

Aggie Up! Noise Abatement Course
Adult, Graduate, and Off Campus Student Services
Offices of the Dean of Student Life
2011

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. An additional assessment tool planned 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

The 18-question survey was developed using Teleform[®], survey design software that creates scannable forms and databases. Two questions were qualitative in nature. The data was analyzed using SPSS[®], a statistical software package, and Microsoft Word[®]. All 34 people who completed the course throughout 2011 completed the survey, yielding a 100% 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%. 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. Comparisons will be made to past courses where appropriate.

The first question asked how high grass can be in their yard before it is considered a code violation. About 97% of the respondents (up 6% from 2009) indicated 12 inches (the correct answer), 3% said eight inches. No one said six inches. Those responses were very similar to the spring 2009 responses.

The next question asked, “If I host a party where I am serving alcohol, and minors begin to drink, who is responsible?” About 91% chose “Me,” while 9% said “the person who serves them alcohol.” No one indicated “Only the people over 21 at the party” or “Only the minors who are drinking.” Responses were somewhat similar to 2009. 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.

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2011 Mean (sd) [n=34]	Spring 2009 Mean (sd) [n=36]	Fall 2009 Mean (sd) [n=35]
Before this class, I understood my neighbors’ attitudes about loud parties	12%	65%	15%	9%	0%	3.79 (.77)	2.89 (1.17)	3.31 (.90)
After this class, I understand my neighbors’ attitudes about loud parties	24%	62%	9%	6%	0%	4.03 (.76)	3.83 (1.00)	4.21 (.59)

Table 1—Neighbors’ Attitudes

In addition, students were asked how accurately their actions relayed their personal values before they took this course. The responses were 33% very accurate, 39% somewhat accurate, 21% slightly accurate, 6% not very accurate, and 0% not accurate at all (Mean=4.00/5.00, sd=.90, n=33). The mean was similar to the 2009 responses.

Students were asked, “Have your attitudes toward your neighbors changed from what you held prior to this class?” Over a quarter (27%) said they were more positive about their neighbors, 65% have the same attitude, and 9% said they were more negative about their neighbors. More students in 2011 reported no change, and fewer students reported a more positive attitude toward their neighbors, than in 2009.

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

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2011 Mean (sd) [n=34]	Spring 2009 Mean (sd) [n=36]	Fall 2009 Mean (sd) [n=35]
Before this class, I believe I hosted a smart party.	15%	27%	32%	24%	3%	3.26 (1.08)	3.17 (1.16)	2.97 (.87)
After this class, I now understand what a smart party is and how to host one.	38%	47%	12%	3%	0%	4.21 (.77)	4.44 (.91)	4.54 (.56)

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 3% answered “High. I expected to learn a lot,” while 56% (up 12% from fall 2009) said “Medium. I expected to learn some things,” 24% (down 27%) said “Low. I expected to learn very little,” and 18% (up 7%) said “I did not expect to learn anything.” When asked if their expectations were met, 50% said their expectations were exceeded (down 24%), 47% (up 27%) said they were met, and 3% 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.

	Very Effective (5)	Somewhat Effective (4)	Slightly Effective (3)	Not Very Effective (2)	Not at all Effective (1)	2011 Mean (sd) [n=33]	Spring 2009 Mean (sd) [n=36]	Fall 2009 Mean (sd) [n=35]
Facilitator(s)	82%	12%	3%	3%	0%	4.73 (.67)	4.86 (.35)	4.82 (.39)
Resource Information	39%	39%	15%	3%	3%	4.09 (.98)	4.47 (.81)	4.52 (.67)
Ordinance Information	39%	36%	18%	3%	3%	4.06 (1.00)	4.69 (.53)	4.55 (.75)
Activities	33%	39%	21%	3%	3%	3.97 (.98)	4.14 (1.07)	4.36 (.70)

Table 3—Effectiveness of Course Components

Students were asked if the class was engaging, and 91% said yes, down from 100% in the 2009 surveys. When asked to explain, students who said “yes” talked about the interaction and involvement, group participation, and the variety of activities. One person who said “no” said it was boring, and another said the instructors were great, but had issues with paying for the class. 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 more about noise levels, laws and talking to the police.

Students were asked some demographic questions. The respondents were 70% male and 30% female. The classification varied: 15% sophomore, 30% junior, 46% senior, and 9% graduate student. No one reported being a freshman. Those demographics are similar to the fall 2009 responses.

The ethnicity of the respondents included 73% Caucasian/White (up 12%), 12% Hispanic/Latino, and 9% Asian American/Asian/Pacific Islander. About 3% each chose Multiracial/Biracial and Prefer Not to Answer. No one responded African American/Black, Native American/American Indian, or Other.

When asked how long they have lived off campus, 15% said 0-1 year, while 27% said 1-2 years, and 30% said 2-3 years. In addition, 15% said 3-4 years and 12% indicated four or more years. That was similar to fall 2009.

In terms of the type of housing, 21% lived in an apartment complex, 60% said house, and 12% indicated duplex/fourplex, and 6% said Townhome/Condo. No one indicated mobile home.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As with previous semesters, students seemed to learn from the workshop and thought it was presented in an engaging manner. 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.

Now that several years have been assessed, 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.

For the question that asked about who was responsible if a minor drank at a party, the form should be adjusted to say “choose one” or redesigned to accept more than one right answer.

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