



Five Key Insights from National Survey Data on Student Activities

Research Note

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Higher education researchers have long understood the role campus involvement plays in supporting student success. Extracurricular participation supplements the classroom experience by allowing students to grow and learn as part of their broader college experience. As such, ensuring our students engage in these experiences—and get the most out of them—is crucial.

This research note explores the relationship between student activities participation and other educational outcomes. The findings, presented as five key insights, were drawn from a national dataset constructed from the responses of over 5,000 college students to the ACUI/Benchworks Student Activities Assessment.

Key Points:

- Four out of five college students reported participating in at least one student activity during the current academic year
- Students who reported participating in activities were more likely to report high scores on a variety of learning outcomes
- Students who reported participating in activities were more likely to report a high GPA than students who did not participate.

Students Frequently Participate in Activities

Data from the ACUI/Benchworks Student Activities Assessment indicate that the majority of students surveyed indicated participating in student activities. Figure 1 displays the percentage of survey respondents who indicated that they participated in at least one type of student activity during the current academic year. Four out of five survey respondents indicated participating in student activities during the current academic year.

Figure 1: Student Activity Participation – Current Academic Year

Distribution of responses to the survey question, “Did you attend/participate in at least one of these activities during the current academic year?”

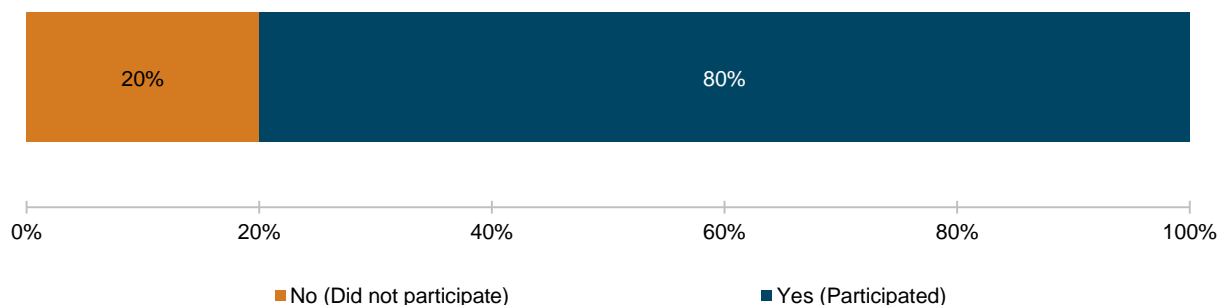
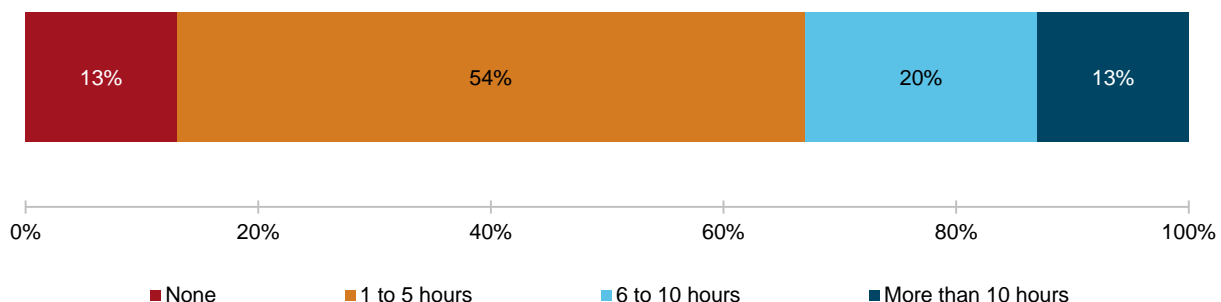


Figure 2 displays the breakdown of the average number of hours per month spent on student activities by various student populations. The response options were grouped into three categories: “None” (In red), “1 to 5 hours” (In orange), and “More than 5 hours” (In blue).

Figure 2: Student Activity Participants– Hours per Month

Distribution of responses to the survey question, “In an average month, how many hours do you spend attending student activities sponsored by this college/university?”



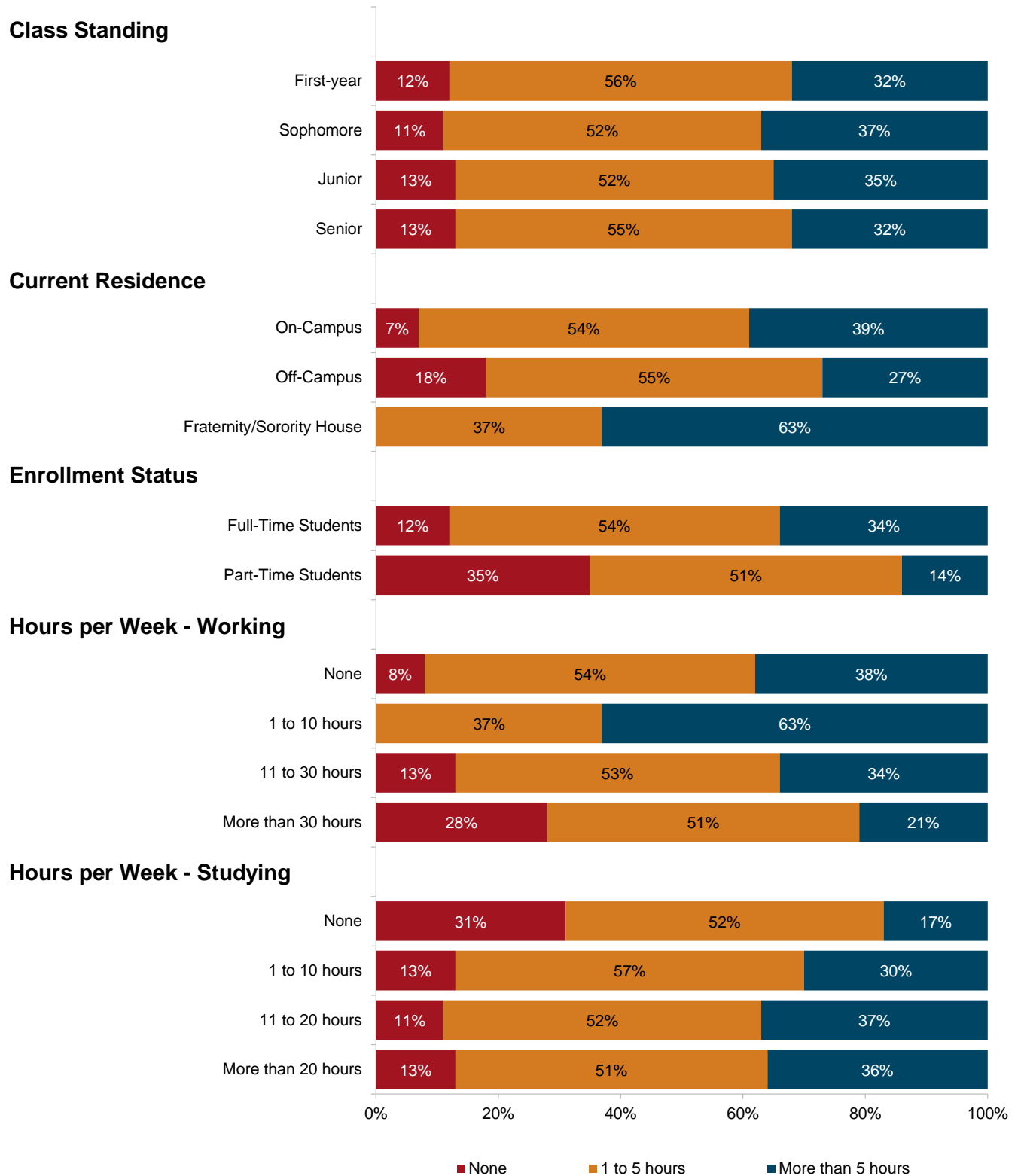
Student Activity Participation Varies Across Student Populations

Figure 3 displays the breakdown of the average number of hours per month spent on student activities by various student populations. The response options were grouped into three categories: “None” (In red), “1 to 5 hours” (In orange), and “More than 5 hours” (In blue). Several results stood out when reviewing these results:

- **Current Residence** – Students who reported living on-campus were more likely to report spending more time participating in student activities than off-campus residents. But, students who reported living in a fraternity or sorority house (either on or off campus) had the highest frequency of respondents indicating participating more than five hours per week (63%).
- **Enrollment Status** – Students who were enrolled full-time were more likely to report spending more hours per month participating in student activities than part-time students.
- **Work Hours per Week** – Hours spent working in a paid job was related to the number of hours spent participating in student activities. Generally, as students reported spending more time working, they reported less time on student activities. However, the one population breaking this trend was students who did not work in a paid job, who reported spending less hours per month on activities than students who spent between 1 and 10 hours per week working in a paid job.
- **Study Hours per Week** – There was a linear relationship between number of hours spent each week on studying and out-of-class work and number of hours per month spent on student activities.

Figure 3: Student Activity Participation Hours by Student Populations

Distribution of the number of hours spent on student activities in a typical month across key demographic questions in the ACUI/Benchworks Student Activities Assessment



Participation in Student Activities is Related to Learning Outcomes

The ACUI/Benchworks Student Activities Assessment contains a set of questions asking the degree to which the students' college or university experience contributed to a broad range of learning outcomes. Each question falls into a particular survey factor. 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.

Part of the analysis of this study compared students who indicated they participated in student activities during the current academic year to those who did not across these learning outcomes. Statistical analysis indicated the differences between groups on these questions were statistically-significant. The following two factors of questions were identified in regression analysis as being top predictors of students' overall experience.

Practical Competencies

Figure 4 displays results to questions in the practical competencies factor by whether or not respondents participated in student activities. The personal competencies factors contains questions related to communications skills, decision-making skills, and ability to work collaboratively with others.

Generally, students who reported participating in student activities were more likely to indicate that their college experience enhanced learning related to practical competencies. For instance, 54% of those who participated in student activities reported their college experience enhanced their decision making skills, compared to 48% of those students who did not participate in activities.

Personal Competencies

Figure 5 displays results to questions in the personal competencies factor by whether or not respondents participated in student activities. The personal competencies factors contains questions related to awareness of talents, time management skills, personal values, and other intrapersonal learning outcomes.

Generally, students who reported participating in student activities were more likely to indicate that their college experience enhanced learning related to personal competencies. For example, 52% of those who participated in student activities reported their college experience enhanced their ability to articulate personal values, compared to 43% of those students who did not participate in activities.

Figure 4: Perceptions of Practical Competencies by Activities Participation
 Percentage of students responding “Extremely” (% 6 or 7) on questions in the practical competencies factor by whether or not they participated in student activities

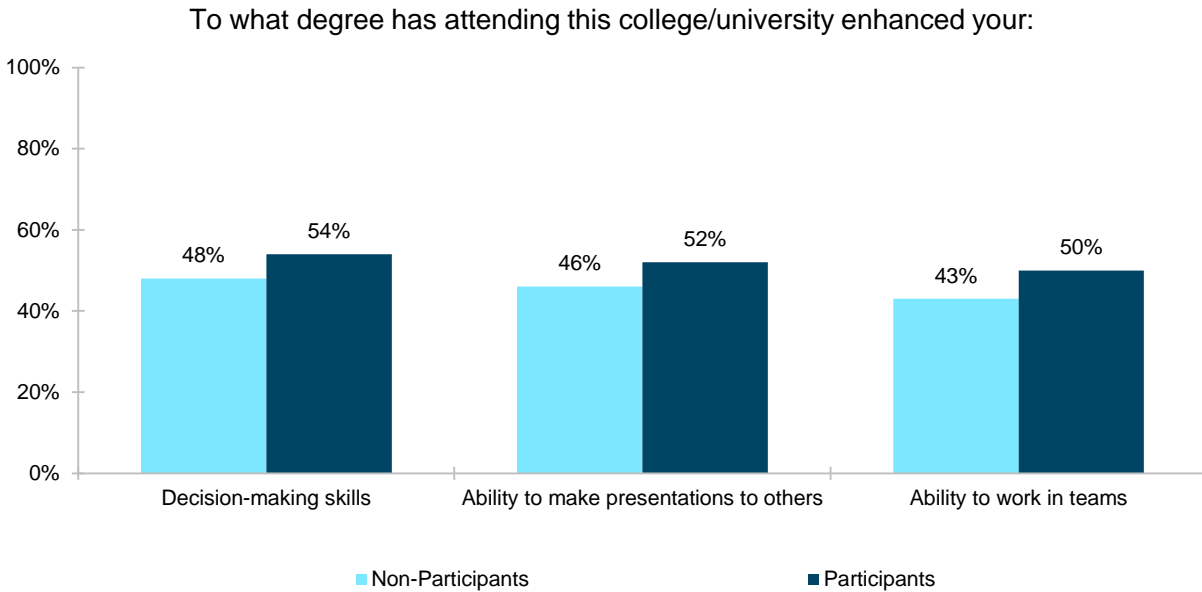
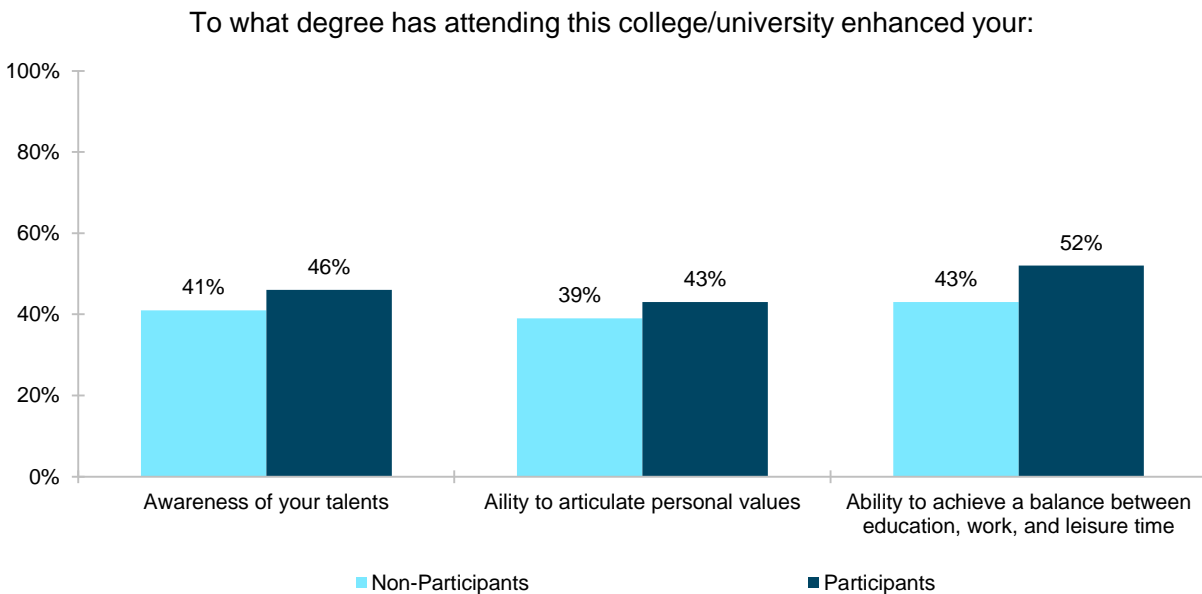


Figure 5: Perceptions of Personal Competencies by Activities Participation
 Percentage of students responding “Extremely” (% 6 or 7) on questions in the personal competencies factor by whether or not they participated in student activities



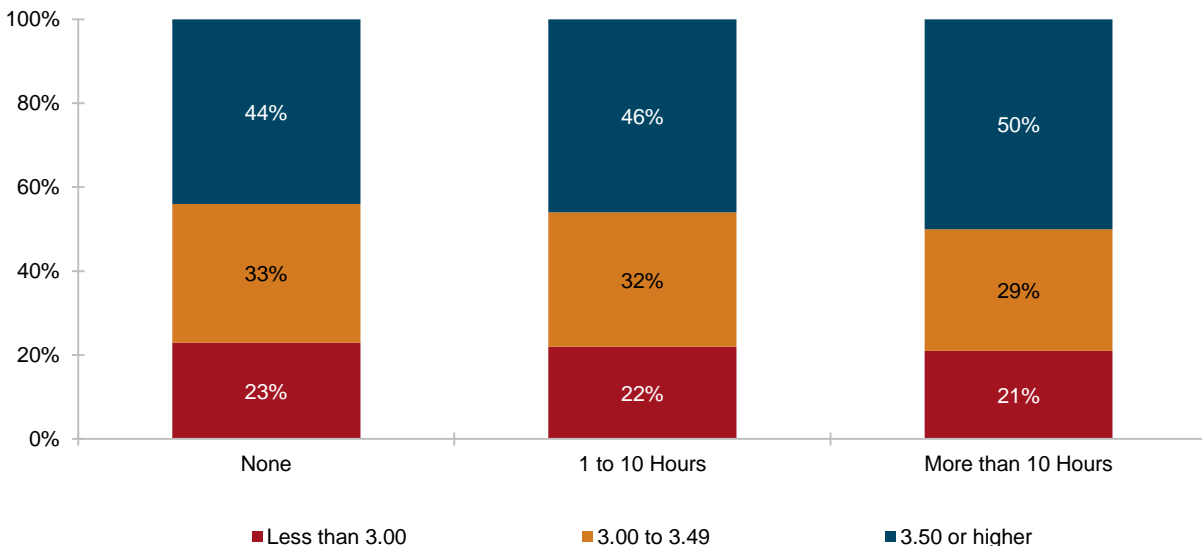
Participation in Student Activities is Related to Academic Performance

The ACUI/Benchworks Student Activities Assessment contains questions related to academic performance, including cumulative grade point average (GPA). Part of the analysis of this study compared students self-reported cumulative GPA based on number of activities attended per month.

Figure 6 displays the relationship between the number of hours spent on activities in a typical month and self-reported cumulative GPA (with students unsure of their cumulative GPA excluded from analysis due to small sample size). There was a positive relationship between hours spent on activities and cumulative GPA, meaning students who participated in activities more often were more likely to report a higher cumulative GPA.

Figure 6: Cumulative GPA by Activities Participation

Distribution of self-reported cumulative GPA for students by the number of hours they participated in student activities during an average month



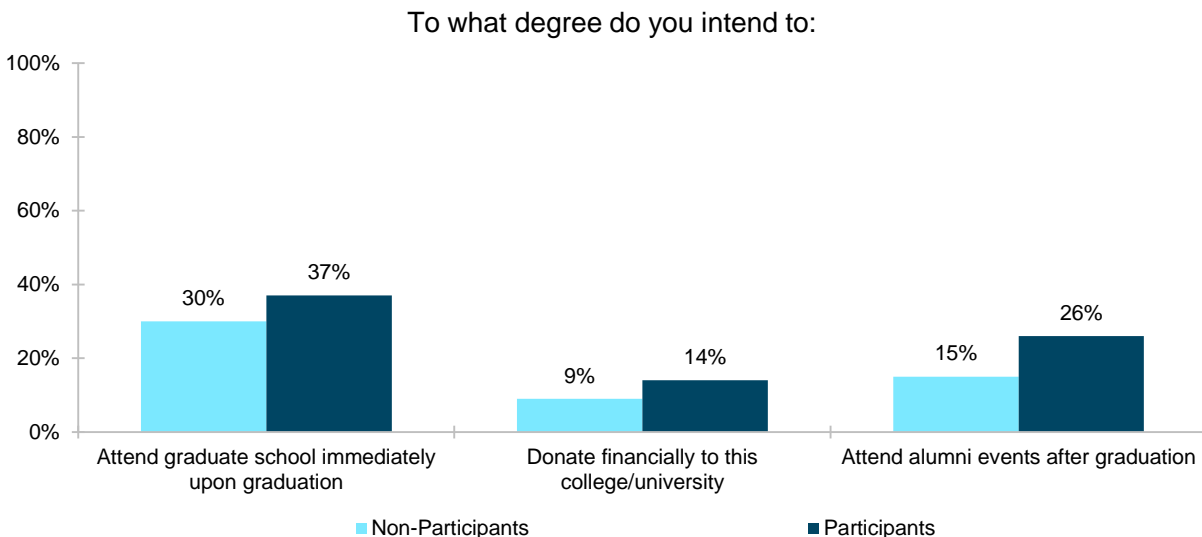
Participation in Student Activities is Related to Post-Graduation Plans

The ACUI/Benchworks Student Activities Assessment contains questions related to various post-graduate plans reflective of either academic performance or engagement with the institution as alumni. Part of the analysis of this study compared student responses to these questions based on the amount of time spent on student activities in a typical month.

Figure 7 displays the percentage of respondents indicating high intent (i.e., selecting either “6” or “7” on a seven-point scale) on various future plans. Generally, students who participated in activities were more likely than those who did not to intend to enroll in graduate school, donate financially to their college or university, and attend alumni events.

Figure 7: Future Plans by Activities Participation

Percentage of students responding “Extremely” (% 6 or 7) on questions related to post-graduation plans by whether or not they participated in student activities



Conclusion

Many higher education and student affairs professionals intuitively understand the importance of participation in student activities outside of the classroom. However, pairing data with the powerful experiences and stories helps to better communicate the value of student activities participation to key audiences across and outside of our campuses. National data from the ACUI/Benchworks Student Activities Assessment highlighted several key insights about the importance of student activity participation:

- There are differences in rates of participation across campus populations that could have implications for efforts to engage students in activity participation
- Participation in student activities is positively related to academic performance, future plans, and key student learning outcomes, all of which could justify increased efforts to encourage student activity participation and broaden activity offerings

About the Data

The data used in this research note are from the 2017-2018 ACUI/Benchworks Student Activities Assessment. The survey measures students' participation in student activities and organizations as well as a variety of academic and social outcomes. 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. The data in this note are from 5,898 college students from 18 institutions in the United States.

About Skyfactor

Since 1994, Skyfactor, a Macmillan Learning company, 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.

About Benchworks

Benchworks (formerly EBI) includes over 50 easy-to-use program assessments across a portfolio of over a dozen disciplines, including academic programs, housing and residence life, college union, student activities, orientation, new student transition, and student services. These market-leading assessments empower programs across an institution to identify areas of improvement for maximum impact on student outcomes. The national assessments are statistically validated, cover important content areas, mapped to key professional and accreditation standards, and allow for campus-level customization. Robust analytics and easy-to-understand reports deliver high-level trends, identify concepts statistically predictive of outcomes, allow for peer and longitudinal benchmarking, and support a culture of continuous program improvement.



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