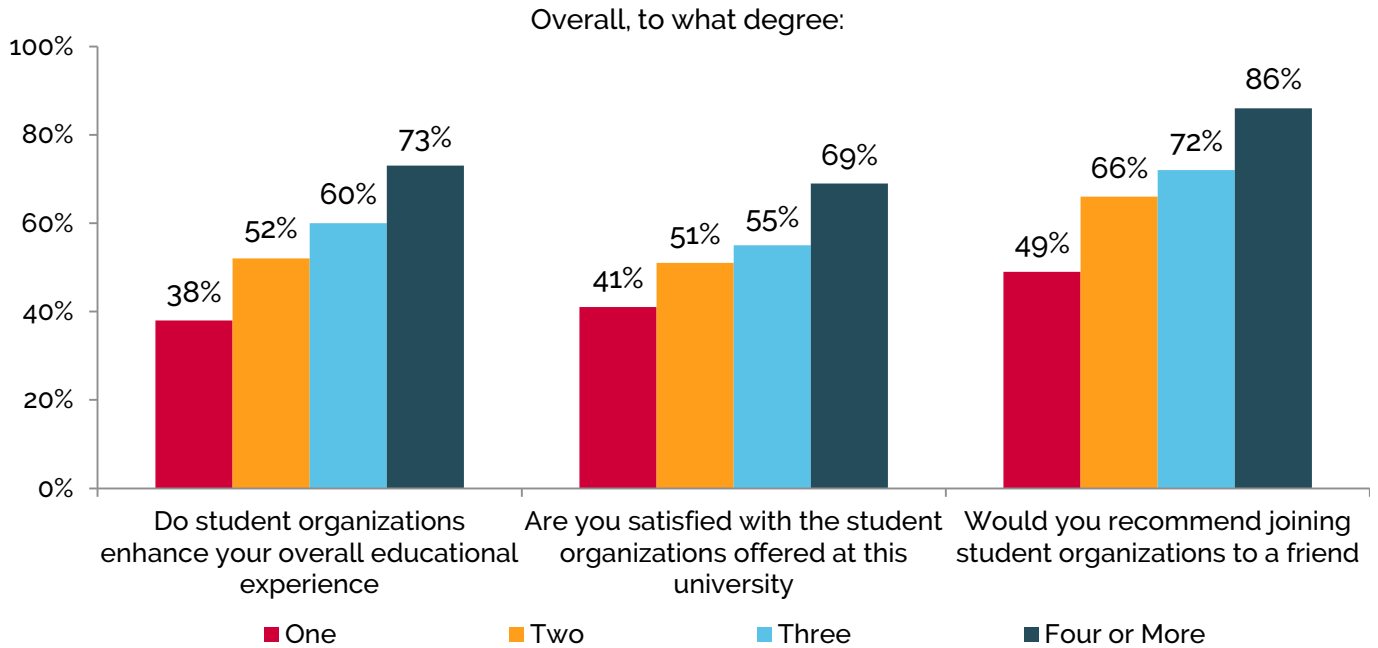
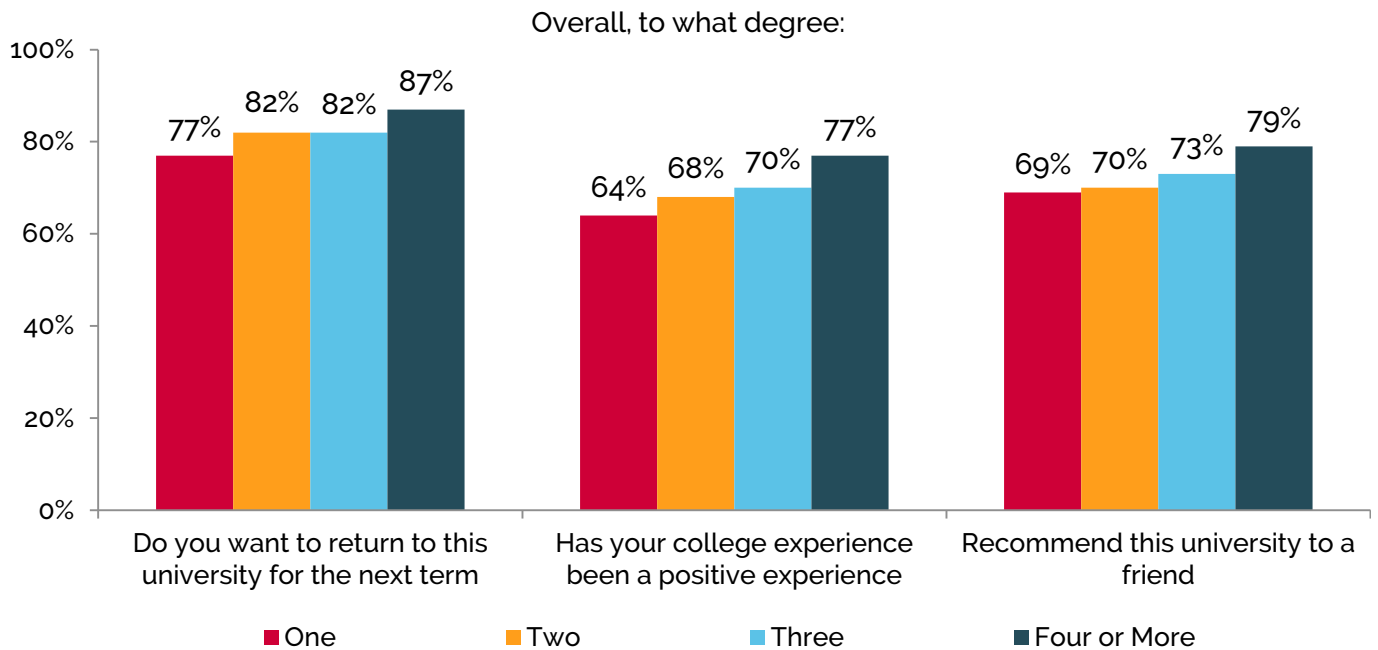


Figure 10: Overall College Experience

Percentage of students responding six or seven on a seven-point scale ("Extremely") on overall college experience questions by the number of organizations they were involved in.

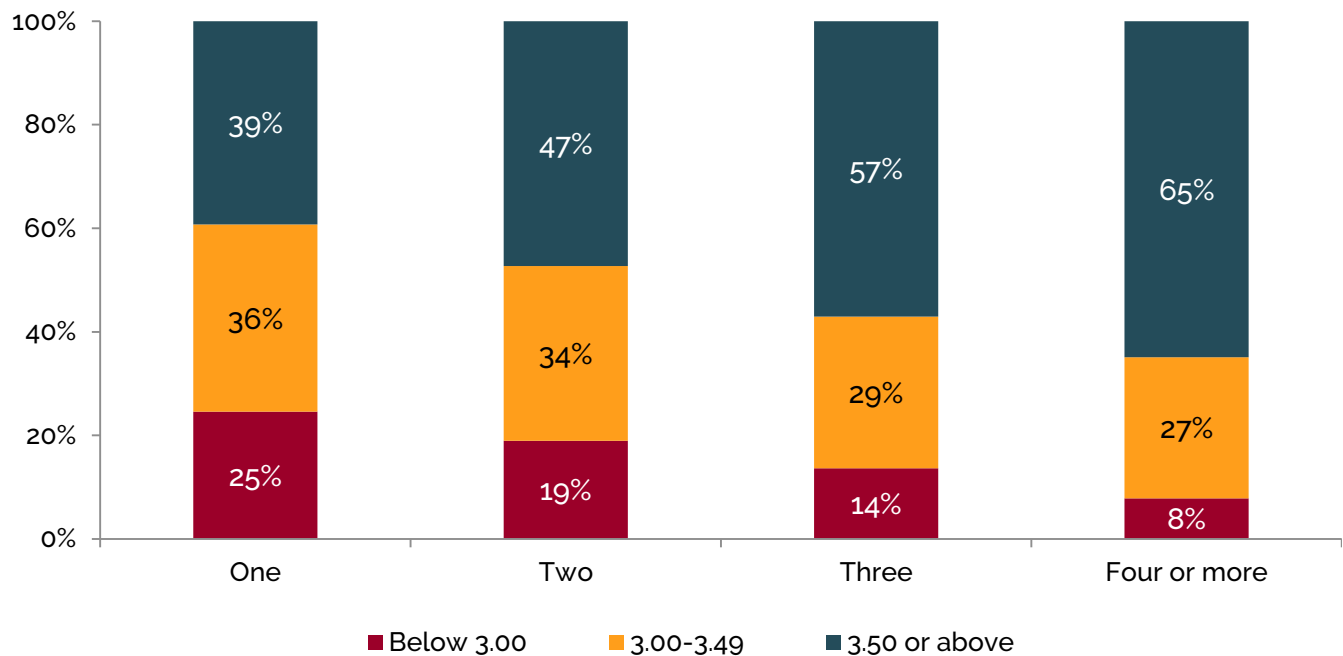


Academic Performance

Figure 11 displays the breakdown of a survey question asking students their current cumulative GPA by the number of student organizations they were involved in. Overall, the percentage of students who indicated their cumulative GPA was a 3.50 or higher increases as the number of organizations they were involved in increases.

Figure 11: Cumulative GPA

Distribution of self-reported cumulative GPA for students by the number of organizations they were involved in.



Conclusion

In general, students who participated in any organization were more likely to report that their college experience contributed to broad learning outcomes as well as report higher cumulative GPAs. Among students who participate in student organizations, it appears that more student organization involvement is also positively related to outcomes and an increased desire to remain at their current institution. Students who participate in more organizations are more likely to be satisfied with their experience, more likely to return, and more likely to report a higher GPA.

About the Data

The data used in this research note are from the 2016-2017 ACUI/Benchworks Student Activities Assessment. The survey was jointly designed by ACUI and the survey development team at Skyfactor. This survey enables institutions to evaluate the experiences of students who participate in student organizations and activities, specifically focusing on importance of educational and social activities; satisfaction with student government and programming boards; role of student activities in contributing to key learning outcomes; and learning related to overall university experiences. In total, 9,382 undergraduate students from 22 institutions responded to the assessment during the 2016-2017 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 colleges 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.



For more information about Skyfactor,
to schedule a demonstration, or to sign up for a webinar,
please write to us at info@Skyfactor.com or visit Skyfactor.com