

Extracurricular participation and student success

The UC Undergraduate Student Experience Survey (UCUES) is administered to all undergraduate students biennially and includes questions on students' participation in extracurricular activities such as leadership programs, entrepreneurial programs, study abroad, student clubs and organizations. Earlier studies show that students' participation in those activities vary significantly, and this variation is especially seen across different student subpopulations (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, discipline, student level)¹. Studies also find participation in extracurricular activities is positively related to students' college experience (e.g., sense of belonging and academic satisfaction) and learning outcomes (e.g., GPA, timely graduation, and long-term impact on earnings after graduation)^{2,3}.

Analyzing data related to extracurricular activities from UCUES longitudinally presents some challenges, however, because the items capturing this data have not remained constant over time. For this reason, this report exclusively includes results based on questions used in the latest 2022 UCUES survey and relevant administrative student outcome data from the same year.

The 2022 UCUES includes two sets of questions related to extracurricular activities. The first set asks if students are doing or have completed a series of activities. The second set asks how many hours students spend in a typical week on other extracurricular activities (see a full list of questions in Table 1 and 2).

Population

In 2022, 62,480 students responded to UCUES, contributing to a systemwide response rate of 28 percent. About 60,000 students responded to the extracurricular activity questions. The figures below display shares of the population and respondents to the extracurricular questions by gender, race/ethnicity, level, and discipline. Generally, the respondents are representative of the population except that female respondents are overrepresented, as in many other surveys since female students have a higher response rate than male students. Earlier analysis referred to above did not find significant gender differences in student extracurricular participation. Therefore, this report does not include analysis by gender.

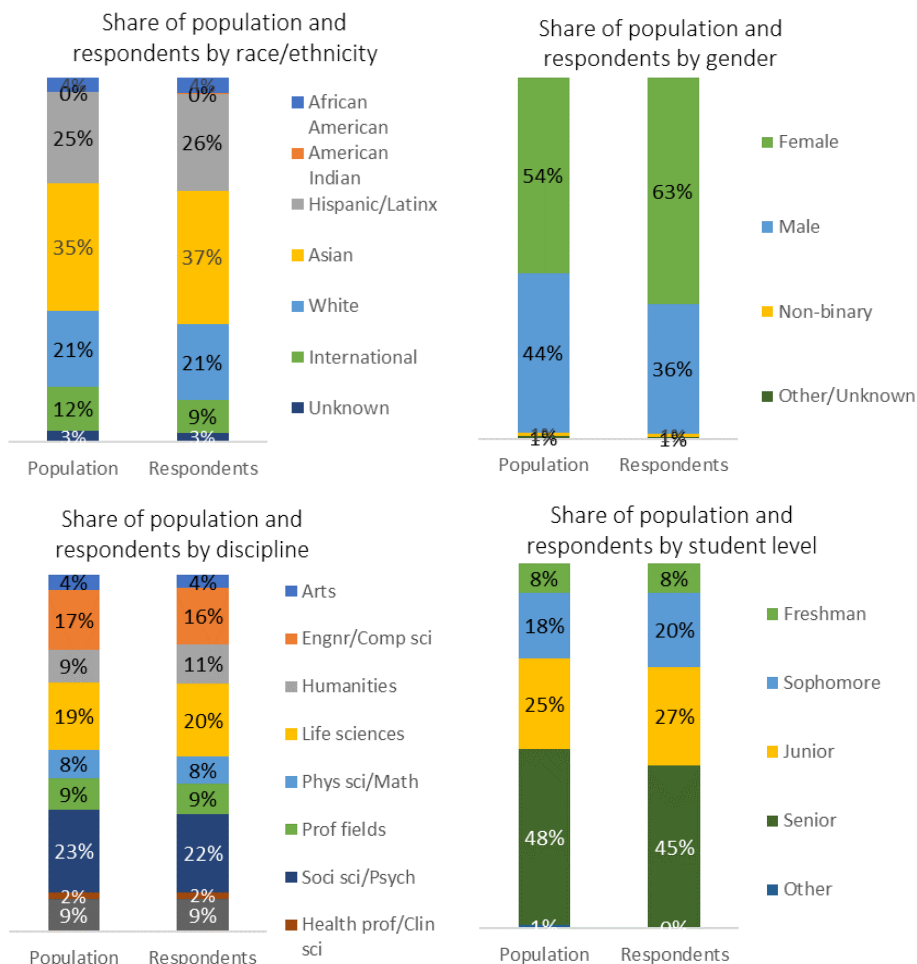
HIGHLIGHTS

- Students reported to have higher participation rates in student organizations, entertainment activities (e.g., cultural events, movies, concerts), and physical activities than in other extracurricular activities.
- Student extracurricular participation increases with student level.
- Hispanic/Latinx students generally have lower participation in extracurricular activities.
- Participation in extracurricular activities is positively related to higher sense of belonging, better academic satisfaction, higher GPA, and higher first-year retention.
- GPA drops for seniors if they spend over 10 hours in a typical week on entertainment, spiritual/religious, and physical activities to be even lower than that for those who do not participate in extracurricular activities.

¹ <https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning//files/extracurricular-activities-impact-on-employment-outcomes.pdf>

² <https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning//files/extracurricular-activities-impact-on-employment-outcomes.pdf>

³ <https://www.cair.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/474/2015/11/Chang-Getting-Engaged.pdf>



Extracurricular activities

Table 1 shows the share of students who reported participating or having participated in extracurricular activities. The percent of student participation varies from 2 percent in an entrepreneurial program to 58 percent in a student organization. Overall, 73 percent of respondents participated in at least one of nine extracurricular activities included in the table.

Table 1 Participation in Extracurricular Activities

Which of the following activities, experiences, or programs are you currently doing or have completed as a [University Name] student?	Participating or have participated %	Participating or have participated #
Credit-bearing internship, practicum, or field experience	19%	11,170
Non-credit-bearing internship, practicum, or field experience	23%	13,719
Leadership program	12%	7,423
Entrepreneurial program	2%	1,280

Which of the following activities, experiences, or programs are you currently doing or have completed as a [University Name] student?	Participating or have participated %	Participating or have participated #
Study abroad — academically-focused time outside of the U.S. in which at least 1 academic credit is accrued	4%	2,257
Being involved in a student organization(s)	58%	34,490
Academic service learning or community-based learning experience	17%	10,364
Performing community service or volunteer activities	30%	17,702
Being an officer of a student organization	39%	13,596
Participated in at least one of the activities listed above	73%	43,486 (unduplicated count)

Table 2 displays the distribution of responses by hours spent in a typical week on extracurricular activities. Seventy-five percent of students spent at least one hour attending cultural events, movies, concerts, sports, or other entertainment with others in a typical week. About 80% of students reported spending at least one hour doing physical exercise, sports, or physically active hobbies in a typical week. About 60% of students reported spending at least one hour in student clubs or organizations, consistent with results from Table 2.

Table 2 Hours spent in a week on extracurricular activities

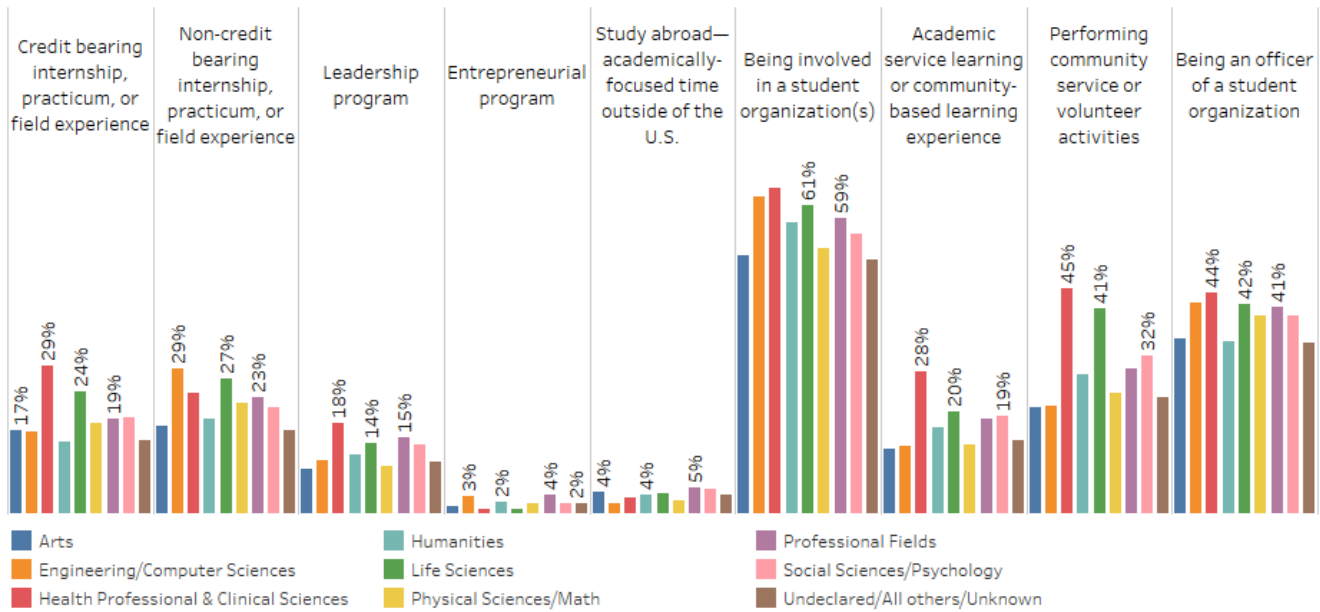
During this academic year, how many hours do you spend in a typical week (7 days) on the following activities?	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	30+
Attending cultural events, movies, concerts, sports, or other entertainment with others	25% 6,257	51% 12,596	13% 3,191	5% 1,224	3% 682	1% 321	1% 194	1% 258
Participating in physical exercise, recreational sports, or physically active hobbies	20% 5,001	46% 11,292	19% 4,761	7% 1,850	4% 891	2% 400	1% 225	1% 302
Participating in spiritual or religious activities	74% 18,288	17% 4,112	4% 897	2% 505	1% 369	1% 207	1% 126	1% 186
Participating in student clubs or organizations	42% 10,284	35% 8,741	12% 2,975	5% 1,241	3% 676	1% 336	1% 196	1% 252

Extracurricular activities by demographics

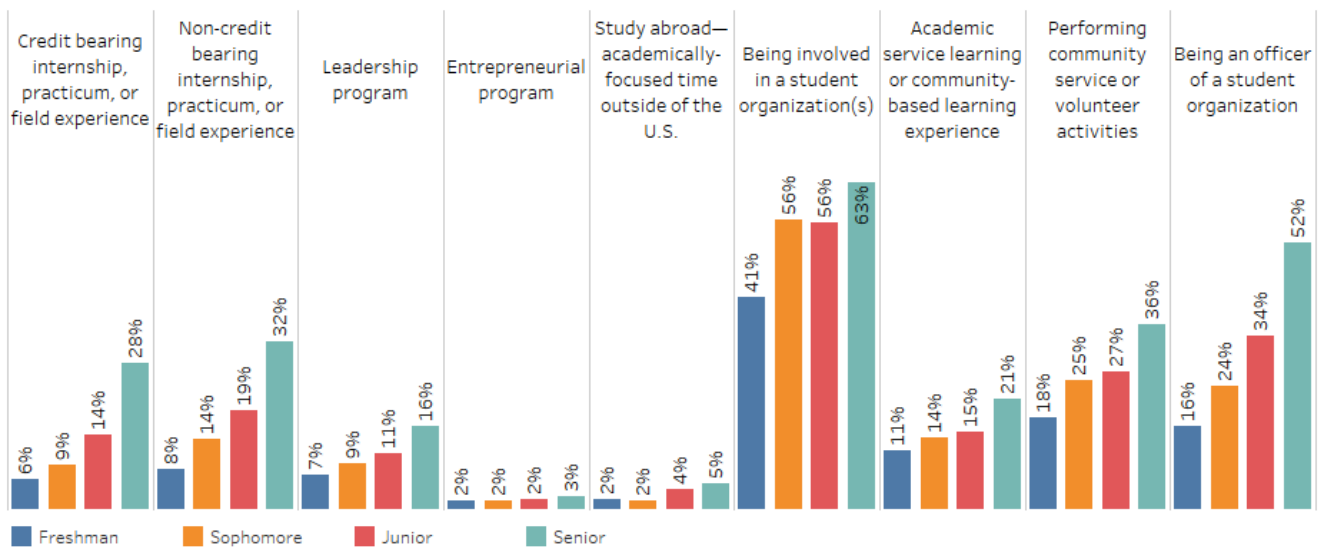
The following graphs (Graph 1 – 3) show participation in extracurricular activities by discipline, student level, and race/ethnicity. There are some variations in extracurricular engagement by discipline. For most extracurricular activities, health professional/clinical sciences and life sciences majors reported the highest rate of participation but arts majors and students with no major reported the lowest rate of participation. Generally, as student level increases, students are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities. Seniors reported much higher participation than freshmen. Students in each racial/ethnic group have an extracurricular activity they are the

highest in participation, except that Hispanic/Latinx students generally have lower participation in all activities.

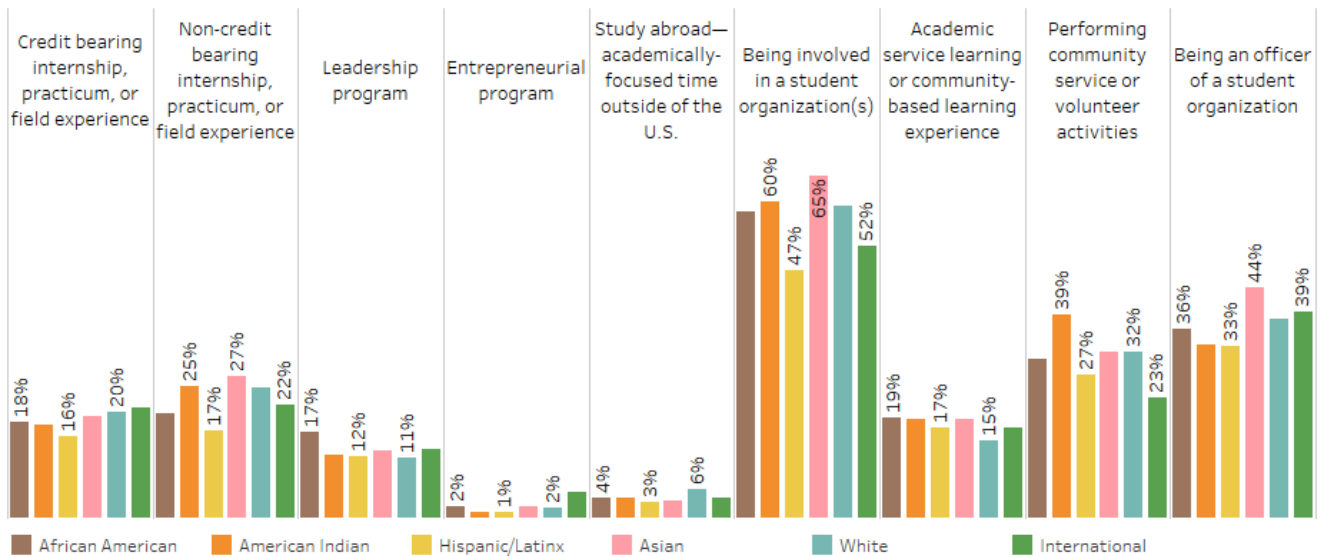
Graph 1. Extracurricular activities by discipline



Graph 2. Extracurricular activities by student level

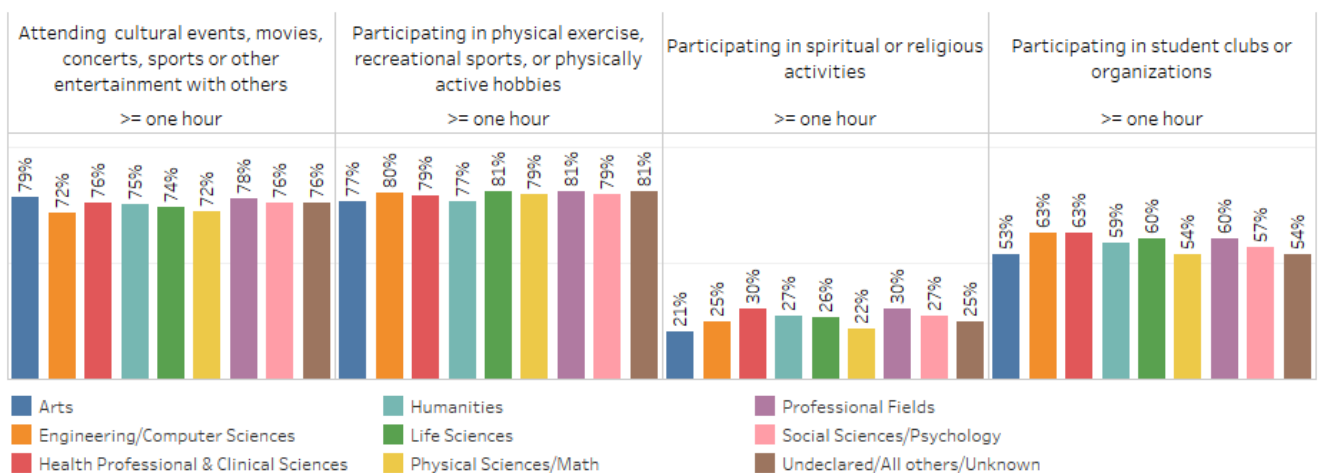


Graph 3. Extracurricular activities by race/ethnicity

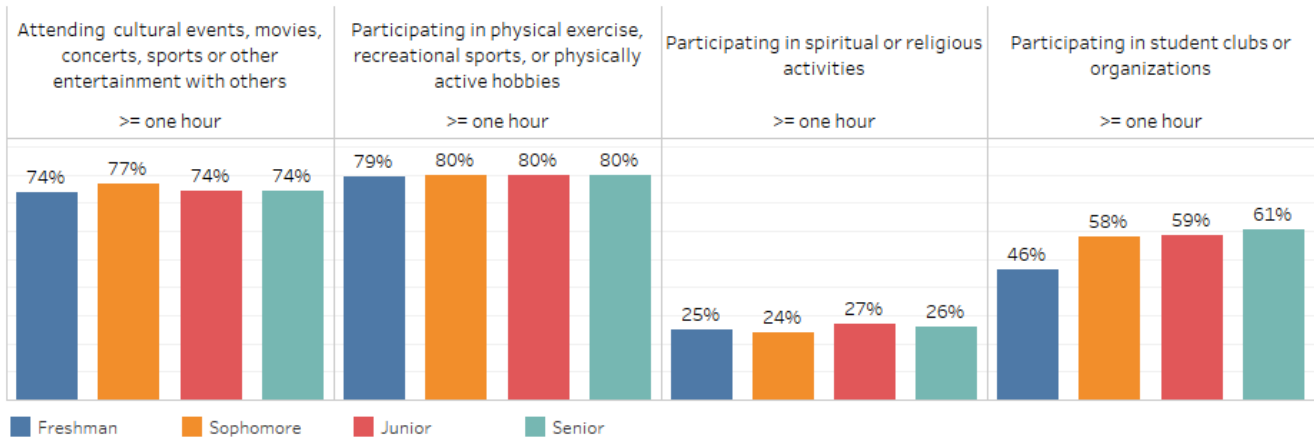


The following graphs (Graph 4 – 6) show student participation in activities for at least one hour in a typical week by discipline, student level, and race/ethnicity. There is not much variation in student participation in entertainment or physical activities by discipline. Students in arts, physical science/math, and with no majors are less likely to participate in spiritual activities or student clubs/organizations. For entertainment, physical, or spiritual activities, there is not much difference by student level, but freshman have a lower rate of participation in student clubs or organizations than students in other levels. Hispanic/Latinx students generally indicated lower participation in the different activities than other racial/ethnic groups, each of which generally has a certain activity with the highest rate of participation.

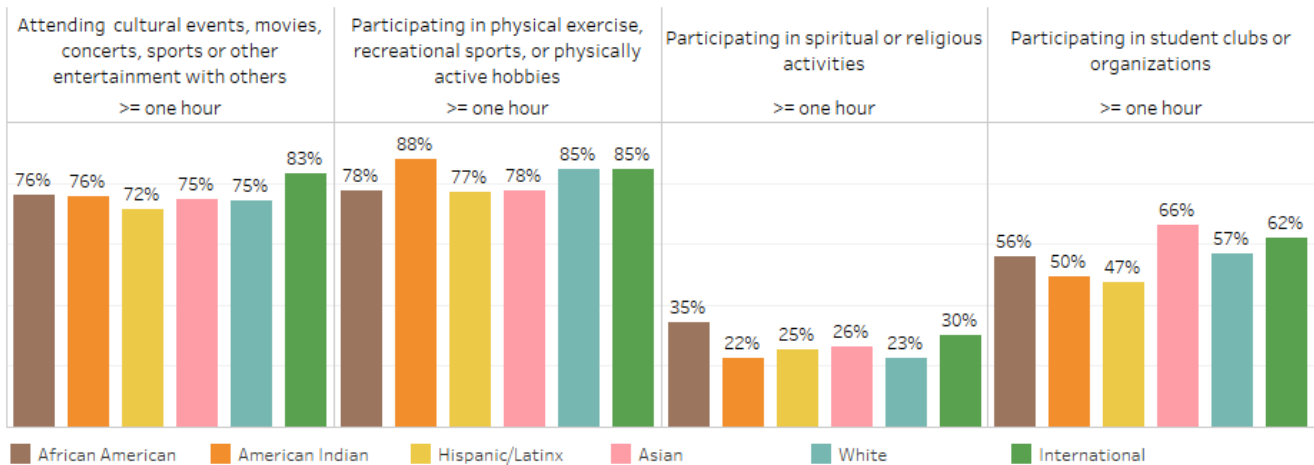
Graph 4. Time spent on extracurricular activities by discipline



Graph 5. Time spent on extracurricular activities by student level



Graph 6. Time spent on extracurricular activities by race/ethnicity



Correlation between extracurricular engagement and outcomes

UCUES also includes questions on sense of belonging and overall satisfaction with academic experience. The following tables (Table 3 - 6) indicate the shares of students who at least somewhat agreed that they belong to their campus as well as the shares of students who were at least somewhat satisfied with their overall academic experience by their participation status in extracurricular activities.

Descriptive statistics show students who were participating or had participated in extracurricular activities reported a greater sense of belonging than non-participants by around five percentage points (Table 3); students who spent at least one hour in a typical week on extracurricular activities are more likely to feel they belong to the university than those who spent no time,

especially among those who attended cultural events, movies, concerts, sports, or other entertainment with others (Table 4).

Students reported similar overall satisfaction with academic experience no matter whether they participated in extracurricular activities or not (Table 5). However, descriptive statistics show that students who reported spending 1-10 hours per week attending entertainment activities have higher rates of academic satisfaction than those who spent no time (Table 6). When they spend over 10 hours, their satisfaction level drops to be similar to or even below that of non-participants.

Table 3 Extracurricular activities and sense of belonging

Which of the following activities, experiences, or programs are you currently doing or have completed as a [University Name] student?	Participating or have participated (% students at least somewhat agreed they belonged at their campus)	Have not participated (% students at least somewhat agreed they belonged at their campus)
Credit-bearing internship, practicum, or field experience	86%	82%
Non-credit-bearing internship, practicum, or field experience	86%	81%
Leadership program	86%	82%
Entrepreneurial program	86%	82%
Study abroad — academically-focused time outside of the U.S. in which at least 1 academic credit is accrued	84%	82%
Being involved in a student organization(s)	85%	78%
Academic service learning or community-based learning experience	86%	82%
Performing community service or volunteer activities	86%	81%
Being an officer of a student organization	87%	84%

Table 4 Hours spent in a week on extracurricular activities and sense of belonging

During this academic year, how many hours do you spend in a typical week (7 days) on the following activities?	0 hour (% students at least somewhat agreed they belonged at their campus)	1-10 hours (% students at least somewhat agreed they belonged at their campus)	11+ hours (% students at least somewhat agreed they belonged at their campus)
Attending cultural events, movies, concerts, sports, or other entertainment with others	75%	86%	85%
Participating in physical exercise, recreational sports, or physically active hobbies	78%	84%	84%
Participating in spiritual or religious activities	83%	84%	82%
Participating in student clubs or organizations	79%	86%	87%

Table 5 Extracurricular activities participation and overall academic satisfaction

Which of the following activities, experiences, or programs are you currently doing or have completed as a [University Name] student?	Participating or have participated (% students at least somewhat agreed they are satisfied)	Have not participated (% students at least somewhat agreed they are satisfied)
Credit-bearing internship, practicum, or field experience	90%	88%
Non-credit-bearing internship, practicum, or field experience	90%	88%
Leadership program	89%	88%
Entrepreneurial program	87%	89%
Study abroad — academically-focused time outside of the U.S. in which at least 1 academic credit is accrued	89%	88%
Being involved in a student organization(s)	90%	87%
Academic service learning or community-based learning experience	90%	88%
Performing community service or volunteer activities	90%	88%
Being an officer of a student organization	90%	90%

Table 6 Hours spent in a week on extracurricular activities and overall academic satisfaction

During this academic year, how many hours do you spend in a typical week (7 days) on the following activities?	0 hour (% students at least somewhat agreed they are satisfied)	1-10 hours (% students at least somewhat agreed they are satisfied)	11+ hours (% students at least somewhat agreed they are satisfied)
Attending cultural events, movies, concerts, sports, or other entertainment with others	84%	91%	87%
Participating in physical exercise, recreational sports, or physically active hobbies	87%	90%	88%
Participating in spiritual or religious activities	89%	89%	85%
Participating in student clubs or organizations	88%	90%	88%

The following tables (Table 7-10) report the first-year retention rates⁴ of freshman students enrolled in the 2022 survey year by their participation status in extracurricular activities as well as the cumulative UC GPA of senior students by their participation status in extracurricular activities.

The first-year retention rates of freshman non-participants are lower than those who participated in extracurricular activities by up to four percentage points (Table 7). Additionally, students who spent 1-10 hours in a typical week participating in extracurricular activities have slightly higher first-year retention rates than those who did not spend any time in extracurricular activities (Table 8). However, if students spent over 10 hours in a typical week on extracurricular activities, their

⁴ The first-year retention rate is based on fall entrants who responded to the extracurricular questions in the following spring on UCUES. Some students in this cohort dropped out before the UCUES administration. Therefore, the retention rates in this report are higher than regularly reported rates.

first-year retention rates rise to be about three to five percentage points higher than those who did not spend any time (Table 8). Participants in student clubs or organizations have higher GPAs than non-participants across all student levels. However, those spend over 10 hours in a typical week have lower GPAs than those who spend 1-10 hours a week. Participants in spiritual or religious activities have lower GPAs than non-participants, and their GPAs drop further if they spend more than 10 hours in a typical week. This also holds for all student levels. For participation in entertainment and physical activities, those who spend 1-10 hours a week have higher GPAs than those either spend no time or those spend over 10 hours a week. For senior and junior participants who spend over 10 hours a week, their GPAs are even lower than those of non-participants (Table 10). However, the descriptive results indicated above may not align with statistical research. An earlier scholarly analysis suggested that time-use on extracurricular activities are weak or insignificant predictors of GPA, but they may have an indirect impact on UC GPA⁵.

Table 7 Freshman extracurricular activities participation and first year retention

Which of the following activities, experiences, or programs are you currently doing or have completed as a [University Name] student?	Participating or have participated (First-year retention)	Have not participated (First-year retention)
Credit-bearing internship, practicum, or field experience	97%	93%
Non-credit-bearing internship, practicum, or field experience	97%	93%
Leadership program	97%	93%
Entrepreneurial program	98%	93%
Study abroad — academically-focused time outside of the U.S. in which at least 1 academic credit is accrued	92%	93%
Being involved in a student organization(s)	95%	91%
Academic service learning or community-based learning experience	96%	93%
Performing community service or volunteer activities	95%	93%
Being an officer of a student organization?	95%	95%

Table 8 Freshman hours spent in a week on extracurricular activities and first year retention

During this academic year, how many hours do you spend in a typical week (7 days) on the following activities?	0 hour (First-year retention)	1-10 hours (First-year retention)	11+ hours (First-year retention)
Attending cultural events, movies, concerts, sports, or other entertainment with others	91%	93%	97%
Participating in physical exercise, recreational sports, or physically active hobbies	91%	93%	95%
Participating in spiritual or religious activities	93%	93%	96%
Participating in student clubs or organizations	91%	95%	96%

⁵ <https://higher-ed2000.ucr.edu/Publications/Brint%20and%20Cantwell%202008.pdf>

Table 9 Senior extracurricular activities participation and GPA

Which of the following activities, experiences, or programs are you currently doing or have completed as a [University Name] student?	Participating or have participated (Cumulative GPA)	Have not participated (Cumulative GPA)
Credit-bearing internship, practicum, or field experience	3.58	3.46
Non-credit-bearing internship, practicum, or field experience	3.58	3.45
Leadership program	3.53	3.49
Entrepreneurial program	3.49	3.49
Study abroad — academically-focused time outside of the U.S. in which at least 1 academic credit is accrued	3.60	3.49
Being involved in a student organization(s)	3.54	3.41
Academic service learning or community-based learning experience	3.55	3.48
Performing community service or volunteer activities	3.55	3.46
Being an officer of a student organization	3.58	3.50

Table 10 Senior hours spent in a week on extracurricular activities and GPA

During this academic year, how many hours do you spend in a typical week (7 days) on the following activities?	0 hour (Cumulative GPA)	1-10 hours (Cumulative GPA)	11+ hours (Cumulative GPA)
Attending cultural events, movies, concerts, sports, or other entertainment with others	3.42	3.50	3.39
Participating in physical exercise, recreational sports, or physically active hobbies	3.46	3.48	3.39
Participating in spiritual or religious activities	3.48	3.44	3.38
Participating in student clubs or organizations	3.39	3.53	3.46

Earlier analyses on academic engagement and student outcomes

In addition to extracurricular activities, UCUES includes many questions on academic engagement in the classroom. These items are all included in the “Academic engagement” tab of the [UCUES data tables dashboard](https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning//files/freshman-experiences-persistence.pdf). Academic engagement is a strong predictor of persistence on all campuses and for all racial/ethnic groups⁶. Student engagement was found to positively affect post-college employment outcomes⁷. Specifically, students who are more prepared for and regularly attend class, put more effort into academic work outside of class, and participate in internship programs, are found to earn significantly higher salaries in the first six years after graduation.

⁶ <https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning//files/freshman-experiences-persistence.pdf>

⁷ [https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning//files/survey-documents-undergraduate/Report College Engagement Undergraduate Employment Outcomes.pdf](https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning//files/survey-documents-undergraduate/Report%20College%20Engagement%20Undergraduate%20Employment%20Outcomes.pdf)