

# Understanding the digital lives of university students

2017/18 research findings

Findings from the second year of an annual multi-institutional study into the behaviour and preferences of users of university digital devices and services.

ExLibris  
campusM

alterline



## Background

Smartphones have now been around for over a decade and within that short period of time they have become smarter, quicker and more indispensable.

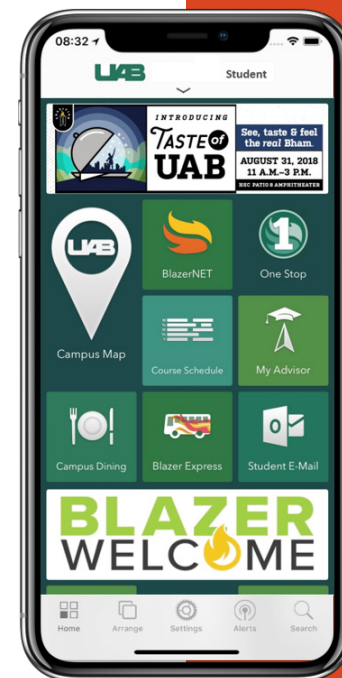
A recent UK study shows the vast majority of 16-24-year olds own a smartphone, checking it dozens, or hundreds of times a day. It is the first thing they look at when they wake up and the last thing they check before bed, and even during the night.

Deloitte have said that smartphones “will likely increasingly be regarded as the primary way to communicate, interact and transact” and with the advent of Apple and Android Pay, phones are becoming more a part of everyday life.

As technology is constantly evolving, one of the challenges for Higher Education leaders is to keep up with how students are using their devices and, almost as importantly, how they feel about them.

In 2016, campusM and Alterline first partnered to survey students about their attitudes and experiences with various aspects of digital technology. The results of this survey helped inform not just the campusM roadmap but also institutional strategies and in 2017 the survey was repeated, with both similar questions to review trends and refreshed look at some of the up and coming topics.

Our aim is to continue to help higher education institutions to make informed decisions on strategy, student engagement, assess trends as well as continue to ensure that our product continues to be a leading mobile solution for students.





## Project

This project was the second year of a research programme commissioned by campusM and delivered in partnership with Alterline, an independent research agency, investigating 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 six participating institutions from the United States and the UK (Edinburgh Napier University, University of Hull, King's College London, University of Montana, Queen Mary University London, and the University of Alabama). The survey was promoted through the campusM app and was completed by both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

**This paper reports on the findings from our survey which was completed by 2420 students between October 2017 and March 2018.**

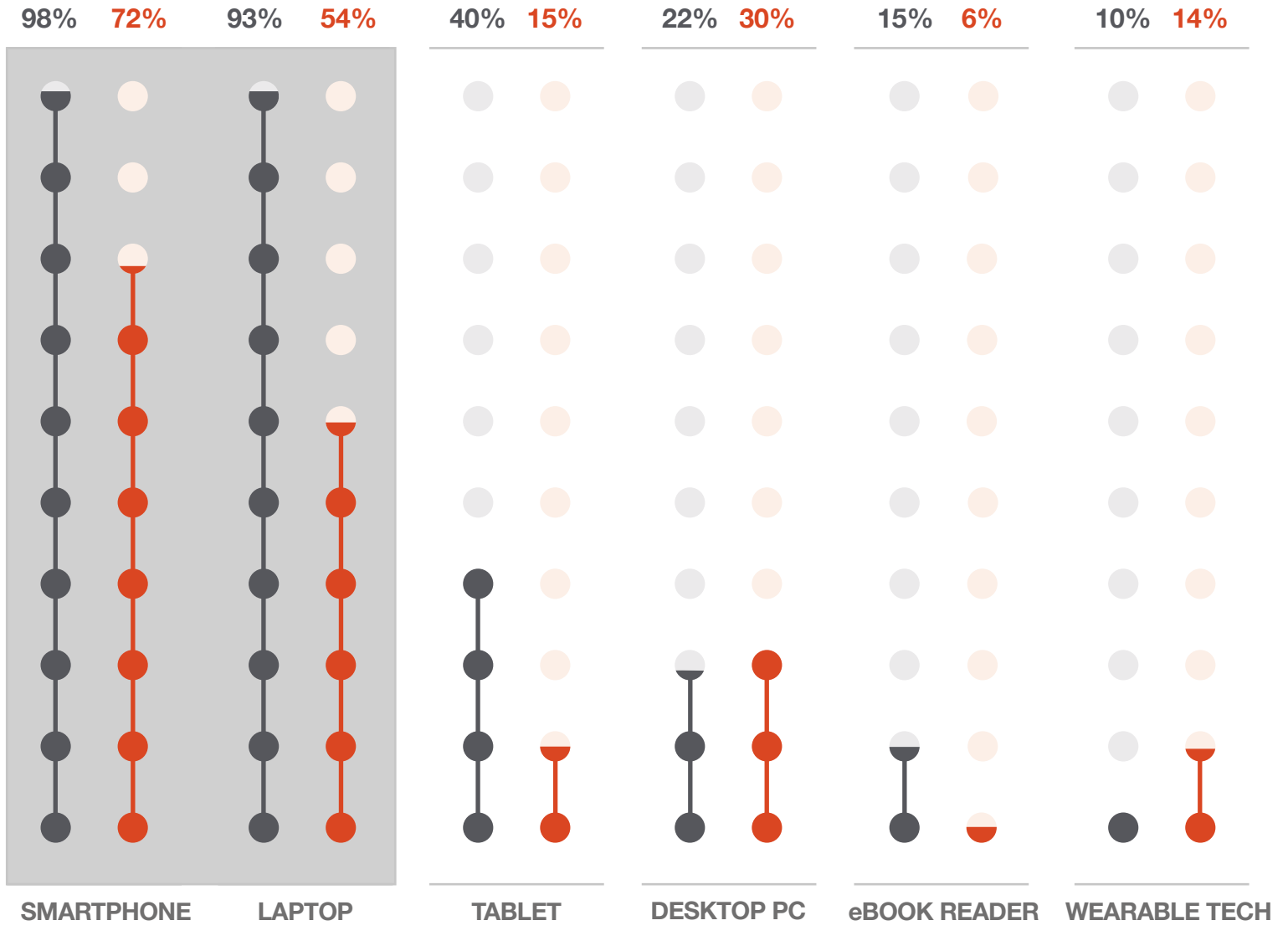
## Technology is an important part of student's lives... especially smartphones

Almost all students own or regularly use a smartphone and a laptop, with smartphones being the most commonly used device. Use of these devices is unchanged from the 2017/18 survey.

Students see smartphones as most integral to their lives, with almost three-quarters of users saying they are unable to live with their smartphone, compared to just over half of laptop users.

Students who took part in the 2017/18 survey were more likely to own wearable tech and an eBook reader than those who took part in the 2016/17 survey (5% and 10%), but how important they are to students remains static.





Percentage of students who own or regularly use device
  Percentage of device owners or users who say they can't live without it

## Students see technology as vital to their studies – more so than to their social life

Only just over a third of students (36%) agree that their social lives would be ruined if they did not have their digital devices. Many more see technology as vital in their academic life; 87% admit that they would struggle to complete their studies without technology.

Students talk about how many different aspects of their studies are completely reliant on technology, from accessing revision and lecture materials and e-resources and journals, writing and submitting coursework, using degree-specialist technology for design, science, or computing courses, and scanning and printing. To a lesser degree, admin and finances, finding lectures and seminars, and communication with tutors and other students are also made easier by technology.

“**Pretty much everything for classes is online, now. So it would be impossible to complete coursework without technology.**”

87%



% WHO SAY THEY WOULD STRUGGLE TO COMPLETE STUDIES WITHOUT TECHNOLOGY


36%



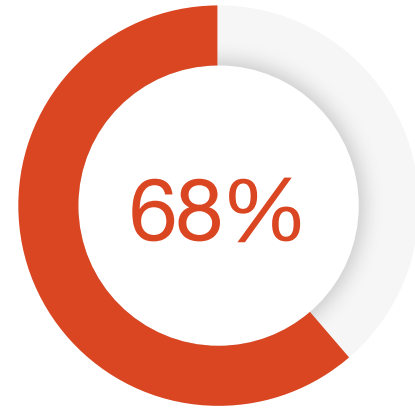
% WHO SAY THEIR SOCIAL LIVES WOULD BE RUINED WITHOUT DIGITAL DEVICES

## Study-related information online is felt to be more reliable than general information

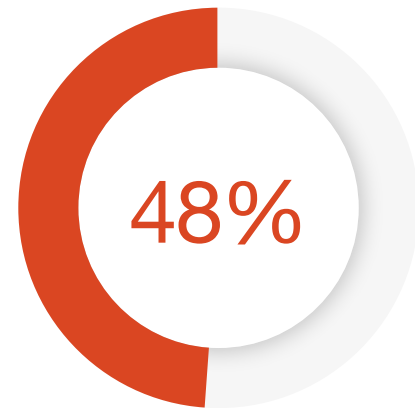
Over two-thirds of students are worried about the reliability of information online but they are more likely to view information specifically relating to their studies as more reliable than general information on the internet. However, despite these worries, just over two-thirds feel that they are able to easily spot 'fake news' on the internet, which may help mitigate concerns about the reliability of information.

 **68% feel they are able to easily spot 'fake news' on the internet**

**“ You can google just about anything and it only take 10 minutes to be able to tell if something is true or false.”**



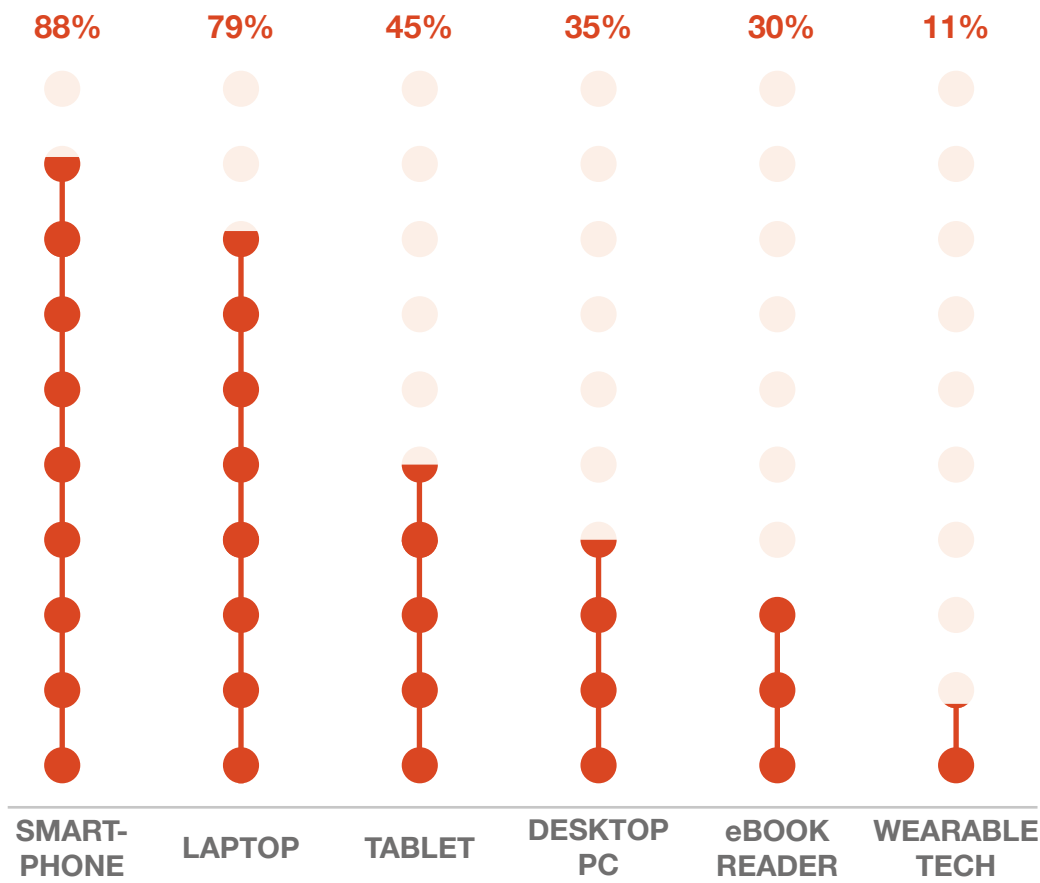
ARE WORRIED ABOUT THE RELIABILITY OF INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET IN GENERAL



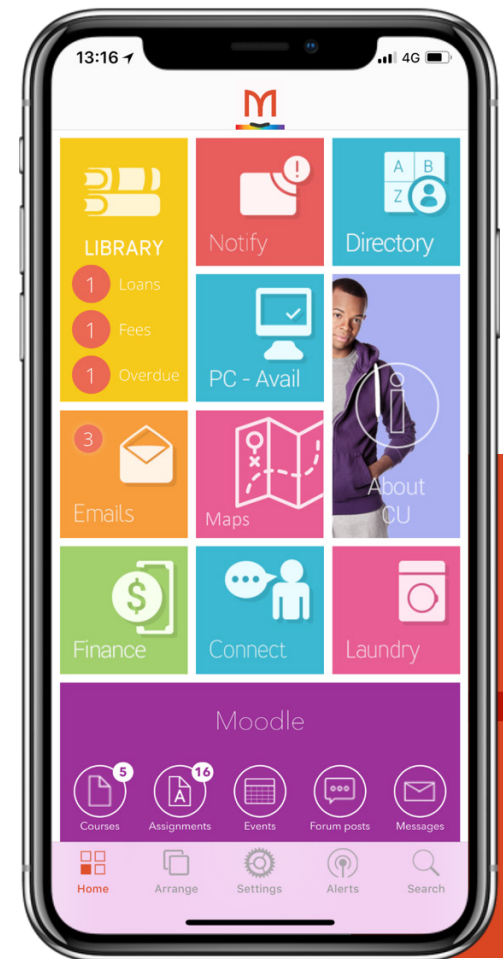
ARE WORRIED ABOUT THE RELIABILITY OF INFORMATION RELATING TO THEIR STUDIES

## Smartphones are most often used device for study and university-related tasks, especially for simple, quick activities

88% of students use their phone for university at least once a day, while slightly less (79%) use their laptops for their studies at least once a day.



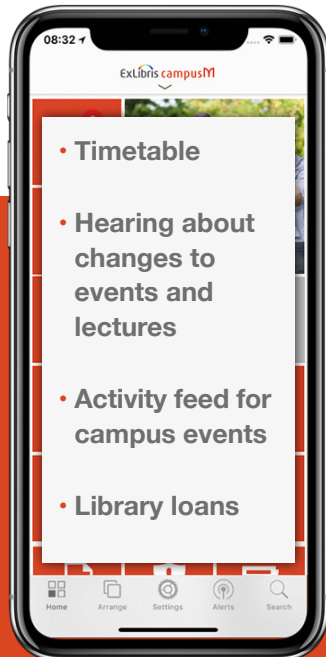
Proportion of students who own each device who use it at least once a day for university



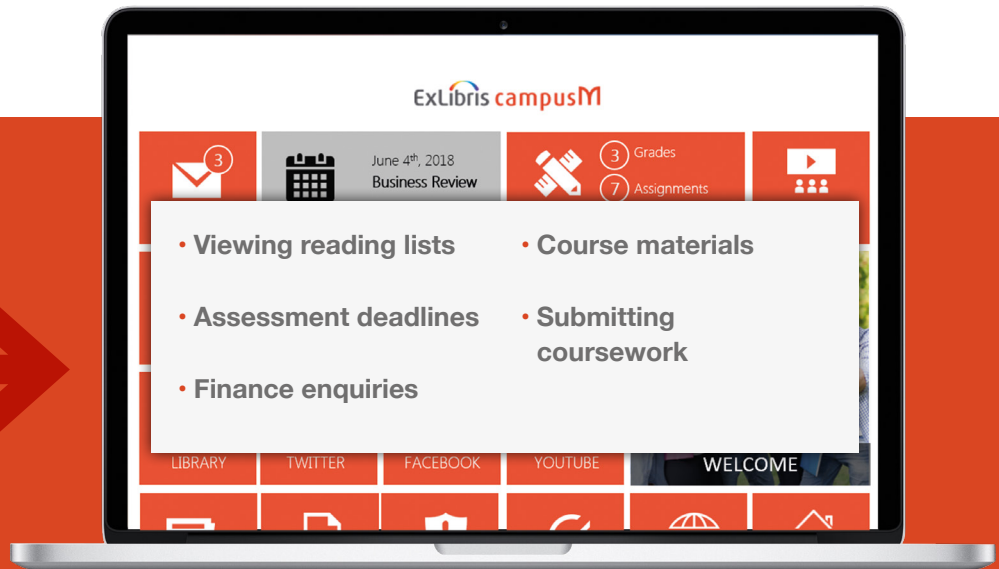


Students look to their mobile device when they need information immediately or on the move. However for more time-consuming or complex tasks, accessing portals via laptops are the preferred option.

**Smartphones are preferred for activities that require a simple information check**



**Laptops are preferred for activities for tasks that require more time or attention**



## Almost half of students see an institutional mobile app as one of most important digital services universities can offer

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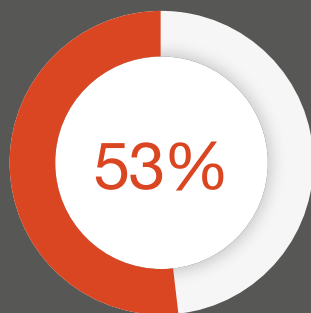
### WHICH DIGITAL SERVICES DO STUDENTS SELECT AS THE MOST IMPORTANT?

“The app is probably the single most useful thing as it links to all sorts of information, timetable, library, canvas, PC finder... this is on an ongoing basis.”

“I always rely on checking my timetable on my phone to see where I have to be and when. I check it the previous night and set my alarm to wake up for morning lectures accordingly. I heavily depend on the app!”

“I use the recorded lectures on a daily basis and I couldn't study without them.”

## 3 MOST IMPORTANT DIGITAL SERVICES ACCORDING TO STUDENTS

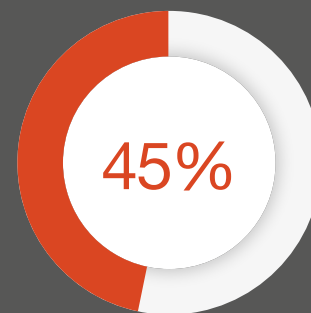


LECTURE RECORDINGS AND NOTES

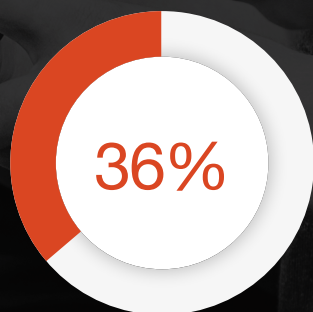


INSTITUTIONAL MOBILE APP

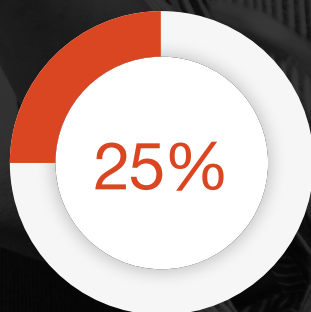
COMPARED TO THE 2016/17 SURVEY, THE MOBILE APP IS SEEN AS THE SECOND MOST IMPORTANT DIGITAL SERVICE, RATHER THAN THE THIRD.



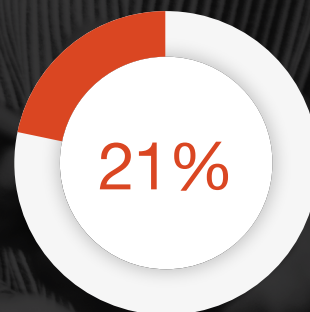
ACCESSING THE COURSE TIMETABLE



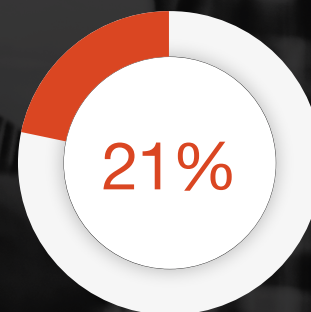
THE STUDENT PORTAL



ACCESSING THE LIBRARY CATALOGUE



THE VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT



THE INSTITUTION WEBSITE

Students were asked which 3 digital services were most important to them. The above figures show 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 (9%), print credits (6%), managing student records (7%), student enquiries (9%), careers service (8%), and cashless payments (6%)

## Alongside core features of the app, students see several others as vital, and many more as ‘nice to have’

### CORE SERVICES



JOB VACANCY SEARCH



LIBRARY LOANS



PC FREE



TIMETABLE



SEARCHING NUMBERS  
AND CONTACTS



CHARGEBOX LOCATIONS



LIBRARY SEARCH



CAMPUS MAPS



TRAVEL INFORMATION



FINANCE ENQUIRIES

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

## ADDITIONAL FEATURES

ABSOLUTELY VITAL



ASSESSMENT DEADLINES



ACCESSING COURSE INFORMATION



EMERGENCY CONTACTS



GRADES AND PERFORMANCE INFORMATION



REGISTERING ATTENDANCE



BOOKING STUDY SPACES



VIEWING MY READING LIST



UNIVERSITY NEWS AND NOTICES



TRACKING CAMPUS ACTIVITY

NICE TO HAVE



ACTIVITY FEED FOR CAMPUS EVENTS



IN CLASS VOTING



VIEWING COURSEMATES' PROGRESS



## Students remain highly satisfied with the campusM app

**Four out of five students with the campusM app would recommend it to a coursemate.**

It's most often described as useful, easy, and helpful, which align with the words students use to describe their ideal app. Students agree that the app saves them time, allows them to easily find information, and that it helps them with their studies.

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, and over a third say they “could not manage” without the app.



✓ WOULD RECOMMEND THE APP TO A FRIEND OR COURSEMATE



🕒 AGREE THAT IT SAVES THEM TIME

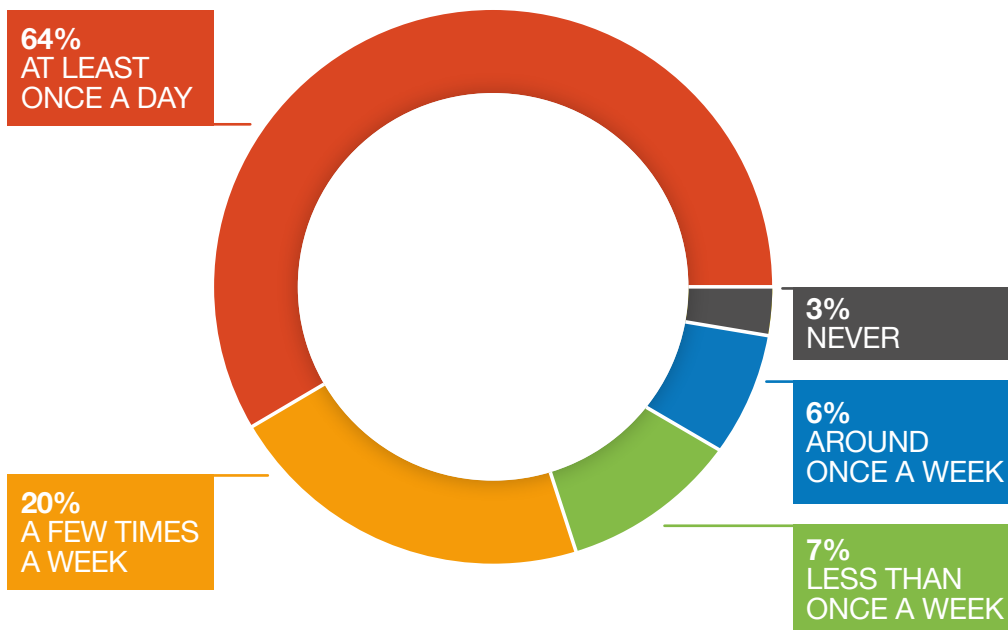


📖 SAY THAT THE APP ALLOWS THEM TO EASILY FIND INFORMATION

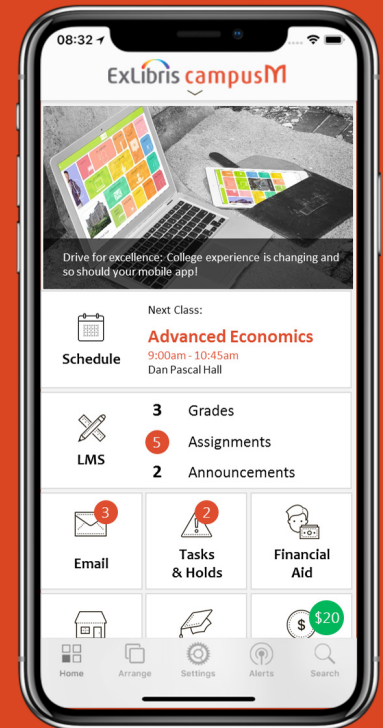


🏆 SAY IT HELPS THEM WITH THEIR STUDIES

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



# 38%



SAY THEY “**COULD NOT MANAGE**”  
WITHOUT THE APP

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  
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