

Aggie Up! Noise Abatement Course
Adult, Graduate, and Off Campus Student Services
Offices of the Dean of Student Life
Spring 2009

Background

In 2008-2009, Adult, Graduate, and Off Campus Student Services (AGOSS) in the Offices of the Dean of Student Life created a four-hour class for off campus Texas A&M students who have been found in violation of College Station's city ordinances (such as noise/loud parties, minor in possession, etc.). The course was developed in conjunction with the police department, AGOSS, Student Conflict Resolution Services in Student Life, the Texas A&M Student Government Association, and the municipal court. A College Station judge can give the course as an option for first-time violators. Students pay to enroll in the class, and if they successfully complete it, the judge will reduce their sanction.

Several goals and learning outcomes were established as a foundation of the curriculum. The goals focused on educating students about their rights and responsibilities as community members and providing expectations about appropriate behavior. The learning outcomes were:

- Students will be able to associate with a wide variety of life perspectives relating to their neighbor relationships.
- Students will be able to translate course content into action steps that can be applied to current neighborhood relations to improve or repair.
- Students will be able to define and articulate applicable city codes and laws as they relate to off campus living.
- Students will be able to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate behavior within the neighborhood community.
- Students will be able to forecast and set procedures for subsequent social gatherings that they may hold at their place of residence to ensure all city codes are followed.

The workshop curriculum included discussion of the city codes, seeing the issues from another's perspective, being a good neighbor, conflict management, and party planning skills. The spring semester served as a pilot program with four sessions. Minor changes were made to the content and format as needed, with an eye for major changes to be implemented for the fall semester. In addition, the assessment instrument will be changed as needed.

An additional assessment tool planned for fall 2009 is a six-week follow up web-based survey that asks about students' behavior and decision making in the time since the course.

Method and Sample

Participants were given an evaluation at the end of the session. In addition to the evaluation, there were other informal assessments during the session. Before the session started, students were asked to answer on a note card, "What three things do you hope to learn from this class?" About mid-way through the session, students were asked to answer "How do you define your role in the community?" on another note card. Finally, at the end of the session, students were asked to write their answer to the question, "What are the three most significant things you learned from this course?" on another note card.

The survey was developed using Teleform®, survey design software that creates scannable forms and databases. The data was analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel®. All of the 36 participants completed the survey, yielding a 100% response rate.

For the three in class informal assessments, all students completed a 3x5 index card answering the question provided. The results were reviewed for major themes.

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%. Because of the small number of respondents, one person accounts for 3%. Qualitative themes are reported here; the entire list can be found in a separate document. The Results section is divided into two areas: Assessment during the Course and Course Evaluation.

Assessment during the Course

As the course got started, students were asked to indicate three things they hoped to learn from this class. The most common response included learning the laws/policies/rules that govern the College Station community. Specifically, students wanted to know the acceptable noise level and how to lower the noise level when they have friends over and/or have music playing. Additionally, students talked about developing or maintaining positive relationships with their neighbors, communicating clearly, and mediating any conflict. Another group of students wanted to prevent getting in trouble, getting tickets, and having the police come to their residence. A few people specifically mentioned responsible party skills.

In the middle of the workshop, students were asked to respond to the following question: “How do you define your role in the community?” Most of the responses surrounded being a productive citizen and following the rules and laws. Other people talked about respecting others, getting along with their neighbors, being a positive influence, being altruistic, providing a peaceful environment, and representing Texas A&M. In one session, the students defined *community* rather than *their role* in the community.

At the end of the session, students were asked to write the three most significant things they learned from the course. Most of the students talked about a better understanding of the laws and codes they need to follow (grass length, parking, water coolers in the front yard, etc.). Another set of responses addressed planning/prevention/preparation when having a party so they do not have problems. Several people appreciated the resources including the Gig ‘Em Go Pack. Many responses included communication—both with the police and their neighbors, being assertive, and building relationships. Some students talked about alcohol specifically, including the definition of a drink, alcohol poisoning, and drug interaction. Some students appreciated learning about the definition of noise and how to reduce it. One person indicated he/she learned about himself/herself.

Course Evaluation

The first question asked how high grass can be in their yard before it is considered a code violation. About 92% of the respondents indicated 12 inches (the correct answer), 3% each said 10 inches, 8 inches, and 6 inches. No one said 24 inches.

The next question asked, “If I host a party where I am serving alcohol, and minors begin to drink, who is responsible?” About 72% chose “Me,” while 17% said “the person who serves them alcohol,” 8% indicated “Only the people over 21 at the party,” and 3% said “only the minors who are drinking.” The correct answer was “Me” but the way the question was worded, “the person who serves them alcohol” could also be a correct answer.

The survey used several “post-then” questions to understand students’ knowledge or opinion before the session and their knowledge or opinion after the session. Table 1 indicates their reflections about their neighbors’ attitudes and the increase in understanding following the class. The scale was 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean (sd)
Before this class, I understood my neighbors’ attitudes about loud parties	6%	31%	25%	25%	14%	2.89 (1.17)
After this class, I understand my neighbors’ attitudes about loud parties	19%	61%	8%	6%	6%	3.83 (1.00)

Table 1—Neighbors’ Attitudes (n=36)

In addition, students were asked how accurately their actions relayed their personal values before they took this course. The responses were 17% very accurate, 47% somewhat accurate, 22% slightly accurate, 6% not very accurate, and 8% not accurate at all (Mean=3.58/5.00, sd=1.11, n=36).

Students were asked, “Have your attitudes toward your neighbors changed from what you held prior to this class?” About a third (33%) said they were more positive about their neighbors, 61% have the same attitude, and 6% said they were more negative about their neighbors.

During the course, students were taught the steps to host a responsible party. Table 2 indicates that students gained an understanding of the components of a smart party.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean (sd)
Before this class, I believe I hosted a smart party.	14%	25%	33%	19%	8%	3.17 (1.16)
After this class, I now understand what a smart party is and how to host one.	61%	31%	3%	3%	3%	4.44 (.91)

Table 2—Hosting a Smart Party

The next section of the survey gathered feedback about the course itself. Students were asked their level of expectations of the class before they participated. About 8% answered “High. I expected to learn a lot,” while 50% said “Medium. I expected to learn some things,” 33% said “Low. I expected to

learn very little,” and 8% said “I did not expect to learn anything.” When asked if their expectations were met, 69% said their expectations were exceeded, 25% said they were met, and 6% said their expectations were not met.

Students were asked the effectiveness of several aspects of the workshop. Table 3 indicates that most students thought the program was presented effectively. The activities rated the lowest of the areas, although they still rated positively overall. The scale was 5=Very Effective, 4=Somewhat Effective, 3=Slightly Effective, 2=Not Very Effective, and 1=Not at all Effective.

	Very Effective	Somewhat Effective	Slightly Effective	Not Very Effective	Not at all Effective	Mean (sd)
Facilitator(s)	86%	14%	0%	0%	0%	4.86 (.35)
Ordinance Information	71%	26%	3%	0%	0%	4.69 (.53)
Resource Information	58%	36%	3%	0%	3%	4.47 (.81)
Activities	47%	31%	17%	0%	6%	4.14 (1.07)

Table 3—Effectiveness of Course Components (n=36)

Students were asked if the class was engaging, and 100% said yes. When asked to explain, students talked about the discussions, group participation, and the variety of hands on activities. In addition, students were asked to explain what areas not covered that they would have wanted in the class. Most students did not have suggestions, but the few specific items listed included how to interact with the police in an emergency, their legal rights when encountering police, alcohol awareness, and noise decibels.

Students were asked some demographic questions. The respondents were 67% male and 33% female. The classification varied: 6% freshmen, 39% sophomore, 28% junior, 25% senior, and 3% graduate student.

The ethnicity of the respondents included 69% Caucasian/White, 14% African American/Black, and 8% Hispanic/Latino. The following categories each represented 3%: Multiracial/Biracial, Native American/American Indian, and Prefer not to Answer. No one responded Asian American/Asian/Pacific Islander or Other.

When asked how long they have lived off campus, 50% said 0-1 year. Of the other half, 31% said 1-2 years, 14% said 2-3 years, and 6% said 3-4 years. No one responded four or more years.

In terms of the type of housing, 59% lived in an apartment complex, 29% said house, and 12% indicated Townhome/Condo. No one indicated duplex/fourplex or mobile home. Half of the students who lived in an apartment also lived off campus for 0-1 year. Freshmen only accounted for 10% of students who lived in apartments (although 100% of the freshmen—two people—lived in apartments).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, students seemed to learn from the workshop and thought it was presented in an engaging fashion. Students left with a better understanding of the relevant laws and their responsibilities in a neighborhood. Students also seemed to know steps to take in order to have a successful party, ways to keep guests safe, and methods to avoid further legal problems.

Over half of the students were fairly new to living off campus and lived in apartment complexes. About two-thirds were sophomores or juniors. That may indicate some need for educational programming to prepare on-campus students moving off campus or to educate students who live in apartments that they share walls with other tenants.

Before the fall semester, the course instructors should review the goals and outcomes of the class, the current content of the program, as well as the evaluation to clarify any confusing questions and to focus on the important aspects of the course.

The six week follow up survey will hopefully provide more evidence of student learning in terms of knowledge and, potentially, actual behavior. It may also highlight content that needs more emphasis.

Prepared for: Margaret Langford, Adult, Graduate, and Off Campus Student Services—Student Life

Prepared by: Darby Roberts, Student Life Studies

Prepared on: July 22, 2009

Services provided by Student Life Studies are funded, in part, by Texas A&M Student Service Fees.