

Spring 2018 Survey Snapshot



Their Daily Digital:

Technology Trends Among U.S. College Students

In spring of 2018, American Campus Communities surveyed more than 25,000¹ ACC prospects and residents across the country — mostly sophomores and juniors aged 21 or younger. One of the topics we explored was technology and the key takeaways tell us a lot about how the 2018 modern student relates to and makes use of their digital world.

Which devices do you have?

94% Have smartphones

93% Have laptops

Now more than ever, today's students are mobile—so this is no surprise.

47% Have a smart TV

45% Have tablets

With the rise of streaming video, we expect to see smart TV usage continue to rise. Tablets often serve the same function, so their popularity may hover around the same level.

40% Have wireless speakers

This likely reflects the popularity of streaming music, movies and TV from mobile devices with small internal speakers. We expect to see smart home devices continue to increase in use.

37% Have gaming consoles

Gaming platforms are still big. 54 percent of students under 18 play daily or weekly, and Xbox One is their preferred console.² Remember, the platform can be used for much more than just games.

Which devices were the least likely to fall in a student's Top Three?

Single-board computers (SBCs) like Raspberry Pi and Arduino, which are frequently used by engineering and computer science students (and hobbyists). While SBCs are a niche product now, they are increasing in popularity for project-based learning in high schools and colleges.

¹This American Campus Communities-administered survey, which was conducted during a two-week period in April 2018, was sent by email to approximately 200,000 ACC residents and non-residents. The survey was promoted with a \$1,000 scholarship that was randomly distributed. Approximately 36% opened the email, and approximately 13% then took the survey, resulting in 25,281 people attempting the survey.

²Game On: Insights on Mobile and Console Gaming, CivicScience.com, June 2018

Which devices do you use most often?

1. Smartphones

The majority of students selected smartphone or laptops as their No. 1 or No. 2 most frequently used devices, with phones just winning out for the top spot.

2. Laptops

3. Smart TV

For 70 percent of those between 14–21 years old, “watching TV” these days means “watching via online source” and 60 percent binge-watch multiple episodes at a time.³

4. Gaming Console

Today’s students are more likely to have gaming consoles than desktop computers in their homes.

5. Wireless Speaker

These devices are almost as popular in student homes as gaming consoles, which isn’t surprising — the U.S. market for Bluetooth speakers alone is expected to have an 11 percent compound annual growth rate between now and 2023.⁴

Spotlight on smart home devices

In our study, roughly eight percent of respondents ranked a smart home device such as Amazon’s Alexa among their Top Three “most used” devices. Almost 16 percent say they or their roommates have one in their unit.

We expect this to grow and fast. According to eMarketer.com, smart speakers are being adopted faster than any other device since the smartphone. In their latest forecast, eMarketer predicts a nearly 50 percent compound annual growth rate (CAGR) in the number of U.S. smart speaker users between 2016 and 2020 — rising from 16.0 million to 76.5 million.⁵

Global market research firm GfK reports that roughly 60 percent of U.S. teens and young adults think living in a smart home is likely to change their lives in the next few years.⁶ At American Campus Communities, we agree — and we think young people will be leading the way as these devices become an essential component of daily life.

In 2017, engineering students who moved into Tooker House at Arizona State University became part of the first voice-enabled student housing community. Incoming freshmen in Tooker House who chose to receive a new Amazon Echo Dot could also sign up for classes in conversational interface design using Alexa, Amazon’s digital assistant.⁷

Individual and communal technology among roommates

Some devices — like smartphones — are very personal to consumers. Other devices are usually shared by everyone else in a home. Smart TVs and gaming consoles may be owned by one roommate, for example, but used by the rest. Sixty-eight percent of students report having five devices or fewer in their homes. Twenty-two percent said they had between five and nine devices, while 10 percent had more than nine. Interestingly, nearly 200 respondents indicated more than 15 devices in their homes. That’s one connected community, especially when you consider that our typical units house four people!

We also asked which specific devices were present in the home, whether the respondent or a roommate owned them. Naturally, laptops and smartphones were the most prevalent. Where it gets interesting is below the top two:

- Smart TVs are about as common in student homes as tablets (46% vs 45%)
- Wireless speakers and gaming consoles are also statistically pretty common (40% vs 37%)
- Students are more likely to report a smart watch in their homes (25%) than a desktop computer (20%)
- Smart home devices are more common than digital reading devices (e.g., Amazon Kindle) or handheld games (e.g., Nintendo 3DS)

³ How Gen Z Connects to TV, Tremor Video/Hulu, November 2017

⁴ Bluetooth Speaker Market in US - Industry Outlook and Forecast 2018-2023, ResearchAndMarkets.com, July 2018

⁵ Hey Alexa, Who’s Using Smart Speakers?, eMarketer.com; May 28, 2018

⁶ One-third of US consumers own two or more smart home devices; GfK.com; March 20, 2018

⁷ ASU, Amazon bring first-of-its-kind voice-technology program to campus; ASUNow.ASU.edu; August 17, 2017

Gender differences in device usage

When we break things out by gender, laptops and smartphones rank as the top two most-used devices for both men and women. That makes sense — both are used for entertainment as well as school work and even some student jobs. When we look at the devices most selected as No. 3 most-used, we see some interesting divergence.

For women, Smart TVs are the clear third-choice device. For men, it's console game systems. This isn't to say that female students aren't gamers — 14 percent of women chose either console or handheld games as one of their Top Three most-used devices. However, they are more likely to opt for a smart watch, tablet or wireless speaker.

Ping Me: Communicating with Students

It's an old cliché — the young adult obsessed with texting. And to a large extent, it's true. *Think with Google's*⁸ study found that teens in 2016 preferred texting twice as much as using messaging apps or connecting in person when they need to get in touch with someone.

But that ignores the fact that people like different forms of communication from personal friends, parents, brands, employers, etc. The American Campus Communities study found that students greatly prefer using email to communicate with their student housing community. Texting came in second. And in-person communication is far better than connecting via social media.

But the old “snail” mailbox is definitely falling by the wayside. Only 36 percent of students polled check their mailbox once a week. Thirty-one percent won't even go to their mailbox unless they're expecting something. (So if you send cookies, you should definitely text them to check their mail...)

For today's college students, devices are their world

Globally, young people between the ages of 13 and 22 spend 75 percent of their time online (outside of school or work).⁹ There is no dividing line between the digital world and the so-called “real world.” For today's students — and those of the future — it's all interwoven.

At American Campus Communities, we use technology-related data to help shape our communities, inside and out. From the amenities in our common spaces to the number of outlets in each unit and each room, every community is carefully planned for the success and well-being of our residents — today and tomorrow.

About American Campus Communities

American Campus Communities, Inc. is the largest owner, manager and developer of high-quality student housing communities in the United States. In 2018, the company celebrates 25 years of success that started with its CEO Bill Bayless' vision to create student communities that inspire academic success, healthy living and personal growth. American Campus Communities is dedicated not only to providing student housing, but also giving students the resources they need to thrive. American Campus Communities prioritizes community growth, and supports charitable organizations focused on disadvantaged youth and education through the American Campus Charities Foundation. In 2017, American Campus Communities earned the Great Place to Work certification and has also been named as a Forbes Most Trustworthy company. Visit www.AmericanCampus.com to learn more about our 202 high-quality communities across the nation.

⁸ Generation Z: Insights into the Mobile-First World of Teens, thinkwithGoogle.com, August 2016

⁹ The GENERATION Z Study of Tech Intimates, Commscope.com, September 2017