

Connectedness at Michigan: What Our Undergrads Have to Say

Executive Summary

The 2011 University of Michigan Asks You (UMAY) survey asked undergrads across campus to describe what made them feel most connected to the University of Michigan. Their responses provide an interesting glimpse into the factors that promote U-M students' engagement and sense of belonging.

What Students Told Us:

- **Students seek a niche.** The majority of comments indicate that students connect most with U-M through activities and organizations on campus that provide a more personal and intimate college experience.
- **Involvement is key.** Almost half of all respondents stated that involvement in a co-curricular club, group or activity provided a sense of connection.
- **Michigan offers something for everyone.** Students named many different organizations and activities, encompassing all range of academic, social, athletic, and artistic interests.
- **Personal connections count.** Students spoke warmly about their relationships with people on campus, including faculty, staff, and fellow students.
- **Diversity is important.** Students appreciate that their U-M connections provide interactions with people from a wide range of backgrounds and interests.
- **Students are proud to wear the Block "M".** Students who represent U-M in an official capacity (athletics, performing arts or academic competitions) spoke proudly about that experience.
- **Bleeding Maize & Blue creates common ground.** Cheering for U-M sports provides a strong sense of connection, particularly on football Saturdays.

A more complete summary, including sample comments in the students' own words, follows.

The UMay Survey

University of Michigan Asks You (UMAY) is a survey that the University periodically administers to all undergraduates. The survey asks questions about many facets of the student experience, including academic activities, experiences in their major, satisfaction, and perceptions of climate. This report is based on the UMay survey administered in the spring of 2011. That year, 8,014 U-M undergraduates responded to the survey, for a 31% response rate.

The UMay survey asks all students a core group of common questions about the undergraduate experience. Upon completion of the core section, each respondent is randomly assigned to answer one of four different modules of additional questions. In 2011, one of the four modules included the following question:

“What is the one activity, involvement, or ongoing experience that makes you feel most connected to the University of Michigan?”

The response option was open-ended, allowing students to describe the experience in their own words. Of the approximate 2,000 survey respondents who were asked this question, 1,202 students submitted comments.

Students responding to the item were distributed across schools and colleges as follows:

School/College	N	%	School/College	N	%
Literature, Science & Arts	721	60%	Music, Theatre & Dance	33	3%
Engineering	251	21%	Education	10	1%
Kinesiology	51	4%	Architecture & Urban Planning	6	<1%
Business	47	4%	Dental Hygiene	6	<1%
Nursing	38	3%	Public Policy	5	<1%
Art & Design	34	3%			

Respondents were somewhat skewed towards residents (72% of respondents, vs. 64% in population) and females (59% of respondents, vs. 49% in population).

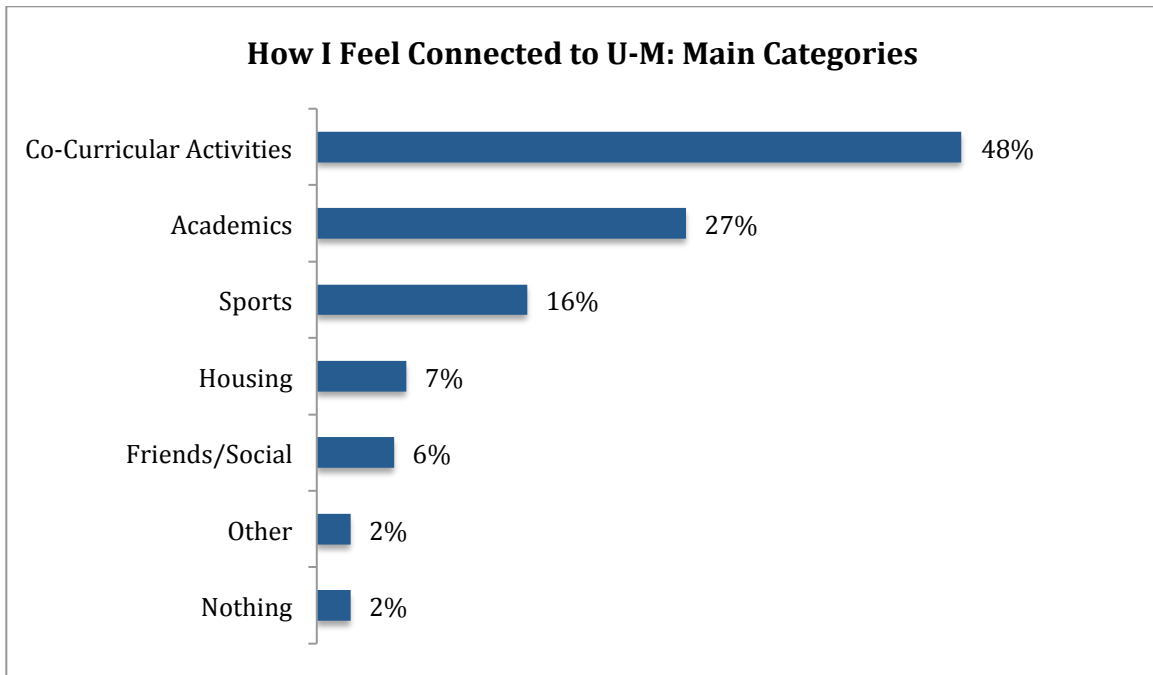
Responses to this item provide an interesting glimpse into the factors that promote U-M students' engagement and sense of belonging.

To summarize the open-ended responses provided by students, the Office of Budget & Planning reviewed all responses and developed a coding system that covered seven main categories and 39 sub-topics. Some comments contained more than one topic and thus fit multiple categories.

This report enumerates the themes found in students comments, and provided some specific examples in students' own words.

Main Categories

The following chart shows how students responses were distributed along the seven broad categories:



Topics within Categories

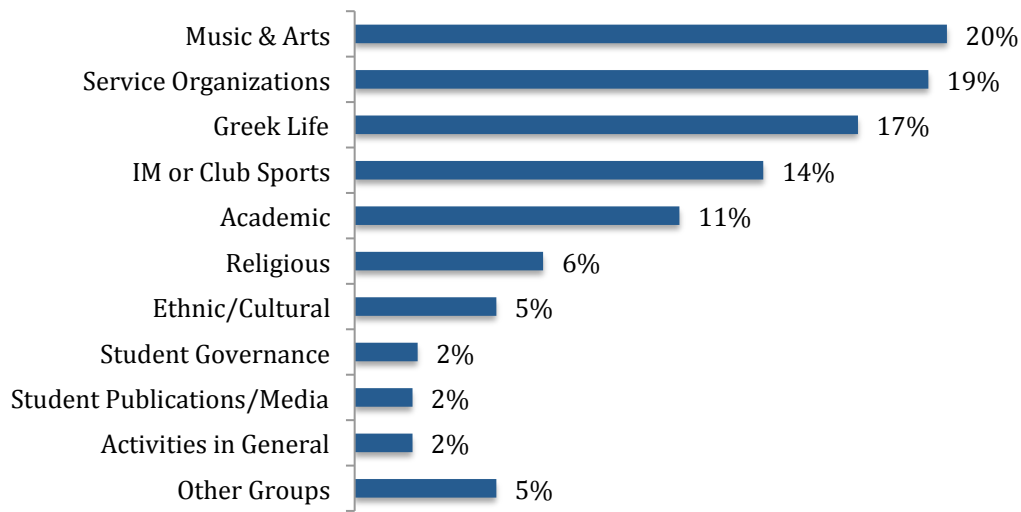
The sections below provide additional detail on student responses by breaking down main categories into more specific, related topics. In each section, the bar chart illustrates the percentage of students within a category that named the topic.

Co-Curricular Activities

Co-curricular activities were the most frequently mentioned category by students. Student comments were widely dispersed across the broad range of activities and pursuits available. One in five students who mentioned co-curriculars told of their experience in Michigan Marching Band, a vocal or dance group, or other fine arts related activity. Community service organizations were also a substantial part of the total.

Co-Curricular Activities (48% of all comments)

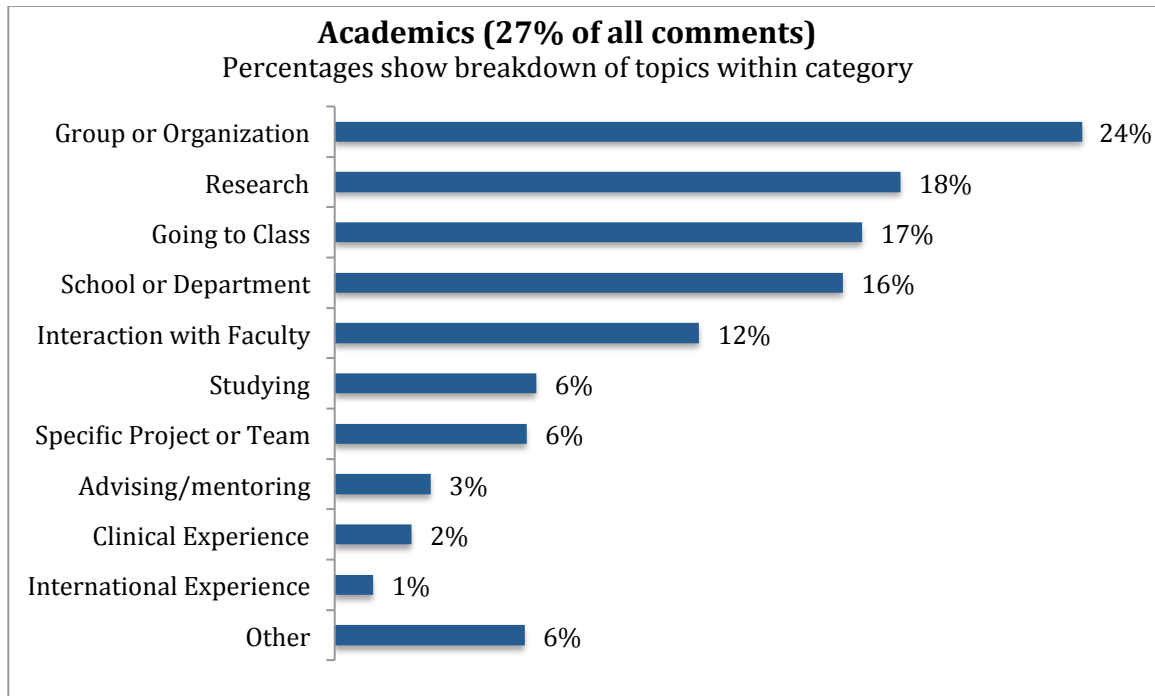
Percentages show breakdown of topics within category



- *I play the viola in the Michigan Pops Orchestra. Being in this Orchestra helps me to feel like I am a part of something, instead of just another number in the campus computers. It makes my campus smaller. (Engineering)*
- *Greek life because it makes the school seem infinitely smaller, provides you with a loyal support system, and provides you with invaluable connections and resources not just for college but for life. (LSA)*
- *Alternative Spring Break made me aware of how the University is viewed across the country with pride and how well U of M students work together. (LSA)*
- *Jumpstart is a non-profit organization that is aimed at increasing phonetic and phonemic awareness in preschoolers. I was a part of this for two years. It helped me with my major and allowed me to make friends. (Education)*
- *I am a part of the planning committee for Relay For Life, and I really enjoy it. It is such a great event, and being a part of the planning committee has not only introduced me to a great group of people, but it keeps me humble. (Engineering)*
- *University of Michigan Rugby Football Club. It has made my experience at the university more enjoyable by giving me a group of diverse friends to share my experience with. (Business)*
- *Michigan Marketing Club because I enjoy interacting with people are going into a similar field then me and it makes me feel like a real part of the school as a whole. (Business)*
- *Being a part of student groups in general helps me feel connected because I am able to make friends and feel like I'm making a difference. (LSA)*
- *Student groups. Most of my lasting friends I have met at U of M, I met in student groups. (LSA)*

Academics

Over a quarter of U-M students named academics or related activities as the way they feel most connected to the University. While general student activities such as attending class or studying were named by some students, many named the “niche” they had found in their department or in an academic-related organization. Research was also an important source of connection.

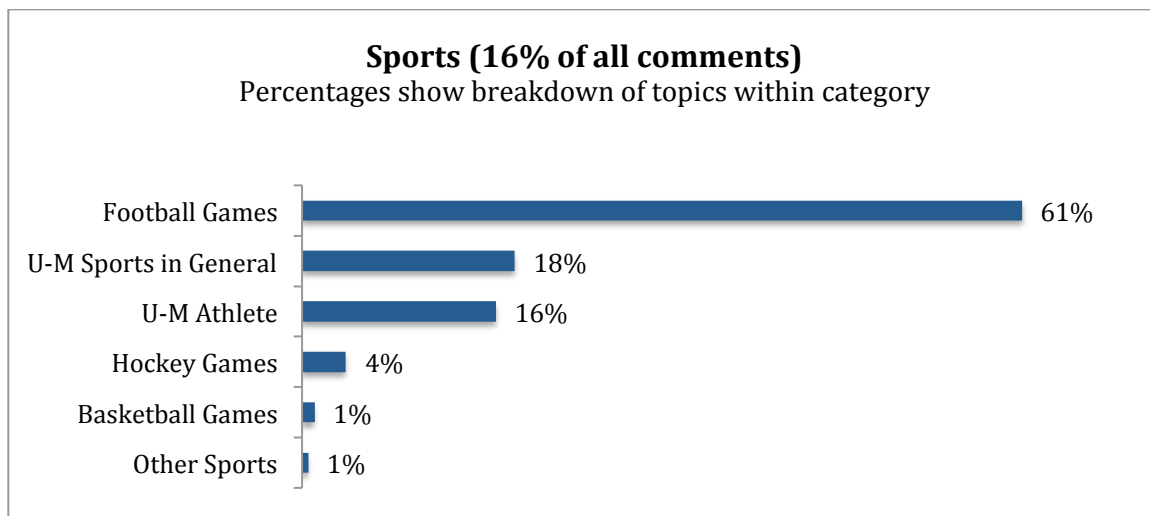


- *Residential College - the intensive language program helped me to focus my academic interests and the small classes allowed me to get to know my professors. (LSA)*
- *Michigan Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program. I got to conduct research in a lab over at the Nuclear Engineering and Radiological Sciences department. Discovering my enjoyment of research made me feel like I fit in with the research mission of the university. (LSA)*
- *Doing research here really connected me to a lot of (graduate) students and made me feel like I belonged here. (Engineering)*
- *Classes, where I have them with people I know and who make me laugh and who get me to relax despite the hard work load. (Art & Design)*
- *My Sport Management 101 class was a really great group of students, led by a great teacher/TA, and the class really confirmed my appreciation for the School of Kinesiology and the quality of students and teaching at U of M. (Kinesiology)*
- *My major: Architecture is a small, tight-knit community that helps me feel very connected to the university. (TCAUP)*
- *My enrollment in the Department of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering makes me feel the most connected to the University of Michigan. The small, personal classes allow me to meet students of similar values and interests. (Engineering)*
- *The community within my major. The people in the jazz department and music school are like another family. Since my freshman year, I've felt at home. (Music, Theatre & Dance)*

- *My involvement in the Graham Sustainability Scholars Program. I have made some very good friends with fellow scholars and have gotten to know the instructors very well. We also are frequently involved in events around campus. (LSA)*
- *The willingness of the Professors to help you learn and connect better not only with the material, but with your interests. (Art & Design)*
- *The entire learning experience at the university. Every day, I learn something new from my lecturers and my fellow coursemates, which is exactly why I came to this university. (Engineering)*
- *Clinical rotations at various hospitals make me proud to be a UM student. (Nursing)*

Sports/Athletics

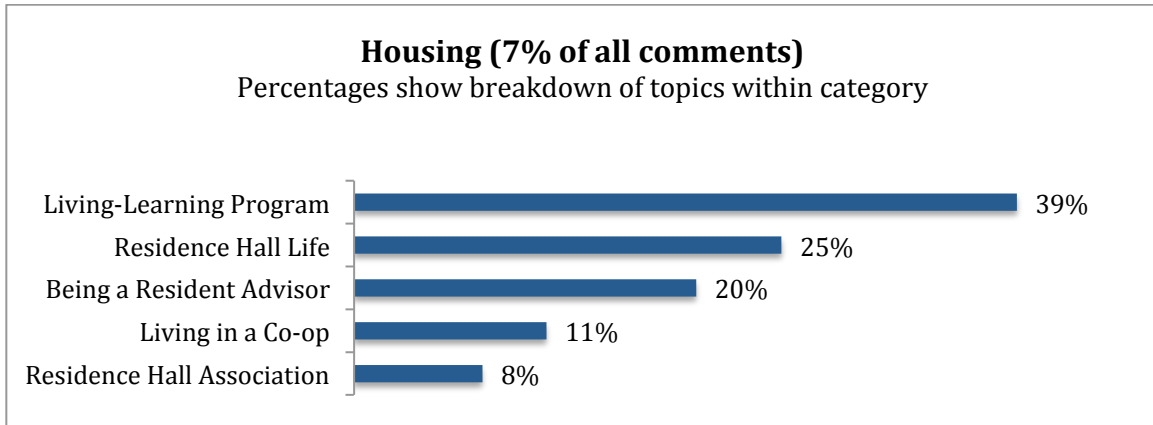
Sports play an undeniable role in helping U-M students feel connected. In addition to the comments here, where students related their experiences rooting for the Wolverines or being a member of one of U-M's club or varsity teams, many students also mentioned Intramural participation (counted among the co-curricular comments above). Football was by far the most common activity listed, despite the fact that students received the survey during the offseason.



- *As of right now, the sports. Nothing like getting the entire hall ready for a football game or watching the NCAA tournament with friends. Makes for a great experience. (LSA)*
- *Varsity Athletics. Being a part of the swimming and diving team has made me feel like Michigan is where I belong. (Kinesiology)*
- *Sporting events make me feel connected to the other students and remind me of the University's past and passionate alumni. (Art & Design)*

Housing

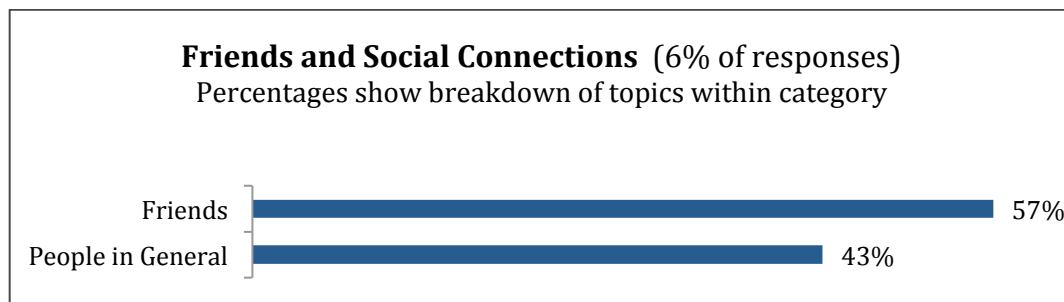
A small but meaningful percentage of students credited housing and residence life as key to their connection. Most numerous among this group were students who participated in a living-learning program (these comments were also counted as academic groups in the “Academics” category)



- *Health Science Scholars Program, it is a living learning community and it has truly made the difference in my transfer from home to college life. (Nursing)*
- *Women in Science and Engineering Residence Program. I feel like I belong with these girls, I'm not weird for liking math and science, I'm normal and valued. (Engineering)*
- *Dorm life: my hallmates have become my brothers. I'm a female and they accept me like their sister. I don't know what I'd do without them. (LSA)*
- *Being a resident advisor. I love helping students get comfortable in their time at the University of Michigan and hope I have made an impact on them. (LSA)*

Social Connections

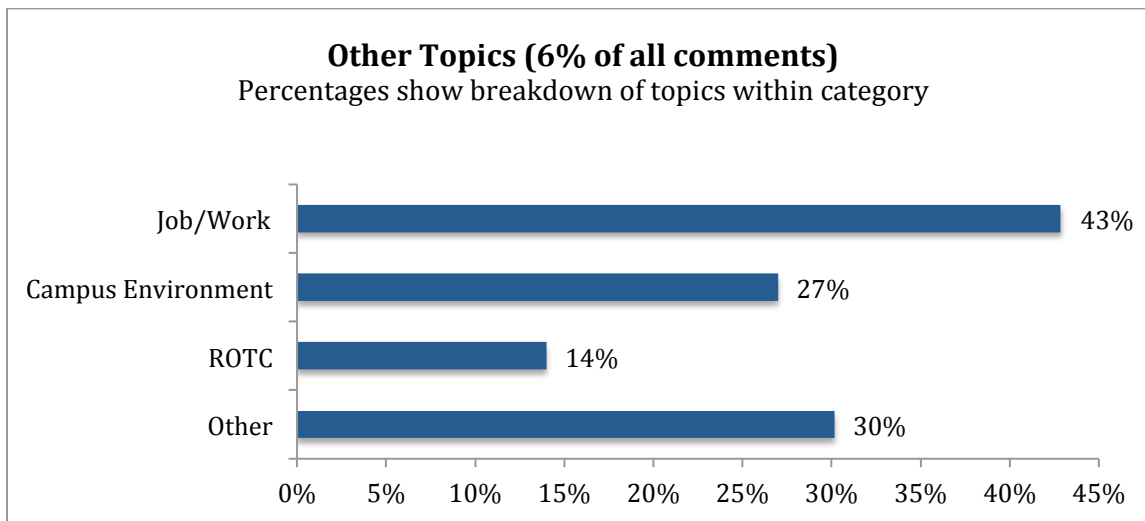
Many student comments related an interpersonal element to the activity that made them feel connected, and these were distributed across every category. The Social Connections category was reserved for comments that spoke exclusively about friends and interpersonal relationships.



- *I feel most connected to the University by the people I have met here. (Engineering)*
- *Hanging out with and meeting new friends from all over the country! (Engineering)*
- *My senior year I lived with 8 roommates from all sorts of majors, sororities, etc. They make me feel most connected to this school. (LSA)*
- *It has always been the people. I like the variation and general desire to learn in people here. (Music, Theatre & Dance)*
- *Seeing people on the Diag and in other places around campus promoting their club, hosting events, doing fun stuff, makes me feel connected with the University. (LSA)*

Other

There were several other topics that did not fit neatly into the previous categories. These included students' jobs, particularly on campus; their overall perception of the campus environment; and involvement in activities like the Reserve Officers' Training Corps.



- *My job at Victors is really great for meeting new people/friends and it's also a great place to talk to other students who are customers. (Nursing)*
- *I am a student manager at Michigan Telefund and working there has increased my understanding and knowledge of the university immensely. (Engineering)*
- *Being able to say "Go Blue!" around the world, and having other people know exactly what you're talking about. (Engineering)*
- *Logging on to the computers and being able to swipe my ID to get into certain buildings, knowing those who are not affiliated with the school cannot do the same. (LSA)*
- *Being part of one of the best public universities in the world and having tremendous academic, social, and co-curricular activities available. (LSA)*
- *ROTC made me feel most connected to the university. We weren't the US Marine ROTC unit, but the Michigan Marines. It definitely bridged the gap between my identity as a man who wished to serve my country, and a Michigan man. (Engineering)*