

A Career in College Unions and Student Activities

ACUI
career
center





Introduction

If you are looking for a rewarding career where you can have a positive impact on others, then a career in college unions and student activities may be right for you. The Association of College Unions International (ACUI) created this guide to provide you with a general overview of a career in college unions and student activities. It will introduce you to different career opportunities, and help you gain an understanding of what to expect in a student affairs graduate program.

Benefits of a Career in College Unions and Student Activities

A career in college unions and student activities provides you with a wide range of benefits. This career path offers limitless opportunities for you to make a difference on a grand scale and to enjoy the simple pleasure of working each day in a fun environment with colleagues who care. Below are some of the benefits available to student affairs professionals:

- Improve student learning on campus
- Create long-lasting relationships
- Join a unique community of people who foster the personal development of college students
- Enhance the overall college experience for students
- Be a part of an exciting and challenging work environment
- Gain access to professional development opportunities
- Help create innovative solutions to the problems affecting today's college students
- Know your work is meaningful
- Build a legacy

Additionally, unions and activities are all about collaboration, creativity, and fun. Every day is different, so professionals are constantly learning and there is no danger of being bored.

Is this the right career for me?

Many undergraduate students enjoy student leadership and employment experiences, but have you considered making a career of those experiences? College union and student activities careers vary by institution. However, they all allow you to take on responsibilities you did not have as an undergraduate, such as facility management, human resources functions, budget development, and evaluation and assessment.

To help determine if this is the right career for you, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you enjoy working with students?
- Are you stimulated by the college or university campus environment?
- Does pursuing a master's degree interest you?
- Do you have good planning, communication, and leadership skills?
- Are you a person who enjoys teaching others?
- Do you want to make a difference in students' lives?

If you answered "yes" to these questions, then you may be on your way to a successful career in college unions and student activities!

Experience

During their undergraduate careers, many college union and student activities professionals were involved in campus organizations or worked on campus. Some held leadership positions in student government or on the programming board. A few served on political, sustainability, advocacy, or diversity initiatives. Others actively participated in a fraternity, sorority, or service organization. And many were student employees in campus facilities, including on-campus housing, the library, the fitness center, the office of campus activities, or the college union. All of these roles provided individuals with an insight to the profession, including an introduction to the core competencies of the field.

The core competencies refer to a set of composite skills, knowledge, and behaviors that provides the basis and forms the foundation for successful professional practice in college union and student activities work. If you are considering a career in this field, it will be important for you to become familiar with these core competencies as they permeate all work in the profession. In preparing for a career in this field, seek out opportunities on campus that will familiarize you with the following competency areas:

- **Communication:** Ability to successfully exchange information through verbal and nonverbal symbols and behaviors.
- **Facilities Management:** Ability to successfully maintain attractive, safe, and fully operable environments.
- **Fiscal Management:** Ability to develop and manage financial systems through responsible stewardship of fiscal resources.
- **Human Resource Development:** Ability to interact with staff members and to manage staff resources in a consistent and equitable manner.
- **Intercultural Proficiency:** Ability to successfully communicate, understand, and interact among persons with differing assumptions that exist because of ethnic and cultural orientations.
- **Leadership:** Ability to develop and communicate a vision so that others commit to fulfilling the mission and goals of an organization.
- **Management:** Ability to coordinate, oversee, administer, and evaluate the daily operations of our facilities, programs, services, and activities.
- **Marketing:** Ability to identify primary markets and to develop and use effective promotions, communications, and informational pieces in a variety of media and formats.
- **Planning:** Ability to identify organizational needs and initiate strategies aligned with the institutional mission, strategic directions, and values.
- **Student Learning:** Ability to create educational environments and experiences that intentionally provide students with opportunities for acquiring intellectual and interpersonal skills, beyond the traditional place and time boundaries.
- **Technology:** Ability to understand the overall intent and to choose from appropriate tools, equipment, and procedures for service delivery and problem solving.

Typically, student affairs professionals have a master's degree in counseling, student services, or higher education. Often, senior-level positions require a doctoral degree. In addition to coursework, students pursuing a career in this field may be required to complete a graduate assistantship, internships or practicum experience, and a thesis.

Career Opportunities

A future in college unions and student activities can lead you to many rewarding career opportunities. Below are typical positions in the field. These positions fall into the following areas: administration, finance, campus life, program management, facilities/operations, and auxiliary services (e.g., campus dining services, ID services, bookstore, and retail operations).

Director of the College Union

Oversees the entire union operation and its personnel and establishes the overall standards of performance through selection of administrative personnel, budgetary controls, and overall direction of programs and services.

Director of Student Activities

Coordinates the complete campus activities program, which may include scheduling events and facilities, advising student organizations, and monitoring budgets for organizations.

Associate Director of the College Union

Performs the day-to-day management of union facilities, events, and activities, including, but not limited to, building operations, student employee and support staff supervision, program board and student organization advising, marketing activities, and assisting with conferences and special events.

Associate Director of Auxiliary Services

Coordinates the retail and/or auxiliary enterprises that support the educational, social, cultural, and recreational interests of the college or university that meet student needs and facilitates student development while generating revenue.

Associate Director of Facilities

Manages the day-to-day operations of the union facility and serves as the primary administrative liaison with facility users, including academic units, administrative departments, and student organizations.

Assistant Director of the College Union

Responsible for a specific functional area, such as programs and activities, food service, business operations, building operations and maintenance, personnel, or marketing.

Assistant Director for Diversity and Multicultural Affairs

Collaborates with a wide variety of constituents to assess programmatic needs that support diversity issues on campus including the assessment of current programs and the development of programs or communications strategies to promote diversity.

Assistant Director for Leadership Development

Works closely with students and staff relative to student leadership and development and presents leadership workshops and training sessions that address character formation and other relative subject matter.

Assistant Director for Programs

Manages the development of programs that serve the educational, social, cultural, and recreational interests of the institution. Provides direction for program activities regarding leadership development for students and professional development of support staff and may also supervise main campus events, such as orientation, homecoming, or ad-hoc groups dealing with specific programs or issues.

Commuter and Nontraditional Students Coordinator

Provides leadership, programming, and support for off-campus and adult students by developing programs, assessing needs, and coordinating publications and marketing materials.

Greek Life Coordinator

Responsible for the supervision, evaluation, recruitment, selection, and training of the greek life staff and ensures that all fraternity and sorority students enjoy a living environment that is physically and emotionally safe and supportive of the educational process.

Program Coordinator

Advises specific programming areas or student organizations on program content. Coordinates arrangements, planning, marketing, and evaluation for programs. This position may also supervise main campus events, such as orientation, homecoming, and leadership development programs.

Service Learning/Community Service Leadership Coordinator

Administers leadership education and community service programs and works closely with students and staff relative to student leadership and development. This position may also be responsible for presenting leadership workshops and training sessions that address character formation.

Student Organization Advisor

Advises student leaders and provides comprehensive direction and guidance to them. This position serves as a resource to students, assesses and maintains risk management practices, and participates on committees and other programs promoting student activities on campus.

Building Manager

Manages specific building operations such as space reservations, event services, information desk, checkroom, rentals, games room, retail shops, and hotel unit. In small unions, this position may be combined with that of business manager under the title assistant director for operations.

Financial Expectations

As you consider a career in college unions and student activities, you may be interested in knowing the salary ranges for some of the positions offered. The salary information on the next page was collected from the 2007–08 ACUI Salary Survey. The survey results include information from 178 institutions. Please note that salaries vary across institutions and involve a wide range of factors including geographic location, institutional type and size, as well as education and experience.

Position	Avg. Salary	Avg. Years in Position	Avg. Years of Experience
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Director Positions

University administrative director	\$88,458	12.8	23.6
Union director	77,415	7.8	19.6
Director of student/campus activities	59,930	5.7	13.1
Director of union and campus activities	68,407	6.4	17.9

Operations Positions

Associate director (operations)	63,757	7.6	17.3
Assistant director (operations)	51,389	6.2	13.6
Building/operations manager	40,753	6.0	11.3

Program Positions

Associate director (programs)	55,841	4.7	12.0
Assistant director (programs)	43,187	3.7	8.0
Program director	44,392	6.7	10.3
Program advisor	36,815	3.2	5.4
Service learning manager	37,158	2.6	4.6

* A breakdown of the data by gender, region, and enrollment can be found by viewing the complete survey results at: <http://www.acui.org/career>.

Some of the perks institutions offer may include employee tuition assistance, use of fitness/athletic facilities, casual dress code, access to athletic event tickets, use of services/amenities, dependent tuition assistance, ergonomic assessment of work space, cell phone reimbursement, and transportation compensation.

What to Expect in Graduate School

Graduate coursework will vary based on the specific program in which you choose to enroll. Learning outcomes may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Gain an understanding of institutional environments and cultures
- Understand and apply student development theories
- Utilize and critique research
- Participate in and lead activities that are designed to understand and embrace diversity
- Develop leadership and interpersonal skills
- Gain an increased self-awareness and understanding
- Understand the development of the whole student
- Help create and promote diverse environments
- Understand and appreciate service learning
- Participate in and lead activities that promote community building

Many graduate programs will require students to complete a graduate assistantship while pursuing their degree. An assistantship provides you with hands-on work experience in your area of interest. Most assistantships require 15–20 hours per week and offer some sort of financial assistance. To view a list of graduate assistantships, visit: www.acui.org/career.

Some graduate programs will also require students to complete a 10-hour-per-week practicum during one semester to provide you with an opportunity to gain experience in another area on campus.

During your course of study you will have an opportunity to develop strong professional and social networks, participate in group activities, develop hands-on experience, and begin to have a positive impact on the college student experience!

Support from ACUI

The Association of College Unions International (ACUI) supports its members in the development of community through education, advocacy, and the delivery of services. ACUI's essential and enduring tenets are core values—a small set of timeless, guiding principles that do not require external justification. They hold great intrinsic value and importance to Association members, staff, and key stakeholders. Core values are so fundamental they seldom change—if at all.

- Unconditional human worth
- Joy
- Learning
- Caring community
- Innovation
- Communication
- Integrity

ACUI Career Center

The ACUI Career Center is your hub for career information! Review open positions, post a candidate profile, upload your resume, and view salary information. You may also review the newly expanded Career Resources section featuring a guide to in-person interviews, tips from fellow professionals, 101 student affairs interview questions, and much more!

Student Programs

If you are looking for leadership development, opportunities to engage in meaningful cross-campus discussions, or an opportunity to compete in leisure activities, there are programs that meet your needs and interests.

- **I-LEAD®**
The Institute for Leadership Education and Development (I-LEAD®) is a weeklong living-learning program for tomorrow's leaders to

focus on personal growth and pertinent issues facing our world.

- **Annual Conference**

Through targeted workshops, students are able to discuss complex social issues related to their own leadership experiences, identity, growth, and development.

- **Poetry Slam**

The College Unions Poetry Slam Invitational (CUSPI) offers an opportunity for campuses to compete in slam poetry as a form of artistic expression, advocacy, and understanding.

- **Regional Recreation and Leisure Activities**

ACUI conducts regional tournaments which generally include bowling, billiards, table tennis, and video games. Some regions run three-on-three basketball, chess, darts—even dominoes!

The Bulletin

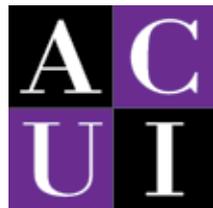
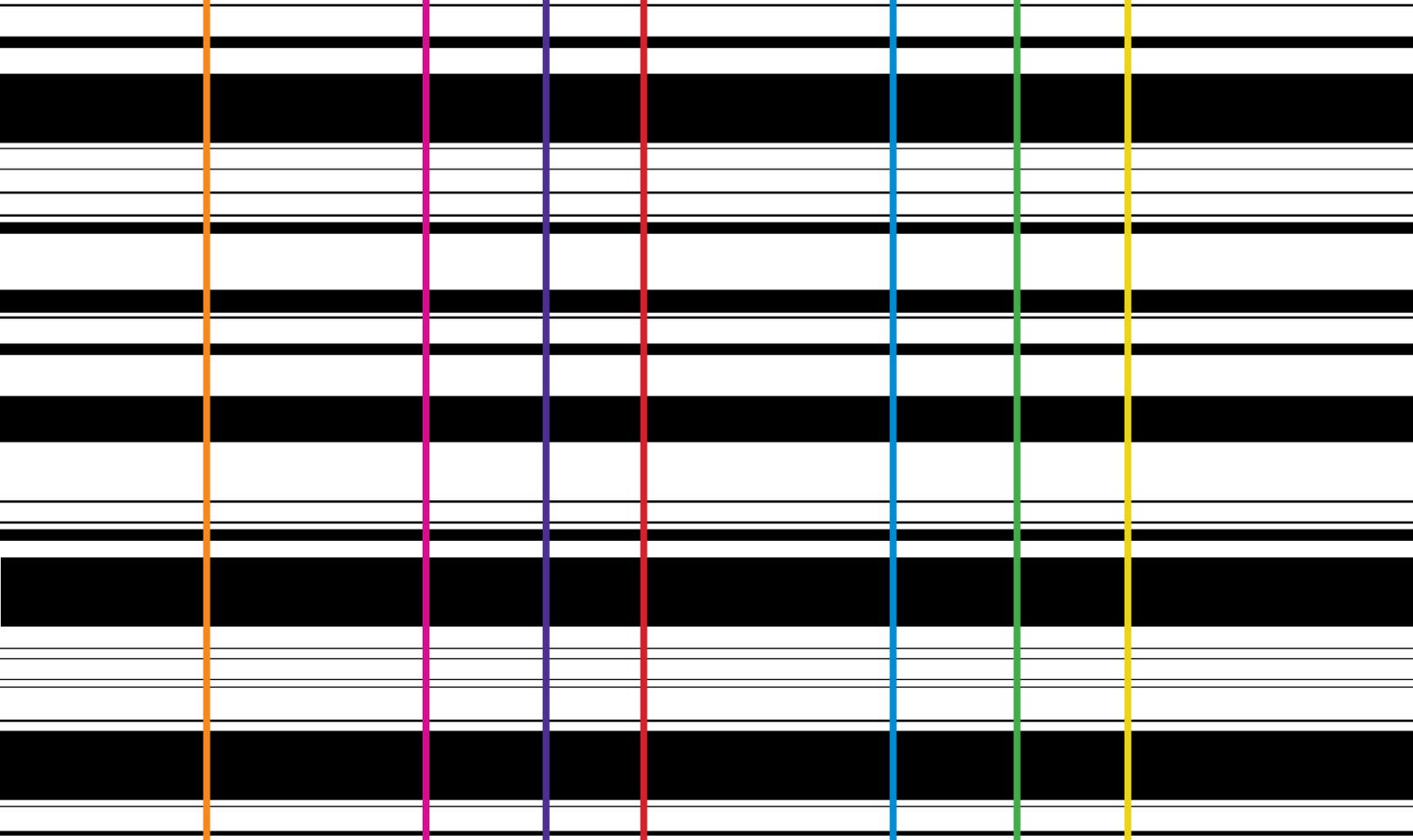
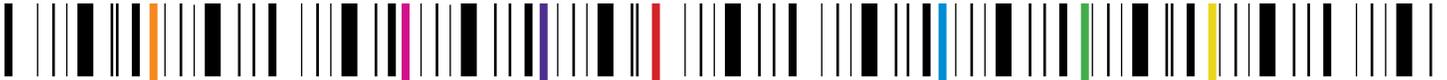
The Bulletin is an award-winning, 64-page, full-color magazine published bimonthly. It features everything from research analyses to best practices to practical reports about trends in the field.

Communities of Practice

Access information and resources in a specific area of interest, participate in the creation of best practices, and build a network of colleagues who are passionate about the same things you are.

Support

The ACUI Central Office staff is available to help by calling 812.245.ACUI or send an e-mail to acui@acui.org.



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