

# Understanding the digital lives of university students

Findings from a multi-institutional  
study into the behaviour and  
preferences of users of university  
digital devices and services

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## Background

The digital landscape has changed drastically over a relatively short period of time. The technology available in modern smartphones has transformed the way we access services, and changed business practices across all aspects of life.

A recent survey by DeLoitte stated “no other device has had the same commercial and societal impact as the smartphone” and for students the impact of this has been profound and beneficial to both their social and academic lives.

Students are able to access information and services in more ways than ever before, from learning materials and resources, to greater collaboration tools. For universities this can present challenges as well as opportunities, as they look to make sure that the right services are made available to students.

For institutions to ensure that they are taking advantage of the opportunities presented by technology, it is important that they understand the ways that students live their digital lives. In this way higher education institutions can help to shape their IT strategy.

By understanding students’ preferences and how technology can best support teaching, learning and student administration, institutions are able to recognize best practice for digital service delivery in an evolving mobile environment.

# The Project

This research project was commissioned by campusM and delivered in partnership with Alterline, an independent research agency. The research investigated the digital lives of students, examining how they use technology throughout their university life and understanding where their experiences can be improved. An online survey was completed by students from three participating institutions (Lancaster University, Aston University and King's College London). The survey was promoted through the campusM app and was completed by both undergraduate and postgraduate students.



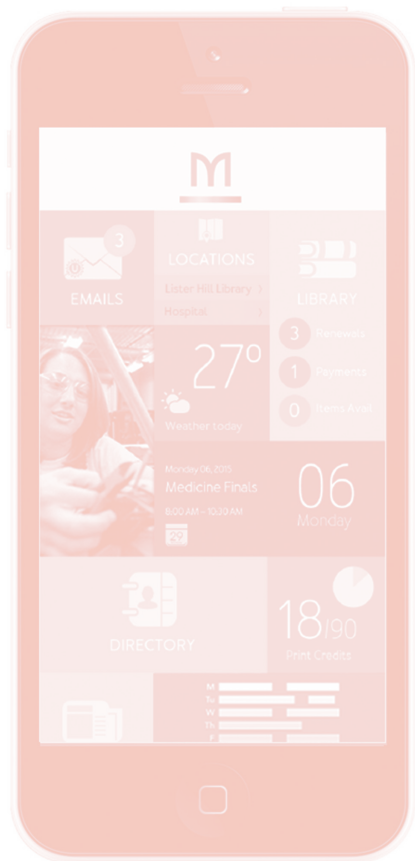
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This paper reports on the findings from our survey (completed by 1033 students between May and June 2016).

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# Technology is a vital part of students' lives... especially smartphones and laptops

Smartphones and laptops are owned or regularly used by almost all students. These devices are seen as being integral to the lives of many, with **74% of smartphone users and 62% of laptop users stating that they are “unable to live without it”**.



**88%**

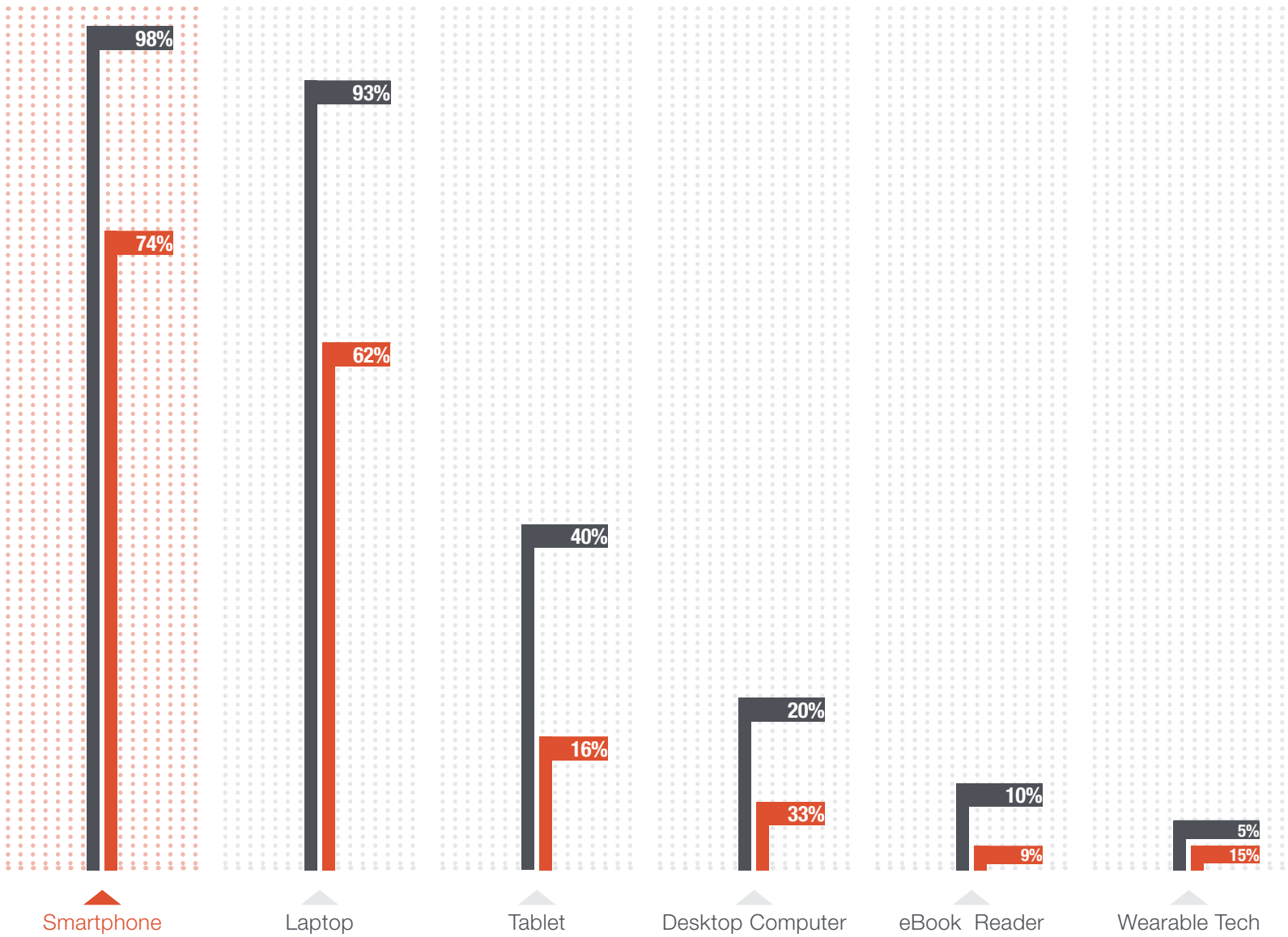
say they find it easy to use new technology

**87%**

acknowledge that technology is engrained into their lives

**88%**

feel that they would struggle to complete their studies without technology



■ Percentage of students who own or regularly use device

■ Percentage of device owners or users who say they can't live without it

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# Students' favourite apps connect them with the world, and offer ease-of-use and entertainment

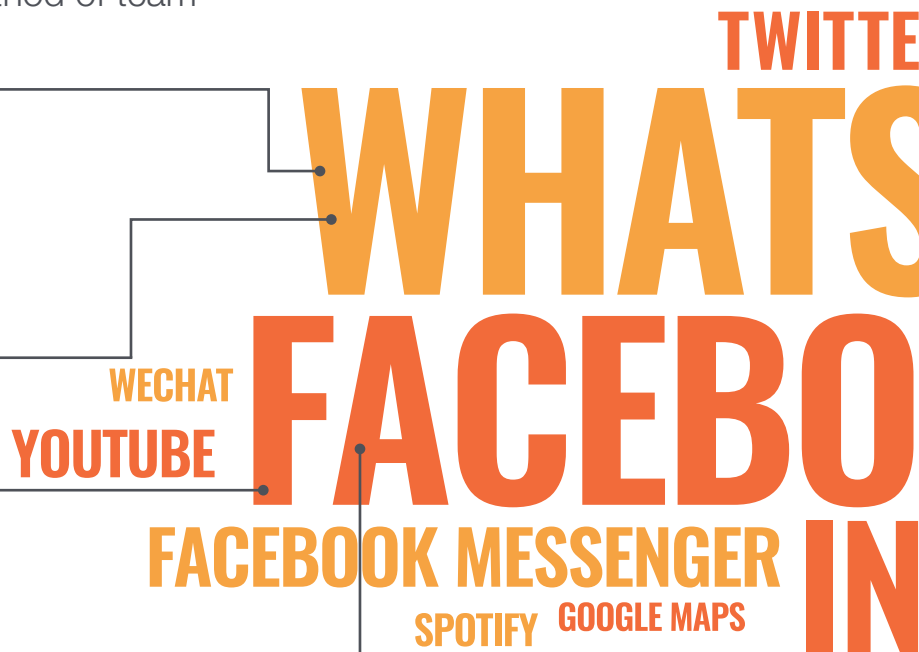
The word cloud below shows which app students said was their favourite. The larger the app name, the more often it was mentioned.

“ It is **easier to communicate** with fellow colleagues that are within your course. Whatsapp is an effective method of team and group work.

“ It really helps to have a **free** messaging app that **keeps me connected** to my family and friends, no matter where they are and what device they use.

“ It is **entertaining** (watching videos, sharing photos) and **educational** (reading articles).

“ Facebook allows me to **keep in touch** with friends and see what they're up to and also let other people know what I'm up to.



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SAPP  
ILANCASTER  
OK SNAPCHAT  
CITY MAPPER GOOGLE  
STAGRAM

“ Twitter **connects me** to people across the world and **gives me a platform** to express opinions.

“ I use Snapchat all the time, it allows me to **communicate** with my friends easily and to show them bits of my life that I couldn't show them with text messages only.

“ Snapchat is **fun** and a good way to **connect with friends**. The new filters have improved it massively and made it an **exciting** app to use.

“ I can **browse** through photos of the people I follow and **get inspiration** for new places to go and new food dishes to try/cook.

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**Students stated that the student portal, lecture recordings and notes, and an institutional mobile app are the most important digital services universities can offer**

## **Which digital services do students select as the most important?**

“ The most important thing is the recording of lectures. It really helped me survive the course. Without this, I would be very likely to fail since the material is very complex and the amount is almost overwhelming.

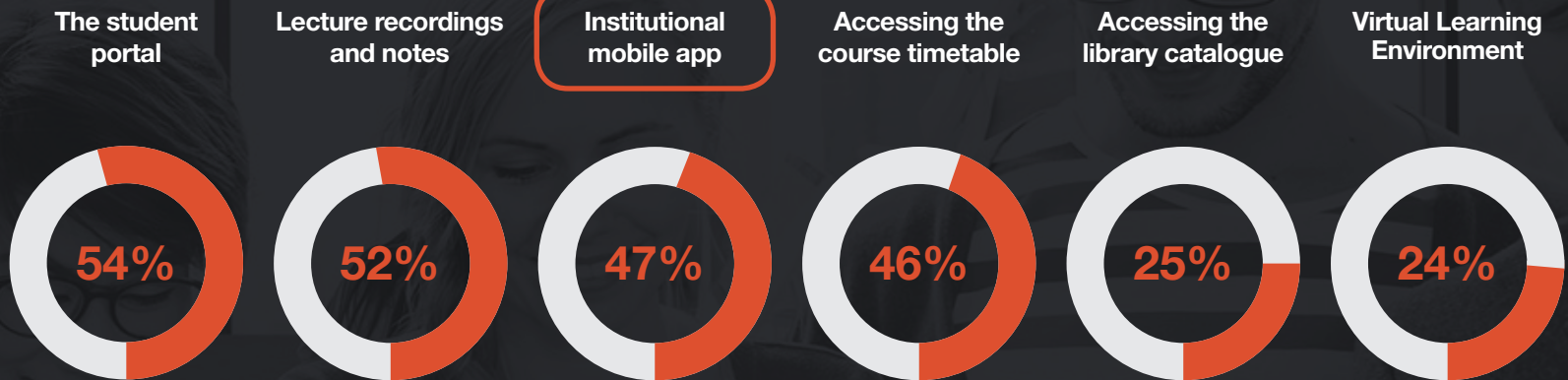
“ The app is really useful when I need to check my timetable quickly when I'm on the move to see if anything has changed. Many times, it has stopped me from being late or going to lectures that I don't have.

“ Library searches are a key part of my research for assignments. Without it, I would have found things much more labour intensive and challenging.





9 out of 10 students prefer a single app that covers all aspects of their studies (rather than multiple apps)

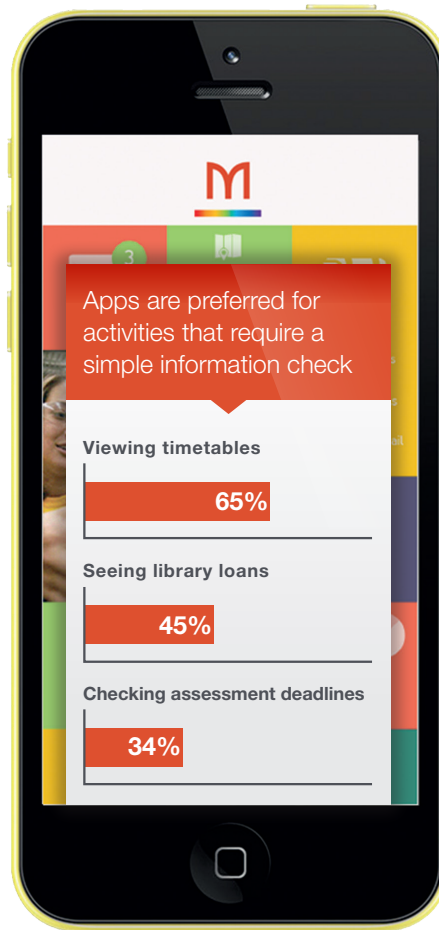


Students were asked which 3 digital services were most important to them. The above figure shows the services that were most often selected as important, and the percentage of students who selected each service. Services that were seen as being less important were: fee payments (11%), institution website (11%), print credits (7%), managing student record (7%), student enquiries (7%), careers service (5%), and cashless payments (4%).

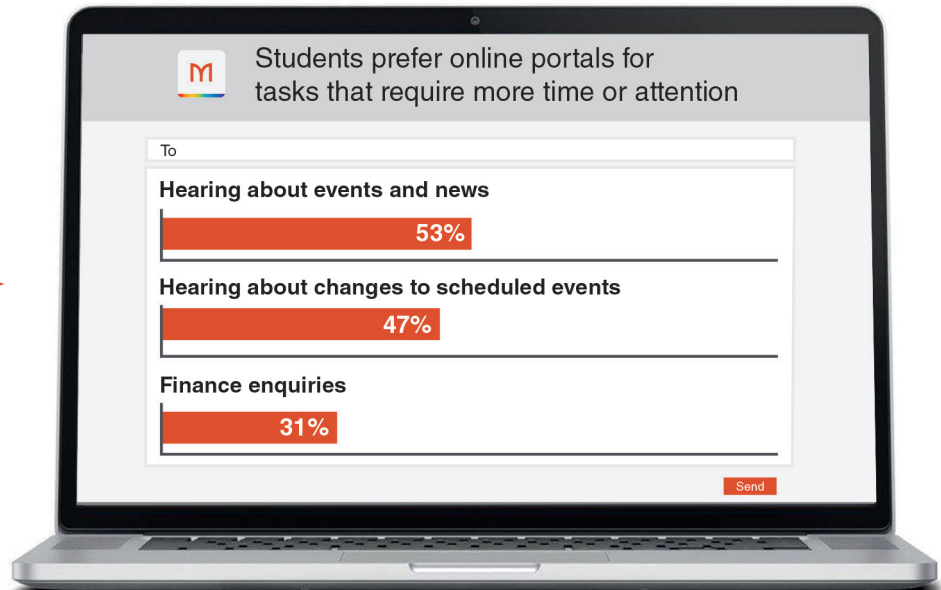
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# Students use mobile for transactional activities

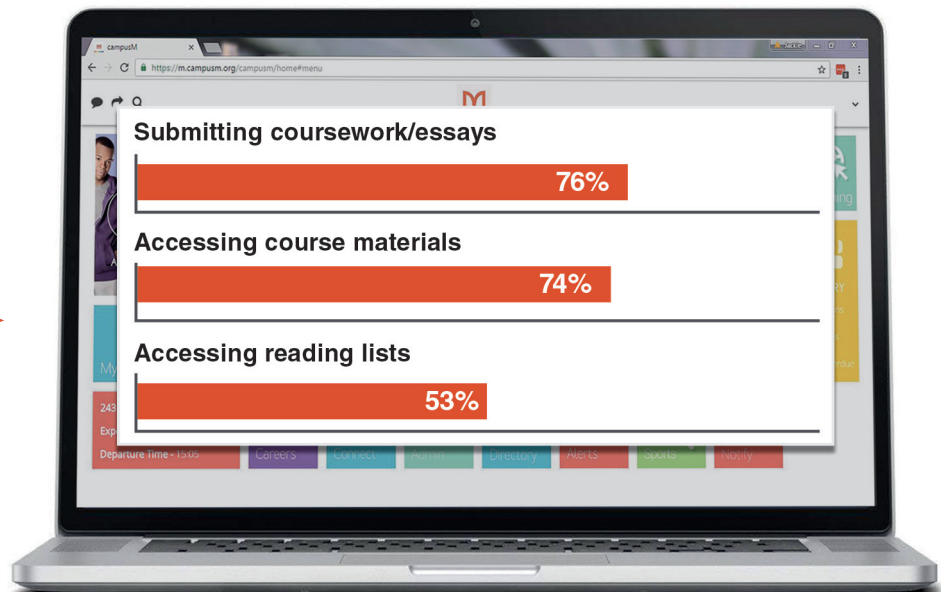
Students look to their mobile device when they need information immediately or on the move. However for more time-consuming or complex tasks, laptops accessing portals are still the preferred option.



Email notifications are preferred for updates and enquiries



Students prefer online portals for tasks that require more time or attention



# Features that students expect in their institutional mobile app

## Academic

 Library search

 In class voting

 Accessing the VLE

 Course information


 Assessment deadlines

 Registering attendance

 Performance information

 Viewing reading lists

## Student administration

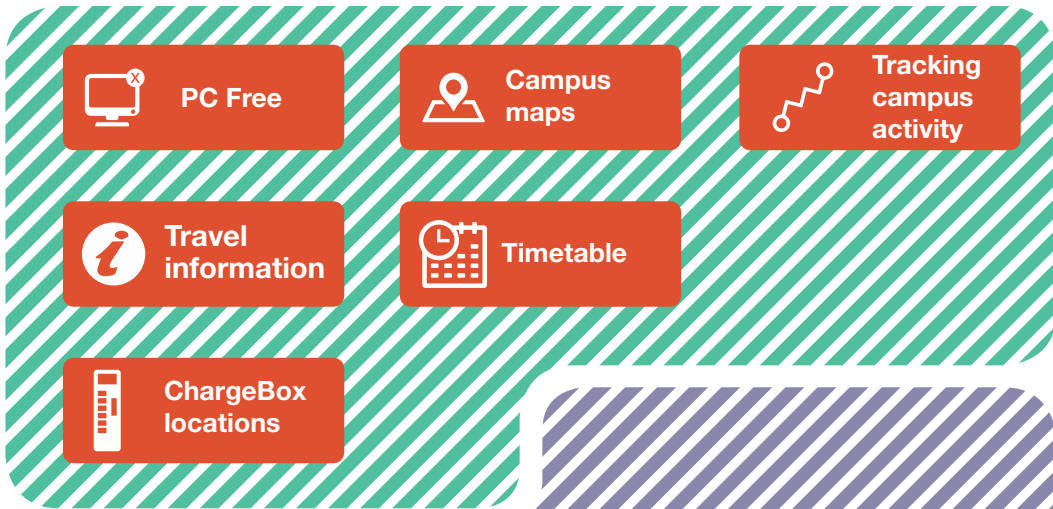
 Searching numbers and contacts

 Library loans

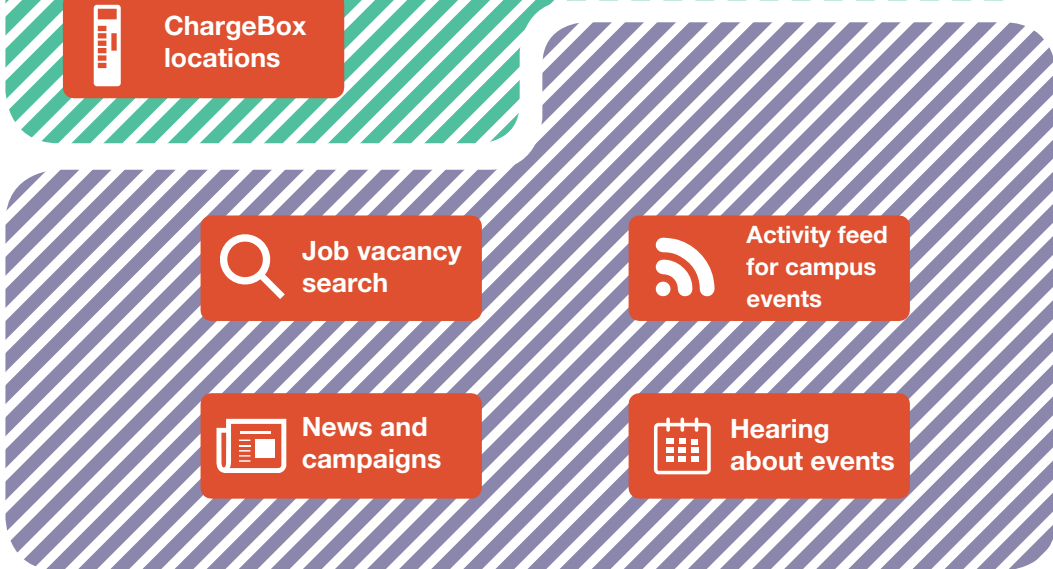
 Booking study spaces

 Emergency contacts

 Finance enquiries



## Logistics



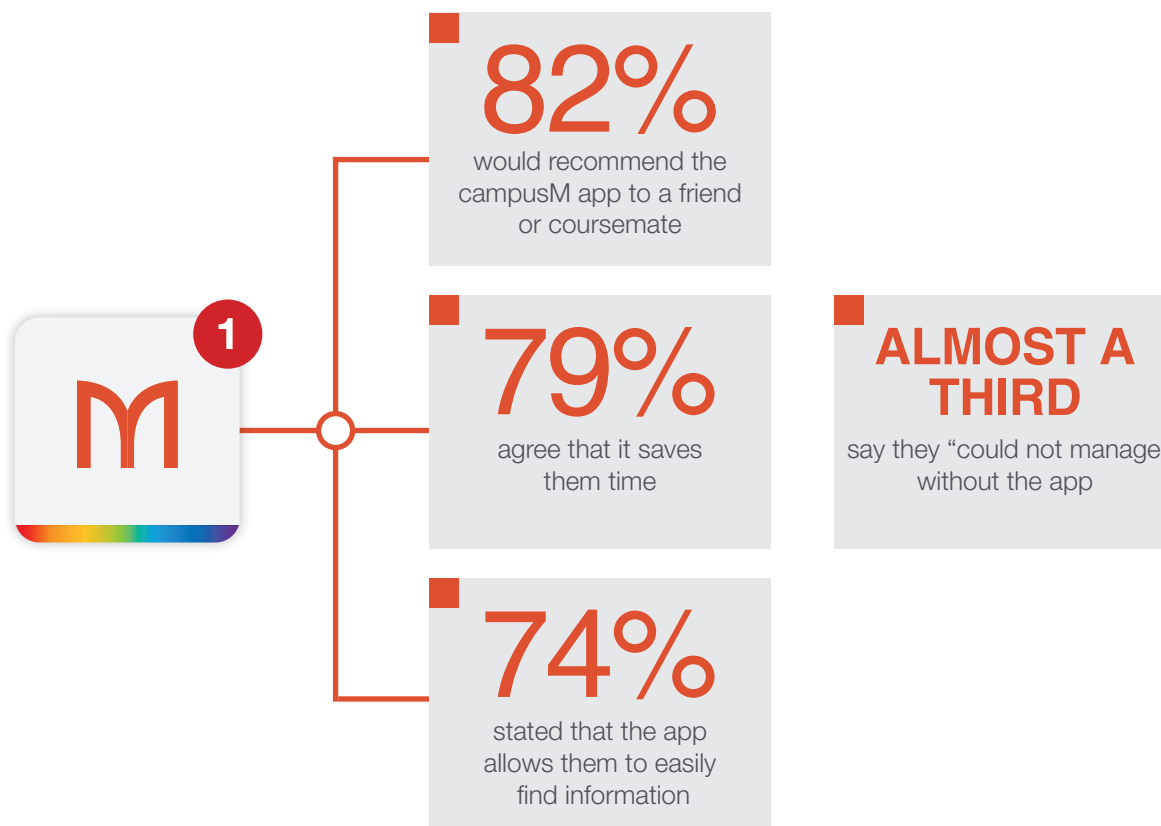
## News and Events

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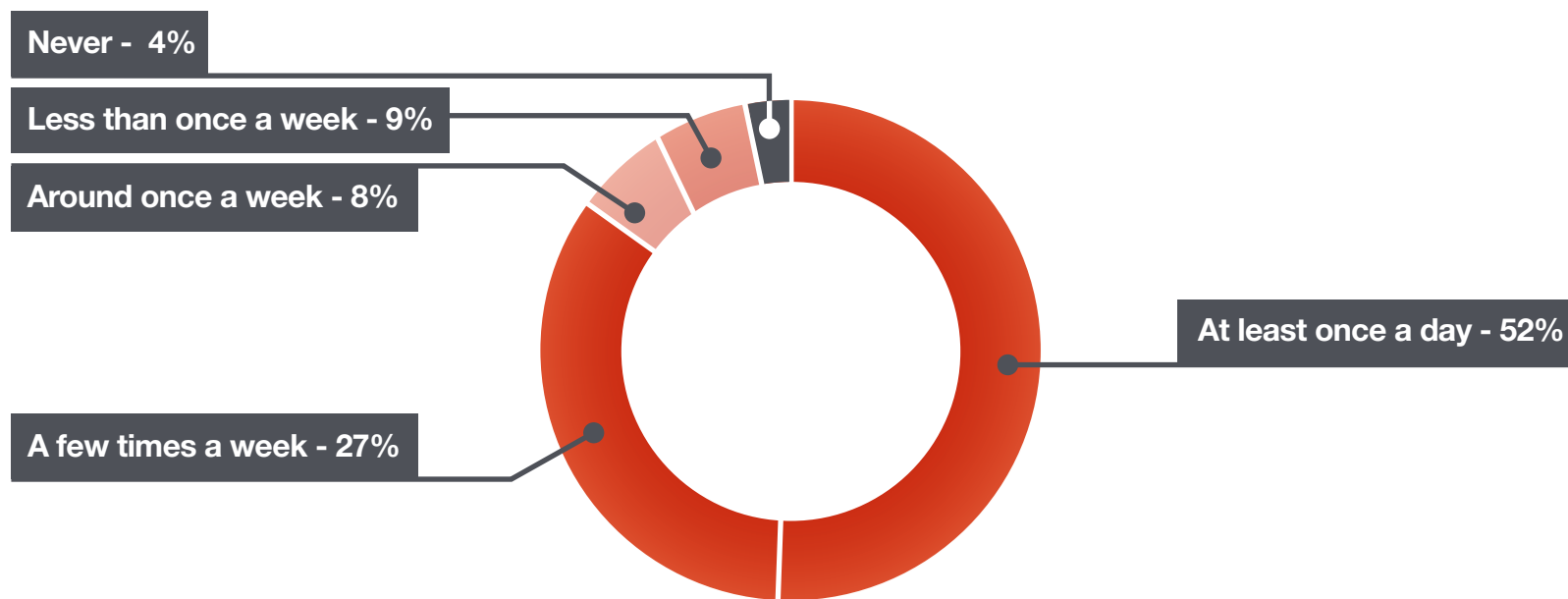
# Students are highly satisfied with the campusM app

**Four out of five students with the campusM app would recommend it to a friend or coursemate.** It's most often described as useful, convenient, and helpful, and its strongest features are that it saves students time, and allows them

to easily find information. The value it provides to students is reflected in the high frequency of its use: three-quarters of those who have the app use it a few times a week or more, with a quarter using it multiple times a day.



The majority of students are frequent users of the app: as shown in the figure below, over half use it at least once a day.



The word cloud shows which words students use to describe the campusM app. The larger the word, the more often it was mentioned.



campusM apps are used by some of the leading teaching and learning institutions in the world, and we are committed to ensuring that students and other stakeholders get the best possible app experience, no matter what device they are using.

Get in touch to find out more.

## **Ex Libris campusM**

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 [www.campusm.com](http://www.campusm.com)

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The logo for ExLibris campusM. 'ExLibris' is in a dark grey sans-serif font with a multi-colored arc above the 'i'. 'campusM' is in a smaller, red, lowercase sans-serif font below it.

The logo for alterline. The word 'alterline' is in a lowercase, grey, sans-serif font. The vertical bars of the 'l's are colored orange and blue.