



Daily Union, Daily Impact

The Who, What, and Why of Students Who Frequent the College Union

Benchworks Research Note
May 2024

“It is the center for everything”

College unions often are a hub of campus life, providing not only spaces but resources for community, activities, and engagement. As universities prioritize community building within these spaces, gaining insights into the students who frequent them regularly can enable staff to better serve this group and customize resources to meet their needs.

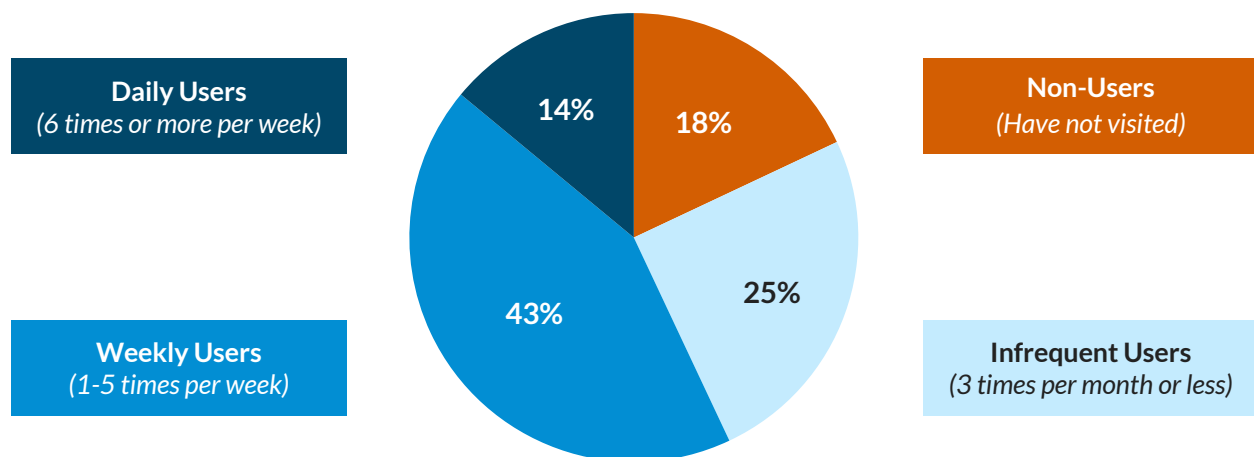
In data from the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Benchworks College Union/Student Center Assessment, respondents indicated how frequently they typically visit their college union.

Figure 1 shows the breakdown. Fourteen percent of respondents (n= 2,526) reported that they visit the union six or more times a week. These are the daily or frequent users.

FIGURE 1.

Frequency of Visits to the College Union

Distribution of responses to the survey question “On average, how often do you visit the college union?”



The remainder of this note focuses on the daily users and examines data to address the following questions:

- Who are these students?
- Why do they use the unions?
- What are they getting out of the experiences?



Who Are the Daily Users of the College Union?

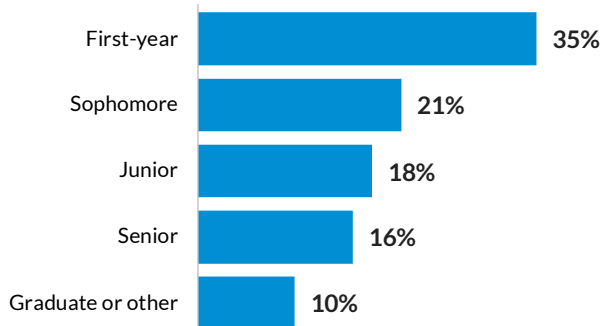


'I like the atmosphere and how I see all different types of people coming together in one room.'

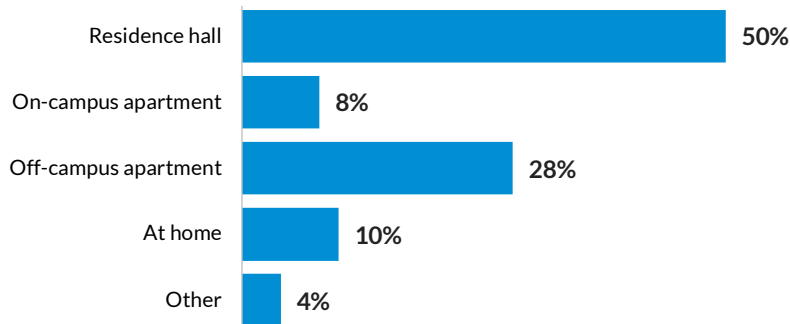
Figure 2 displays the breakdown of daily users by class standing, place of residence, and involvement in college union organizations. Overall, daily users of the college union do not have a single profile. They come from all class levels, live both on and off campus, and include a significant number of students who are not active in college union student organizations.

FIGURE 2.
Characteristics of Daily Users of the College Union

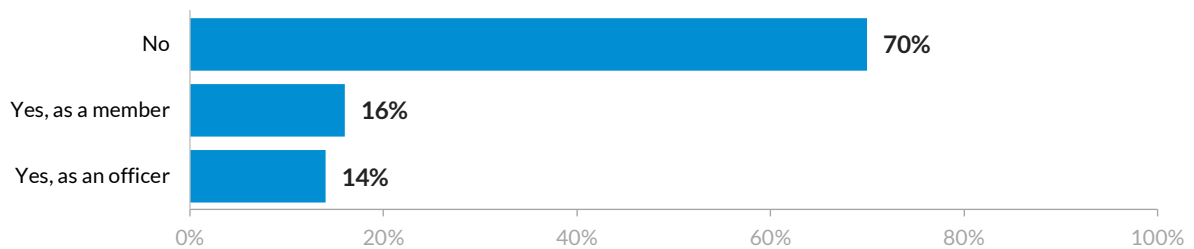
What is your current academic class standing?



What is your place of residence?



Are you involved in a College Union student organization?



Why Do They Frequent their College Union?

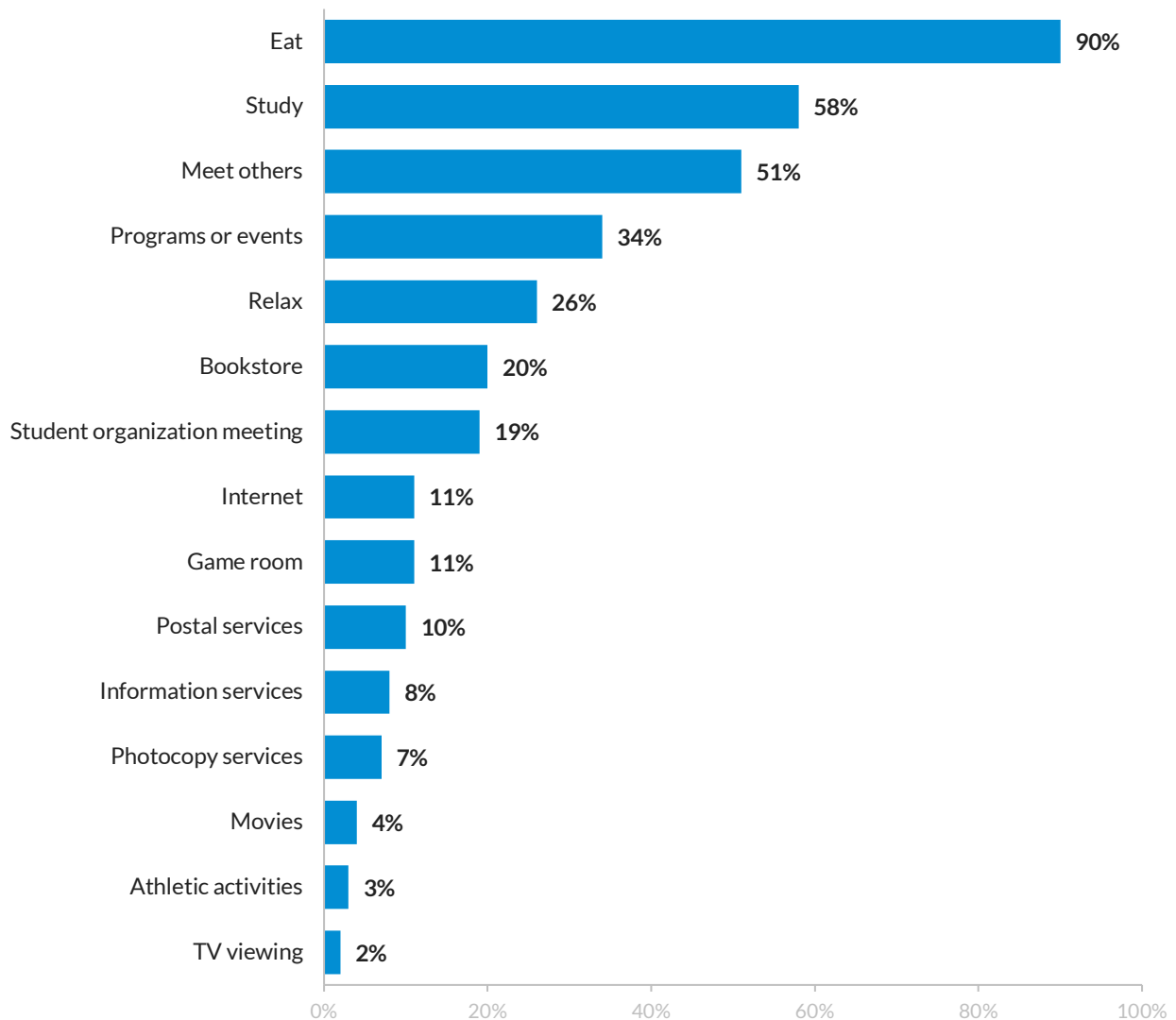


“My favorite thing about the student center is how universal the space is. You can get food, study, relax, play pool, get gear, meet people, print, copy, bind art projects, and so much more. It is the place where I spent the most time last semester.”

The assessment asks students to identify their top three reasons to visit the union from a list of options. Results for daily users are included in figure 3. Nine out of ten daily users said they visit the union to eat. Many daily users indicated that they visit the union to study (58%) or to meet others (51%). One third reported they visited the union for programs or events, and one-fourth went to the union to relax.

FIGURE 3.

Top Three Reasons for Visiting the College Union for Daily Users



What is the Impact of Daily Use of the College Union?

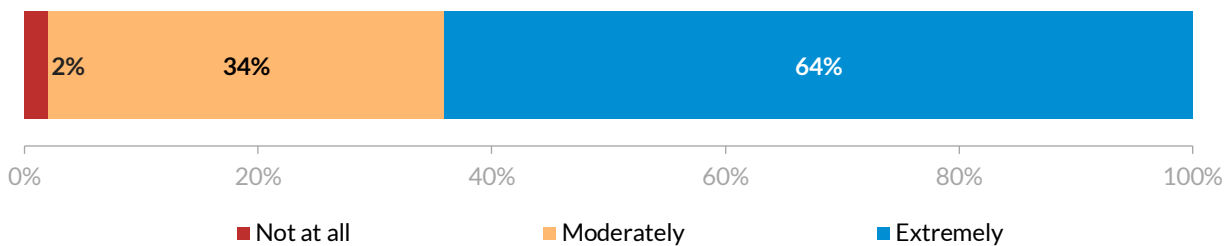


“The food and the togetherness, it’s important to have student common spaces, and the student center is one of those.”

Results from the Benchworks College Union/Student Center Assessment showed that daily college union users were highly satisfied with their overall experience. Figure 4 displays the breakdowns of daily college union users by overall satisfaction with the college union. Most daily users are extremely satisfied with their union and only 2% were not satisfied.

FIGURE 4.
Overall College Union Satisfaction of Daily Users

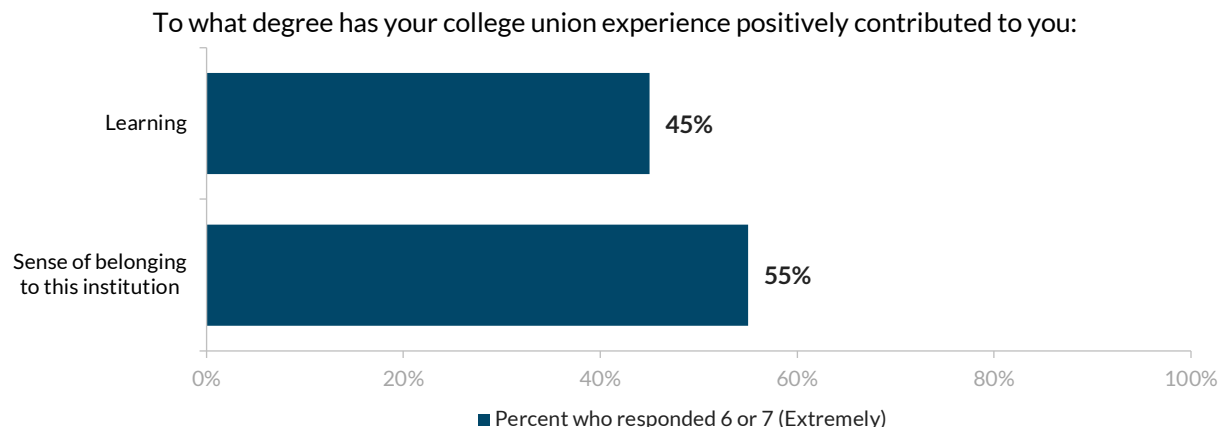
Distribution of responses to the survey question “Overall, to what degree are you satisfied with your college union experience?” for daily users.



College unions also contribute to the learning environments and the student community. Figure 5 shows the percentages of daily users who reported positive impacts. Specifically, 45% said the college union had contributed to their learning and 55% said it had impacted their sense of belonging.

FIGURE 5.
College Union Made Positive Contributions for Daily Users

Percent of daily college union users responding 6 or 7 (Extremely) to questions about the positive contributions of their college union experience.



Methods

Survey

The Benchworks College Union/Student Center Assessment enables institutions to evaluate student perceptions of college unions. The survey focuses on satisfaction with college union facilities, environment, services, staff, eating establishments, and bookstores; as well as the degree to which students indicate their college union experience contributed to a range of general learning. The assessment also contains questions for students who have not visited their college union to better understand their perceptions. Learning outcomes on the assessment are aligned with and results are mapped to the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) student learning and development outcomes.

Dataset

The findings in this research note are based on aggregate analysis from the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 academic year administrations of the Benchworks College Union Assessment. In total, 18,714 students from 40 institutions in the United States administered the assessment. The average online response rate was 13%.

Analysis

The insights shared in this research note were developed based on a wide range of statistical analyses, including descriptive analysis (frequencies, means, standard deviations), correlational analysis and cross-tabulations with chi-square analysis, and regression models. The findings in this research note are presented as descriptive analysis, specifically percentages. Results do not indicate whether differences between groups are statistically significant. All figures reflect the number of responses to a question and do not include missing data. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percent; therefore, some totals may not exactly equal 100.



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