

ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGE UNIONS INTERNATIONAL

Founded in 1914, the Association of College Unions International (ACUI) is a nonprofit educational organization that brings together college union and student activities professionals from hundreds of schools in seven countries. Its members work on urban and rural campuses, in two-year and four-year institutions, and at both large and small schools.

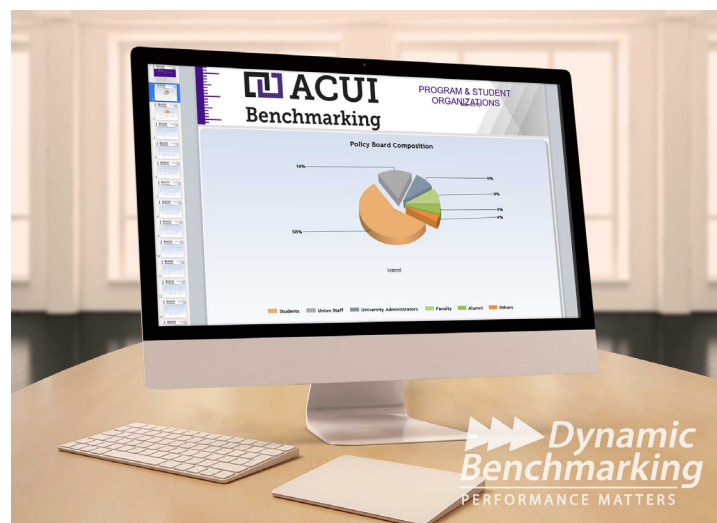
Members are students and administrators whose mission is to build campus communities. ACUI enriches them all through education, advocacy, and the delivery of services. ACUI called upon Dynamic Benchmarking to create a platform that would house both a comprehensive salary survey and an operations study that would not only collect extensive information from its members, but in turn, provide them with an easily accessible bank of data to assist in data-driven decision making for their organizations.

ACUI is a nonprofit educational organization that brings together college union and student activities professionals from hundreds of schools from seven countries. Its members represent campuses ranging from small, private colleges to large, public universities; both two-year and four-year institutions; and campuses located in urban, suburban and rural locations. ACUI came to Dynamic Benchmarking with two studies, a salary survey and an operations survey, that needed to become more user-friendly and applicable to all its members.

Struggling with Low Participation

Prior to engaging Dynamic Benchmarking, ACUI conducted a massive operations survey called *ACUI Info*. During the five years it was offered, only about 100 schools participated in the study and while well-received, the low participation levels made it painfully clear that the study was underutilized and simply not user-friendly. In addition to the operations study, ACUI also offered periodic salary surveys, but engagement for those studies was also disappointing and the association wasn't able to offer the study as frequently as it would have liked, as it was also unmanageable and not easy to use.

ACUI knew that its studies needed to be improved on two, very important fronts. First, it needed to reduce the number of questions to make the surveys more manageable and easier to complete and use for its members. While in some respects it was easy to see some obvious candidates for removal like outdated questions (e.g. — Does your campus offer VHS rental



kiosks?), there were other relevant issues not being addressed that called for the addition of new questions. With such a large and diverse membership, narrowing the list of questions seemed an impossible task.

“We wanted a tool that would be just as easy and inclusive for smaller schools to use as it was for larger colleges and universities, while still meeting the needs of both extremes of our membership and everyone in between,” comments Deana Nichols, Member Data Specialist for ACUI.

The other major goal for the new platform was to provide better results reporting. ACUI wanted to provide members with better, more meaningful information to justify and guide their decision-making. This meant offering more than the standard, static reports, but different options for comparisons, reports and even offering disaggregated data in some cases.

“Sometimes it’s not just about who’s doing what, but who to talk to about it so members can connect and share best practices,” adds Nichols. “We needed more than simple, one-size-fits-all reporting for our members to make these studies meaningful to them.”

Finding a Solution for Better Data, Usability & Reporting

As Nichols and her team struggled to find solutions to these issues, the answer presented itself when they were invited to attend DB Hive, a webinar series where Dynamic Benchmarking customers share their best practices and idea with each other.

“During the webinar, an association told its story about how its survey didn’t perform as expected because it was simply too large. That really hit home with us,” Nichols recounts. “As the story unfolded, we found that the association went on to cut its study questions by more than half and saw a dramatic increase in its response rate while still collecting the data its members wanted. That story confirmed that we had made the right decision in choosing to work with Dynamic Benchmarking.”



Question Filtering Provides Relevant Data

And while ACUI did eliminate many questions, Dynamic Benchmarking presented another solution that enabled much of the survey to remain intact while still making the overall data entry experience shorter and more relevant for each individual user.

“By adding simple ‘if-then’ logic to each study’s backend, we were able to eliminate entire sections of irrelevant questions for each user,” explains Dynamic Benchmarking Project Manager, Holly Maki. “For example, if a user indicates that his organization doesn’t offer catering services, no further questions are asked about catering services. When this is applied to multiple questions and survey sections, the time savings for the user is tremendous.”

This question filtering was especially vital when it came to questions regarding auxiliaries. Auxiliaries are services and/or features that campuses may or may not provide such as bookstores, dining services, ATMs, hotels, etc., and, while of great interest to those who do offer them, the questions would be a waste of time for those who do not. By using 'if-then' logic to filter out non-applicable questions, study participants not only save time, but non-responses to these questions are no longer counted against their threshold of completion percentage.

Launch of the Successful New Studies

The new and improved benchmarking study platform launched in December 2017 to a small beta group. An association-wide launch was kicked off with a how-to webinar in January 2018 that covered the basics of data entry and report generation. Two videos summarizing those topics were subsequently posted to the ACUI website as permanent resources for member reference.

To help improve member awareness and participation further, ACUI has implemented an ongoing marketing and communication campaign to their very busy membership. The studies are promoted through banner ads, periodic emails and an information sheet which is included in the new member packet. Snapshots of data pulled from the studies are also included in the ACUI bimonthly magazine *The Bulletin*.

"By continuing to promote the value of these studies we know our participation numbers will only increase," adds Nichols.

Additionally, with each new data collection period ACUI will add and promote a new feature of the benchmarking platform. Most recently, it added the *Copy Prior Year Data* feature which was of great value for previous study participants. Feedback to the new platform has been overwhelmingly positive.

"We are impressed with how user friendly and inclusive the studies are," says Nichols. "Our members also love that there are so many more options for reporting, how aesthetically pleasing they are and how quickly they can generate meaningful reports and charts on demand."

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Deana Nichols, Member Data Specialist

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