

# Memorial Student Center (MSC) Student Conference on National Affairs Officer Student Learning Outcome Spring 2017

## **Background**

According to its website, (<https://scona.tamu.edu>) the Memorial Student Center (MSC) Student Conference on National Affairs (SCONA) was founded in 1955 in order to bring national and foreign policy issues to Texas A&M University. Each year MSC SCONA “discusses a different topic of national importance, giving delegates the chance to interact with the nation’s highest academic scholars, government officials and well-known public figures.” The students working within the MSC SCONA committee prepare this annual conference as well as other small programs throughout the year. Per their website (<https://scona.tamu.edu/about/scona-is-a-committee/>) the members “...work to develop the program, invite speakers, raise funds for the conference and recruit the delegates” for the yearly large MSC SCONA conference.

The MSC wanted to more fully understand the MSC SCONA officer student experience and measure their learning within their officer role as it relates to the Texas A&M undergraduate learning outcome of working collaboratively. Specifically, the MSC wanted to assess the officers’ abilities to work with others to support a shared purpose or goal and articulate collaboration skills developed as a result of their participation in the MSC. While the MSC has worked with Student Life Studies on numerous projects, this was the first time for measuring the learning outcomes specific to the MSC SCONA officers.

## **Method and Sample**

The assessment was produced using Teleform<sup>®</sup>, a software program that creates scannable paper surveys and databases. It consisted of 11 questions; 10 questions were quantitative and one question was qualitative. The data was analyzed using SPSS<sup>®</sup>, a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel<sup>®</sup>. Qualitative data was analyzed by the advisor of MSC SCONA as well as by Student Life Studies to identify and code main themes which are presented in this report; the comments themselves can be found in separate documents.

The paper survey was distributed to MSC SCONA officers on April 17, 2017. Fifteen student leaders of MSC SCONA received the survey and 15 completed it for a 100% response rate.

## **Results**

Results include frequencies, means, and standard deviations (sd) 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%. Qualitative responses were coded and those themes are contained within this report while the full qualitative responses can be found in a separate document. Also reported are the results of paired sample t-tests used to determine if whether there was a significant difference between reported before and after effects, reported as t, degree of freedom (df) and 2-tailed significance (Sig).

In a rubric-like format, the MSC SCONA officers were asked to self-report their level of learning and skills development regarding collaboration (working with others) through five statements at the beginning of their term in office and after working with others in MSC SCONA throughout the term. They were asked to rate themselves using the scale Exemplary=4 (this statement is true all or nearly all of the time), Proficient=3 (this statement is true most of the time), Sufficient=2 (this statement is true only some of the time) and Developing=1 (this statement is true rarely).

As noted in Table 1 on the following two pages, for all statements, at least 80% of the MSC SCONA leadership rated themselves at a sufficient skill level at the beginning of their term in office. On average, growth was reported regarding all statements after working with MSC SCONA throughout the term. However, although growth was reported, the officers seemed least confident in their abilities to have fellow team members and themselves end discussions with clear and specific resolutions and calls to action. Of the five statements, results (gains) reported for all statements were found

statistically significant between before and after using the comparison of means, Student t-test. Data is presented in descending mean order by the after response.

	Exemplary (4)	Proficient (3)	Sufficient (2)	Developing (1)	Mean (sd) n=15	Paired sample t-test (df) [Sig.]
<i>At the beginning of my term in office...</i> I could be depended upon to complete tasks and fulfill my responsibilities.	40%	53%	7%	--	3.33 (.62)	
<i>Now, after working with others in MSC SCONA throughout our term in office...</i> I can be depended upon to complete tasks and fulfill my responsibilities.	80%	13%	7%	--	3.73 (.59)	2.449 (14) [.028]
<i>At the beginning of my term in office...</i> I knew what my peers in MSC SCONA were working on and how they contributed to the collective good of the organization. .	7%	27%	47%	20%	2.20 (.86)	
<i>Now, after working with others in MSC SCONA throughout our term in office...</i> I know what my peers in MSC SCONA are working on and are contributing to the collective good of the organization.	60%	33%	7%	--	3.53 (.64)	4.934 (14) [.000]
<i>At the beginning of my term in office...</i> I held myself and others in MSC SCONA accountable for unproductive behavior.	--	53%	27%	20%	2.33 (.82)	
<i>Now, after working with others in MSC SCONA throughout our term in office...</i> I hold myself and others in MSC SCONA for unproductive behavior.	53%	40%	7%	--	3.47 (.64)	6.859 (14) [.000]

Table 1: Collaborative Learning Outcomes: Before and After Term  
(Continued on next page)

Exemplary (4)	Proficient (3)	Sufficient (2)	Developing (1)	Mean (sd) n=15	Paired sample t-test (df)
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<b><i>At the beginning of my term in office...</i></b> During meetings, the most important- and difficult issues were put on the table to be resolved.	13%	33%	40%	13%	2.47 (.92)	
<b><i>Now, after working with others in MSC SCONA throughout our term in office...</i></b> During meetings, the most important- and difficult- issues were put on the table to be resolved.	27%	53%	13%	7%	3.00 (.85)	2.779 (14) [.015]
<b><i>At the beginning of my term in office...</i></b> My fellow team members and I ended discussions with clear and specific resolutions and calls to action.	--	27%	60%	13%	2.13 (.64)	
<b><i>Now, after working with others in MSC SCONA throughout our term in office...</i></b> My fellow team members and I end discussions with clear and specific resolutions and calls to action.	20%	60%	13%	7%	2.93 (.80)	5.527 (14) [.000]

Table 1: Collaborative Learning Outcomes: Before and After Term (continued)

When reviewing the participants' individual results as a rubric, 87% indicated at least one step increase to at least one statement when comparing the beginning of their term in office and after working with others throughout their term in office. That same 87% reported one step increases to more than one statement and 60% reported a two or more step increase to one or more of the statements. Seventy-three percent (73%) of the leadership also reported remaining static (no change) in one or more of the statements, although 40% had already rated themselves at the exemplary level for those statements at the beginning of term. Another 13% of MSC SCONA leadership reported no growth for any of the statements or decreases to one or more statements when comparing the beginning of their term to their end of term.

The MSC SCONA officers were then asked to provide an example of a time when they completed a task that contributed to successfully achieving a goal of MSC SCONA this year. They were asked to describe how they worked with others within MSC SCONA to successfully achieve that goal. All responded and more than three- quarters spoke of communicating and coordinating work with others to complete the required tasks for MSC SCONA programming.

As the officers were asked to describe actions and interactions involved in working as a team, these responses were analyzed and coded using process or action coding. Table 2, on the next page, lists those processes or actions that officers articulated in their example, how many were articulated and the number of respondents represented. In their examples, 80% of the officers most frequently described themselves and those they worked with as communicating, coordinating, collaborating and influencing. Those terms among the least frequently mentioned were partnering, inviting and training, among others.

**Process code descriptor.**

**Number  
within  
comments**

**Number of  
respondents**

Communicating/Speaking	14	10
Coordinating	12	8
Collaborated/Worked with	11	8
Influencing/Garnering Support	7	7
Completing	7	6
Correcting/Fixing/	7	3
Executing/Implementing	5	5
Help/Assisted	5	4
Enforcing	5	4
Meeting	5	3
Delegating	4	4
Planning	4	3
Collecting	3	3
Creating	3	3
Setting (standards)	3	3
Research/Finding	3	3
Leading	3	2
Writing	3	2
Developing	2	2
Identifying	2	2
Deciding	2	2
Connecting	2	2
Producing	2	2
Marketing	2	1
Improving	1	1
Partnering	1	1
Inviting	1	1
Providing	1	1
Training	1	1
Redesigning	1	1
Contributing	1	1
Synthesizing	1	1
Managing	1	1

Table 2: Process/Actions Described by Officers

Officers offered some notable examples of their processes, working in collaboration with others as well as exercising leadership acumen resulting in some critical outcomes. In the excerpts below, officers describe their actions, collaborations and resulting outcomes:

*My team and I identified specific tasks and goals for each director under our respective purview. Research was to complete the program early and create committee wide discussions delegates was tasked with coordinating the housing, travel & hospitality of approx. 200 guests and operations was to create detailed schedules and audience planning. I maintained clear communication, set detailed goals with deadlines and coordinated among directors and fellow executives to ensure my team members were set up to give their best efforts.*

*This year my team and I successfully built and strengthened relationships with ol' Ags on a higher level than ever for MSC SCONA. My team members sent emails, talked at tailgates, found new documents, broke bread, and otherwise building tangible links between the past, present and future of the MSC and MSC SCONA.*

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Overall, the MSC SCONA officers reported sufficient or better skills relating to working in collaboration with others to achieve a goal prior to starting their terms in office, and most reported growth as a result of their work with the committee. The officers indicated the most gains in their ability to hold themselves and others accountable for unproductive behavior and although still reporting growth, they reported the least confidence in their abilities to end discussions with clear and specific resolutions and calls to action. The MSC SCONA advisor and top student leadership may want to consider development activities or trainings that will help the 2017-2018 MSC SCONA officers become more skilled and comfortable in facilitating accountability between committee members and within the meetings throughout the year.

More than three-quarters of the officers also articulated how they collaborated with others to achieve their committee's goals. They spoke about actions taken in collaboration with others by speaking with, coordinating, working with and influencing others. Some expressed they were able to achieve what was needed within their committee by helping their fellow members, fixing, and implementing strategies to complete the tasks necessary to produce successful programming and conference. All the qualitative comments should be perused to gain a more thorough understanding of the officers' experiences and perspectives when working with and leading others within MSC SCONA.

The advisor, and leadership of MSC SCONA may want to consider a more direct measure of learning than is afforded by the officer's self-reported gains in skills regarding collaboration skills. Using a similar rubric and having either the advisor, graduate assistant or more experienced, higher level MSC SCONA officers to rate the skills observed of the other officers throughout the year would provide a more direct measure of learning. It is recommended this report and results be shared with the MSC SCONA officers and with other stakeholders within the Memorial Student Center and the Division of Student Affairs who may be interested in the results.

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