

Offices of the Dean of Student Life New Student and Family Programs Howdy Week 2017

Background

Howdy Week is coordinated by New Student & Family Programs in the Offices of the Dean of Student Life and takes place just before the fall semester at Texas A&M University. Howdy Week, formerly known as Gig 'Em Week, is Aggieland's official Week of Welcome. This week is full of events and opportunities for new and returning students to become familiar or reacquainted with the Texas A&M University campus, fellow Aggies, and the Bryan/College Station community. Howdy Week was held August 20-27, 2017.

Howdy Week staff wanted to capture assessment data about students' experiences attending different activities from the week, specifically the Class of 2021 Photo, the Faculty Reading Program, and Howdy Week Coordinators of signature events. This was the second time Howdy Week has formally assessed the events through Student Life Studies.

Method and Sample

Two electronic surveys were developed in Qualtrics®, a software program that creates web-based surveys, to assess different aspects of Howdy Week. Student Life Studies evaluated the results for all programs using SPSS®, a statistical software program, and Microsoft Excel®. Demographic information for events was gathered from the University student database and then analyzed.

The eight-question Howdy Week Coordinator survey included three quantitative and five qualitative surveys. This survey link was sent through email on September 7, 2017, to coordinators for the 117 signature events during Howdy Week. A survey link was sent for each individual signature event and asked coordinators to respond to that specific event. Some coordinators were responsible for more than one event during the week and therefore received multiple survey links. Before the survey closed on October 2, 2017, up to three reminders were sent to non-responders. Of the 117 surveys links sent, 74 responses were collected, yielding a 63% response rate.

The second survey, containing nine questions, was for the Faculty Reading Program; eight questions were quantitative and one was qualitative. The survey link was sent on October 5, 2017, to 191 email addresses for the students who attended one of the faculty discussion sessions on August 22. Non-responders received up to three reminders before the survey closed on October 20, 2017. Two email addresses bounced back; however, of the 189 students who received the link, 97 completed some part of the survey, for a 51% response rate.

The third program being assessed was the Class of 2021 Photo on Kyle Field held on August 22. New Student and Family Programs swiped student IDs for many of the students attending that event to have demographic data run to understand the make-up of the students attending that event.

Results

Results are reported as means, standard deviations (sd), and frequency percentages for the number of people (n) who responded to the questions. For ease of reading, the percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%. The summary themes are contained in this report, while the full listing is in a separate document. This report is divided into three sections: Coordinator Survey, Faculty Reading Program, and Demographics.

Coordinator Survey

Coordinators were asked what day of the week their signature event was scheduled. Table 1 shows that Thursday was the most popular date for events, closely followed by Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. Weekends were the least selected options. Coordinators were also asked to write in the time of their events; which can be found in a separate document.

What day of the week was your event?	Frequency Percentage
Thursday	21%
Tuesday	20%
Wednesday	20%
Friday	20%
Monday	16%
Saturday	3%
Sunday, August 27	1%
Sunday, August 20	--

Table 1: Event Day (n=71)

When coordinators were asked about the estimated attendance for their event, the range was from zero (7% of the responses) to 4,500 students. Almost one-third of the write-in responses (32%) had 1 – 99 attendees, 40% had 100 – 500 people, 8% had 501 – 1000 attendees, and 13% had over 1,000 in attendance. When asked how they tracked attendance for their event, coordinators wrote-in several methods including estimates based on food served, plates used, room capacity, and number of groups for the program. Other methods used included having sign-in sheets when students arrived, swiping IDs cards, counting attendees, returning prize entry forms or bingo cards, and collecting signed waivers.

When asked, through a select all that apply response option, how they marketed their event, a majority of the coordinators (90%) said Facebook. Additionally, 66% reported through the website and 63% said Twitter. Furthermore, 60% selected the “other” response option and were provided space to write in a response. Coordinators reported a variety other marketing methods used including the Howdy Week brochure/schedule, Instagram, digital signage, word of mouth, booths at NSCs, flyers, extended orientation programs, residence halls, SnapChat, email messages, and MaroonLink.

When asked if they used any form of assessment for their event, 24% said yes and 76% reported they did not assess their event. Coordinators who assessed their event (n=17) were asked a follow-up question to describe how they assessed the event. Of the comments, most mentioned having a post-event meeting or discussion about the event covering strengths vs. weaknesses or a *Start, Stop, and Continue* exercise. A few indicated having a more formal process such as an evaluation or pre- and post-tests.

Coordinators were asked to share any suggestions or changes they had for Howdy Week 2018. Several said nothing or provided praises about Howdy Week. Some talked about changes for their event rather than Howdy Week such as starting their event earlier, having more giveaways, and tracking attendance. Suggestions for Howdy Week or the planning in the future included making the packets available throughout campus not just the residence halls, keeping the website up to date, providing notice about weather conditions, doing more marketing, using the A&M calendar for events rather than MaroonLink, sending email reminders for due dates, not scheduling similar events for the same day and time, improving communication between coordinators, and communicating more about coordinators’ responsibilities with logistics such as making room reservations. A few coordinators did mention Hurricane Harvey impacting their program or needing to cancel an event.

Faculty Reading Program

Students were asked if they read the selected book prior to the book discussions on August 22 with their faculty member. Almost all (90%) reported reading the entire book, 10% said they read part of the book, and 1% indicated not reading the book. When asked if they interacted with a current faculty member during their book discussion, 99% indicated they did, while 1% reported they did not interact with a current faculty member.

Students were asked to rate their level of agreement with several statements about the book discussion. Table 2 illustrates that students were generally positive about all statements. They were the most positive about utilizing critical thinking skills during the discussion and their level of participation during the discussion. Students were the least positive about the program helping them feel comfortable in a college-classroom environment.

Please respond to the following statements:	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Mean (sd)
I used critical thinking skills to process the discussion.	59%	37%	3%	1%	3.54 (.62)
I actively participated in the dialogue during the book discussion.	58%	38%	2%	2%	3.52 (.65)
I used reflection to process the discussion.	58%	35%	5%	2%	3.48 (.70)
As a result of participating in this program, I am more comfortable in a college-classroom environment.	35%	50%	11%	5%	3.14 (.81)

Table 2: Faculty Reading Program Experience (n=95)

When asked if they would suggest this program to an incoming student next year, 87% of the students said yes, 10% said maybe, and 3% indicated they would not suggest the program. Respondents were asked to share any comments they had about the Faculty Reading Program and 35 elected to write in a response. Most students shared positive opinions about enjoying the experience overall and liking their book selection. Students shared that it was a great way to meet other students, they learned about a new subject, and felt the sharing/discussion was valuable. Additionally, students appreciated the interaction with the faculty member. A few students were less positive about their experience and reported the book was not interesting, their group was too small for a discussion, or that the program had no benefit. Furthermore, there were a few suggestions including having more than one discussion with their group, making it easier to register and know the book you are selecting, and offering a reading program for each classification.

New Student and Family Programs gathered information about how students heard about the program during the registration process. This information was analyzed by Student Life Studies and is reported in Table 3. Most students heard about the program from New Student Conferences or an email message.

How did you hear about the Faculty Reading Program? (select all that apply)	Population Frequency Percentage [n=191]	Respondent Frequency Percentage [n=96]
New Student Conference	78%	83%
Email	62%	60%
College Meeting	6%	7%
Friend	3%	2%
Website	2%	1%

Table 3: Marketing

Respondents were asked if they would be interested in participating in a focus group about the Faculty Reading Program. Almost one-quarter (23%) expressed interest in a focus group, while 78% said they were not interested. Those who were interested were asked to share their email address to be contacted; those responses can be found in a separate document.

Demographics

Demographics of the students who attended two of the Howdy Week activities were obtained through the student information system, as well as the fall 2017 enrollment data. Table 4, on the following page, displays these results. Both Howdy Week events had a higher proportion of students who were Hispanic, White, freshmen, or continuing generation attending than the fall 2017 enrollment. International students attended these Howdy Week less frequently than the fall 2017 enrollment. The Faculty Reading Program had more females participant and respond to the survey than compared to the campus enrollment.

Citizenship was also gathered for students attending the Class of 2021 Photo on Kyle Field and the Faculty Reading Program. Almost all students (97%) were from the United States for both events. However, other countries represented at the Class of 2021 Photo on Kyle Field included Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, Colombia, Denmark, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, and Vietnam. The countries outside of the United States represented for the students attending the Faculty Reading Program included Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, Rwanda, and Venezuela.

Demographic Statements	Class of 2021 Photo on Kyle Field [n=1,228]	Faculty Reading Program Population [n=188]	Faculty Reading Program Respondents [n=95]	Fall 2017 College Station Enrollment [N=64,120]
College				
Agriculture and Life Sciences	9%	12%	14%	12%
Architecture	4%	3%	2%	5%
Education and Human Resource Development	7%	5%	10%	11%
Engineering	35%	32%	32%	29%
Exchange	<1%	--	--	<1%
General Studies	11%	7%	4%	4%
Geosciences	2%	1%	1%	2%
Liberal Arts	10%	13%	13%	13%
Mays Business School	8%	7%	7%	10%
Public Health	1%	3%	1%	1%
Science	8%	7%	8%	4%
Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Science	6%	8%	7%	5%
Other	--	--	--	1%
Ethnicity				
American Indian Only	<1%	--	--	<1%
Asian Only	4%	5%	7%	7%
Black Only or Multi-Racial with Black	3%	4%	3%	4%
Hispanic or Latino of any race	26%	26%	19%	21%
International	1%	--	--	9%
Multi-Racial excluding Black	2%	3%	1%	2%
Unknown/Not Reported	<1%	--	--	1%
White Only	65%	63%	70%	57%
Generation Status				
Continuing Generation	76%	81%	83%	65%
First Generation	23%	19%	17%	24%
Unknown	1%	--	--	11%
Gender				
Female	45%	73%	76%	47%
Male	56%	27%	24%	53%
Classification				
Freshman	88%	84%	80%	18%
Sophomore	9%	11%	15%	17%
Junior	2%	5%	4%	18%
Senior	<1%	<1%	1%	27%
Masters	<1%	--	--	12%
Medical/Doctoral/Non-degree/Law/Vet	--	--	--	9%

Table 4: Demographics

Conclusions and Recommendations

The events that were assessed as part of the Howdy Week, seemed to have been positively received and the coordinators for the Signature Events were positive about Howdy Week overall. Specifically, for the Faculty Reading Program, students read the books prior to the book discussion and had many positive comments regarding their experience.

New Student and Family Programs may want to consider ways to engage with the coordinators for the signature events or resources that could be offered or suggested. Staff could compile information to share with coordinators about scheduling, ways to track attendances at events, how to market their events, and assessment methods for some events. Additionally, the staff could look at options to bring the coordinators together before events are scheduled to not overlap similar programs, to learn from one another, to get to know other coordinators, and understand all events scheduled throughout the week. It also may be beneficial to discuss marketing efforts with the coordinators to have a more unified manner and how to market each other's events.

Coordinators also suggested there be clear communication on what New Student and Family Programs do and what is the responsibility of coordinators. Some coordinators expressed frustration with using MaroonLink and might find a cheat sheet or tutorial helpful when completing paperwork through the system.

The demographic information may provide some information about the students who attended activities during Howdy Week. New Student and Family Programs might look at student populations who do not attend to determine if targeted marking to those student groups may help increase attendance.

Howdy Week staff is encouraged to read through all of the qualitative responses to gain a better understanding of the themes represented in this report. New Student and Family Programs is also encouraged to share results with their stakeholders such as other event coordinators, Aggie Orientation Leaders, Office of the Dean of Student Life, and other stakeholders.

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