

Memorial Student Center Alumni Survey Spring 2017

Background

The Memorial Student Center (MSC) has been the student union at Texas A&M University since 1951. In addition to being a building on campus, the MSC is also a department in the Division of Student Affairs providing students with academic, cultural awareness and arts programs. The mission, according to its website (<http://msc.tamu.edu/about-us/>), is to “promote leadership development through campus programs and service opportunities while preparing students to engage in a global society.” Additionally, the MSC provides leadership development opportunities for students involved in any of the 19 committees or various trips and service experiences.

The MSC keeps track of many former students who were involved in MSC committees and leadership opportunities. The department leadership wanted to understand the impact of the MSC leadership experience after they graduate, specifically related to the institution’s undergraduate learning outcomes. This is the second time the MSC and Student Life Studies has worked to assess former students; the first time was in 2010.

Method and Sample

The electronic survey was developed using Qualtrics[®], survey design software that creates web-based forms and databases. The 32-question survey contained 12 quantitative questions, 17 qualitative questions, and three demographic questions. Due to branching technology, not all respondents saw all the questions. The data was analyzed using SPSS[®], a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel[®].

The MSC provided Student Life Studies with a list of 3,681 names and email addresses of former students who graduated between 2011 and 2016; however, 353 e-mail addresses were incorrect and bounced when the survey link was sent out. In the end, 3,328 former students were invited to take the survey from March 13, 2017 through March 27, 2017. Non-respondents were sent up to three reminders to participate in the survey. Of the 3,328 people invited, 519 responded to at least part of the survey, yielding a 16% response rate.

Results

Results will be reported as means, standard deviations (sd), and frequency percentages for the number of people (n) who responded to the question. For ease of reading, frequency percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%. Tables are in descending mean or frequency order, unless otherwise specified. Summary themes for the qualitative questions are included in this report; the entire list can be found in a separate document. Comparison results to the 2010 survey will not be made since the questions changed. This report is divided into three sections: Demographics, Learning Outcomes, and Post-Graduation.

Demographics

Students were asked what year they graduated from Texas A&M University. Table 1 shows these results; almost half of the responses were from students who graduated three or four years ago.

What year did you graduate from Texas A&M University?	Frequency Percentage
2014	23%
2013	22%
2012	19%
2015	18%
2011	16%
2016	2%

Table 1: Graduation Year (n=465)

Former students were asked about their length and area of involvement in the MSC. Table 2 reveals that three-fourths of the students were involved between one and three years. On the following page, Table 3 displays the areas students were involved in within the MSC. This was a select all that apply question for students who were involved in multiple areas to indicate all their involvement. Former students that selected the "other" response option were provided the opportunity to write in a response. Respondents wrote in a variety of ways they were involved including high school leadership conferences, Aggies Reaching Out (ARO), processes task force, Unity Team, Board of Directors, programming council, student employee, Big/Little Program, and Aggies Nights. Additionally, some wrote in involvement areas that were outside of the MSC such as Fish Camp, Fish Aides, and Aggies CAN.

How many years did you actively participate in the MSC?	Frequency Percentage
2 years	28%
3 years	24%
1 year	23%
4 years	16%
Less than 1 year	7%
5 years	2%
More than 5 years	0%

Table 2: Length of Involvement (n=476)

In which area(s) were you involved within the MSC? (Select all that apply)	Frequency Percentage
MSC Hospitality	15%
MSC Aggies Leaders of Tomorrow (ALOT)	14%
MSC LEAD	14%
MSC Freshmen in Service and Hosting (FISH)	13%
MSC Abbott Family Leadership Conference	10%
MSC OPAS	9%
MSC Fall Leadership Conference (FLC)	7%
MSC Town Hall	7%
MSC Spencer Leadership Conference	6%
MSC Student Conference on National Affairs (SCONA)	6%
MSC Aggie Cinema	5%
MSC Freshmen Leaders International (FLI)	5%
MSC L.T. Jordan	5%
Other:	5%
MSC Stark Northeast Trip	4%
MSC Wiley Lecture Series	4%
MSC Committee for the Awareness of Mexican American Culture (CAMAC)	3%
MSC Diversity	3%
MSC Executive Team/Administration Team/Program Team	3%
MSC Human Resources (HR)	3%
MSC Champe Fitzugh International Honors Leadership Seminar	2%
MSC Development	2%
MSC Spring Leadership Trip	2%
MSC Visual Arts Committee (VAC)	2%
MSC Woodson Black Awareness Committee (WBAC)	2%
MSC Assessment and Finance	1%
MSC Bethancourt	1%
MSC Leadership and Empowerment of Aggie Females (LEAF)	1%
MSC Marketing	1%
MSC Services and Facilities (S&F)	1%
MSC Business Associates	0%

Table 3: Involvement in the MSC (n=469)

To better understand the respondents, they were also asked three demographic questions. Table 4 reports that most respondents were white, female, and continuing generation. One respondent wrote in the “other” option for race/ethnicity and reported being bi/multiracial. There also was one respondent who wrote in purple dinosaur for their gender and race/ethnicity.

Demographics	Frequency Percentage
Gender	(n=310)
Female	61%
Male	38%
Not Listed – please specify:	<1%
Prefer not to answer	<1%
Transgender	0%
Race/ethnicity (select all that apply)	(n=311)
Caucasian/Anglo/White	79%
Latina/o or Hispanic	15%
African-American/Black	6%
Asian	4%
Prefer not to answer	2%
Native American or Alaskan Native	1%
Not listed – please specify:	1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	<1%
Middle Eastern/Arab	<1%
First Generation Status	(n=312)
Continuing Generation	89%
First Generation	10%
Prefer not to answer	<1%

Table 4: Demographics

Learning Outcomes

There were seven learning outcomes included on the survey, which are listed below. For each outcome, former students were asked to rate their level of agreement that their involvement in the MSC helped them develop that skill. Respondents who strongly agreed or agreed were then asked a follow-up question to provide a specific example of how their work in the MSC helped them develop that skill. Alternatively, those who reported neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree were also asked a follow-up question about how the MSC could have better helped them develop that skill. Additionally, each outcome had a brief description of what was meant by the name of that outcome; those descriptions are included with the results for qualitative questions.

- Critical thinking
- Communicate effectively
- Personal and social responsibility
- Social, cultural, and global competencies
- Lifelong learning
- Working collaboratively
- Problem solving/decision making

Table 5 demonstrates that former students felt most positive about learning how to work collaboratively and communicate effectively from their involvement in the MSC. Students were less positive about the MSC helping them develop critical thinking skills and being a lifelong learner. The summary themes for the qualitative follow-up questions continue after Table 5 and are same order as seen in the table.

Learning Outcome	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Mean (sd) [n]
Working Collaboratively	57%	35%	6%	1%	1%	4.46 (.76) [319]
Communicate Effectively	49%	42%	6%	2%	1%	4.35 (.79) [363]
Personal and Social Responsibility	43%	44%	11%	1%	1%	4.27 (.77) [332]
Social, Cultural, and Global Competence	41%	41%	13%	3%	1%	4.18 (.87) [332]
Problem Solving / Decision Making	35%	45%	16%	2%	2%	4.10 (.85) [317]
Lifelong Learning	32%	44%	19%	4%	1%	4.02 (.88) [319]
Critical Thinking	30%	45%	18%	6%	2%	3.95 (.93) [363]

Table 5: Learning Outcomes

Working Collaboratively

Working collaboratively was described to former students as the ability to participate effectively in teams, consider different points of views, and work with others to support a shared purpose or goal. Former students who agreed or strongly agreed that their involvement in the MSC developed their ability to work collaboratively with others were asked to share an example of this. Many students talked about their work in committees or teams and planning various types of events or programs. Some also mentioned that they worked with others to plan meeting agendas or make decisions. Numerous responses indicated that the MSC is based on teamwork.

Alternatively, former students who were neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed that their involvement in the MSC developed their ability to work collaboratively with others were asked how the MSC could have helped develop this skills. There were a couple comments about committees being clique-oriented or hostile and not having an environment for working with others. A couple suggestions included assigning clear roles to individuals and for advisors to be less micromanaging.

Communicate Effectively

Former students were told that communicating effectively included oral communication, effective writing skills, nonverbal communication, actively listening, and public speaking skills. Former students shared various examples of how they further developed their ability to communicate effectively. Many talked about different

types of meetings or programs where they had to communicate to others such as committee meetings, presenting at Program Council, giving a Bonfire Memorial tour, or speaking in front of large groups. Some talked about gaining confidence, getting their message across, and articulating their thoughts based on these experiences. Others talked about learning to write professional letters or emails, making phone calls, and creating meeting agendas as other methods of communication. Many former students discussed learning how to communicate differently based on the audience, such as internal committee members, donors, vendors, university officials, speakers, and host families. Some also talked about different situations between informal and formal settings.

Some students felt their role as a conference delegate did not provide opportunities to communicate or that it was not a focus of their committee. A couple former students shared ideas of how the MSC could have better helped them develop their ability to communicate effectively including asking challenging questions to students and creating opportunities for open dialogue.

Personal and Social Responsibility

Personal and social responsibility was defined as including the ability to practice ethical leadership, recognize an ethical dilemma and apply rational decision-making, acknowledge and address consequences of one's actions, and engage in local and global civic activities. Former students shared a wide range of examples of how this skill was developed while they were involved in the MSC. Students talked about their personal learning such as managing their time, being prepared and timely, listening to others, following their personal values, and holding themselves to high standards. Others commented on thinking about personal and social responsibility in terms of programs being planned or speakers to bring in for programs. Some also talked about balancing personal friendships with following committee rules or review board processes for behavior or grades.

One former student recommended the MSC having a book review and discussion about moral law. Another student suggested the MSC offering a facilitated discussion on social justice topics or civil discourse rather than just promoting awareness of an issue.

Social, Cultural, and Global Competence

The definition of social, cultural, and global competence included the ability to live and work in a diverse and global society, recognize diverse economic, political, cultural and religious options and practices, and articulate the value of a diverse and global perspective. Former students who reported that they had developed this skill while in the MSC were asked to share an example. Several students talked about the MSC having diverse teams and training on diversity or cultural awareness. Others talked about programs committees planned either focused on an area of diversity or social justice; or that programs were planned for a diverse audience. There were several former students in L.T. Jordan that talked about their international travel experience. Some students involved in MSC OPAS felt that the performances often told stories of different experiences. Former students who participated in Aggies Reaching Out (ARO) also talked about working with students and families very diverse to them.

Former students who felt their time in the MSC did not contribute to them developing this skill were asked how the MSC could have helped them develop their ability to demonstrate social, cultural, and global competences. Suggestions included being more intentional with encouraging discussions among peers, focusing on religious diversity, planning activities related to diversity, bringing in global leaders to speak to students. A couple of students felt that some committees, specifically MSC Abbott Family Leadership Conference, brought in like-minded students. One student shared that Texas A&M was not very diverse to begin with so it is difficult for the MSC to be diverse.

Problem Solving / Decision Making

Problem solving/decision making was defined as the ability to choose between different options, find solutions to issues, and explore creative solutions. Most students who reported that their involvement in the MSC developed their ability to solve problems or make decisions talked about different aspects of program planning and execution. This included deciding on program topics or speakers; planning for various logistics; responding to challenges with speakers, weather, and host families; and making budgetary decisions on how to spend money. Students reported feeling empowered to make decisions.

There were recommendations provided on how the MSC could better help students develop this skill. These recommendations included giving case studies or more real world problems for students to address in meetings or retreats, making this a topic of conversation with students, and having less micromanaging from advisors.

Lifelong Learning

Former students were told that engagement in lifelong learning included demonstrating intellectual curiosity, formulating a plan for professional growth, showing proficiency in current technologies, exhibiting the skills to acquire new knowledge. Those who reported the MSC prepared them to engage in lifelong learning shared examples from their involvement in the MSC. Former students described the MSC as a learning environment and provided opportunities to attend various programs on a wide range of topics. Some talked about learning from others and the MSC facilitating a mindset of making things better or improving areas. A couple committees were mentioned specifically as fostering lifelong learning. MSC Wiley and the focus on current events was mentioned by students involved in the committee and by students who were not in the committee but attended their programs. MSC Abbott Family Leadership Conference was also described as focused on learning from the various speakers and their experiences. Furthermore, Deryle Richmond was specifically mentioned for sharing different perspectives or ways of thinking about a situation and that she is an example of this by reading and always learning herself.

Several former students who did not feel the MSC prepared them to engage in lifelong learning reported that they did learn this while at Texas A&M, but more through their classes or overall experience than specifically the MSC. Some shared that the MSC focused more on social engagement and leadership development rather than lifelong learning. One student suggested there be more interaction with organizations outside the MSC to foster more lifelong learning for the students within the MSC.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking was described as the ability to evaluate, analyze, and integrate information from a variety of sources and develop critical, reasoned positions. Former students who agreed they learned this skills through their involvement in the MSC were asked to give an example of how the MSC helped develop their critical thinking skills. Several responses to this question were similar to the responses related to problem solving/decision making. Many students talked about their experience with program planning, specifically making decisions on speakers and schedules, dealing with challenges or unexpected situations, and managing a budget or developing a fundraising plan for specific programs. Some talked about analyzing programs through the Program Council process. One person discussed working through the change of host families, which had been an important aspect of the conference. One person shared an experience of needing to work with others to decide committees that would be eliminated due to department budget constraints.

Former students shared a couple ways they felt the MSC could have better helped them develop critical thinking skills. Students suggested being challenged more and holding them accountable, having more activities or discussions as regular meetings, balancing subcommittees and their responsibilities, and generally providing more opportunities to use critical thinking skills. Several students also report that they did not feel critical thinking was a focus for the committee they were involved in, and suggested talking with students about this skill.

Post-Graduation

Using a select all that apply question, former students were asked about what they have done since graduating Texas A&M. Table 6 illustrates that almost all have worked full-time and over half have traveled and participated in community service or volunteered. Far fewer former students have served in the armed forces or attended vocational training since graduating. Those who selected the “other” response option were given the opportunity to write in a response. Students wrote in planning for graduate school, completing a second bachelor’s degree, starting their own company, working on a political campaign, and completing an internship.

What have you done since graduating from Texas A&M University? (select all that apply)	Frequency Percentage
Worked full-time	90%
Traveled	59%
Participated in community service/volunteerism	54%
Attended graduate/professional school	47%
Looked for employment	34%
Worked part-time	22%
Stayed at home to be with or start a family	7%
Participated in a post-baccalaureate program	5%
Participated in an organization like the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps/VISTA, or Teach for America	5%
Served in the Armed Forces	3%
Attended a vocational training program	3%
Other:	2%

Table 6: Post Graduation Experiences (n=312)

Former students who reported working either full-time or part-time were asked three follow-up questions. The first question asked to describe the industry in which they are currently working. Table 7, on the following page, indicates that business was the most common industry. Alternatively, veterinarian, skilled trades, music, counseling/psychologist, civil service, and architecture were the least common industries. Former students who selected the “other” response option wrote in a variety of industries including hospitality, information technology, military, ministry, oil and gas, and social services.

Which best describes the industry you are currently working in? (select all that apply)	Frequency Percentage
Business (marketing, management, etc.)	19%
Other:	17%
Education (K-12)	11%
Engineering	10%
Health Care (doctor, nurse, dentistry, vision, pharmaceutical, etc.)	10%
Finance (accounting, finance, etc.)	9%
Information Technology	9%
Education (higher education – student affairs, academic affairs, enrollment management, etc.)	8%
Government	8%
Law	6%
Human Resources	5%
Communications (journalism, radio, television, press, broadcasting, etc.)	4%
Natural Sciences	3%
Post Baccalaureate education	3%
Agriculture	2%
Arts	2%
I am currently not working	2%
Architecture	1%
Civil Service (police, fire department, etc.)	1%
Counseling/Psychologist	1%
Music	<1%
Skilled Trades (Plumbing, Electrician, HVAC, Carpentry, etc.)	<1%
Veterinarian	0%

Table 7: Employment Industry (n=290)

The other two follow-up questions asked former students how they utilized and described skills learned or developed while in the MSC with their employer. Former students commented on utilizing many of the skills associated with skills focused on this survey including critical thinking, communication, social, cultural, and global competencies, working collaboratively, and problem solving/decision making. Other skills former students reported utilizing in their employment that they learned or developed while in the MSC included networking, project management, public speaking, running meetings, marketing, budgeting, and interviewing. Students also talked about gaining professionalism, time management skills, and general leadership skills while being involved in the MSC. One respondent described their MSC experience as a time to practice real skills that now are being used in their work.

When former students were asked how they had described the skills they learned through their MSC involvement to a potential employer, they shared that their involvement allowed them to put a variety of skills into practice and that they had the opportunity to blend many skills. One respondent reported answering questions in an interview, and being able to back-up each question with an example of their experience. Several former students listed the skills they have described, such as teamwork, leadership, project management, communication, problem solving, and marketing.

All former students were asked to explain if there was a skill(s) they wished they would have learned or developed further while in college that would help them where they are now? There were a wide-range of responses. Many offered praise for the experience at Texas A&M and/or their involvement in the MSC.

However, several former students offered ideas for what they wished they would have learned more prior to graduating. Several talked about understanding finances or budgeting better such as investments, savings, taxes, and general personal finances. Additionally, some talked about wishing they had learned more about fundraising and writing grants. Other areas mentioned were giving presentations and writing skills. Others talked about various interpersonal skills such as dealing with difficult people, negotiating with others, and how to hire someone.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The former students who responded to the survey generally reported a very positive experience. Their time involved in the MSC developed skills, which many reported utilizing in their employment. The former students recalled developing a variety of skills, especially working collaboratively and communicating effectively. For the learning outcomes addressed on this survey, students who were involved in the MSC one year or less than one year were less likely to report developing these skills. Alternatively, those students who were involved in the MSC for three, four, and five years were more likely to agree that they learned or developed the skills through their MSC involvement. The MSC leadership may want to explore the learning outcomes they have for students leaders compared to those for general members of committees. General committee members may not have the opportunity to develop some of these skills.

Furthermore, MSC leadership may want to do a mapping exercise to see how different roles or experiences align with each of the outcomes. This may help in determining the outcomes the department is intentionally working for students to achieve and how many opportunities there are for students to develop certain skills.

There were numerous skills former students reported they wished they would have learned while in college. The MSC is encouraged to identify ones that fit within the mission of the department. Staff could then look at how to provide intentional training plus giving opportunities with feedback for students to practice. If a mapping exercise is done, that may also help identify which student roles might be best to target for any trainings.

The MSC is strongly encouraged to share the results of this assessment with various stakeholders such as current MSC students, former MSC students, donors, advising staff, as well as use information when marketing student involvement to potential MSC students. MSC advising staff are also encouraged to talk with students about the skills they should be learning as well as having conversations with students about their learning.

The response rate to the later questions decreased by over 100 respondents, indicating that the survey may have been too long or repetitive. It may be beneficial to think about the question format or allowing respondents to select a couple of the outcomes to provide a qualitative follow-up about it rather than for every outcome.

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