

Department of Residence Life AFAM and Aggie Familia Fall Semester Reflection December 2017

Background

The Department of Residence Life was initially awarded a Division of Student Affairs College Completion Grant for the 2016-2017 academic year to create a support network for under-represented students living on-campus, specifically Black/African-American and Hispanic/Latino students. This grant was renewed for the 2017-2018 academic year. Following from the Aggie family ideal, the Black/African-American group was referred to as AFAM and the Hispanic/Latino group was named Aggie Familia.

As part of the grant, identity-conscious programs and mentoring opportunities are planned throughout the 2017-2018 academic year for these student populations. Programs include topics such as academic connections, money management, stress management, and finishing the semester strong. Through these events, AFAM and Aggie Familia students will be connected with faculty, staff, and other students to establish and build a community with people, programs, and resources. The planning committee coordinated an End-of-Semester Celebration for the students in both groups, which was held on December 5, 2017. The event included a keynote speaker, time to socialize/network with students and mentors, and the opportunity to reflect on the fall semester.

The grant planning committee worked with Student Life Studies to collect data from students reflecting on their semester. While other assessments have been conducted as part of the Aggie Familia/AFAM initiative, this was the first time this specific event or reflection was assessed.

Method and Sample

A survey was developed in Teleform[®], a software program that creates paper-based surveys and databases. The survey contained four qualitative questions. Student Life Studies evaluated the results using Microsoft Excel[®], an electronic spreadsheet software.

The paper survey was distributed at the end of the event on December 5, 2017 to the 32 students who attended. Of those 32 students, 31 completed the survey, for a 97% response rate.

Results

Results in this report are reported as summary themes for the qualitative questions, but the full listing is in a separate document.

Students were first asked what they thought the AFAM / Aggie Familia program was or how they would describe the program to another A&M student. All 31 of the students who turned in a survey responded to this question. Many talked about it being a series of programs or seminars to provide resources, prepare students on college life, make students feel welcome, connect students with other students and mentors, provide support to students, and to build a community. Some also talked about it being for minority (under-represented) students. A few students talked about the End-of-Semester Celebration event specifically and not the AFAM / Aggie Familia initiative.

One of the outcomes for the AFAM / Aggie Familia program is for students to make connections with others on the Texas A&M campus. Students were asked to talk about who they made a personal connection with since coming to Texas A&M – not necessarily the name of the person but rather that person’s role or connect with the student. Almost all students responded, with 30 sharing a comment. Most students talked about making connections with other students through classes, student organizations, in their residence hall, or the Corps of Cadets. Several students also talked about connections with Resident Advisors (RAs) or residence hall staff and faculty members. Alternatively, one student reported not making connections with anyone.

When asked about topics, programs, or socials they would like to see offered during the spring semester, 31 students wrote in suggestions covering a variety of ideas. Academic programs were the most common suggestion. Other program ideas mentioned by at least a few students included opening/closing socials, inspirational speakers/talks, and stress-reliever activities.

The last question asked students about the type of support that would help them continue to be successful or be more successful and 29 students wrote in a response. The most common response related to academic support or tutoring assistance. Other ideas for support to help students be successful included being matched with a mentor, knowing about campus resources, having socials or time to hang out with other students, hearing from inspirational speakers, and receiving emotional or mental support.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Students generally understood what the AFAM / Aggie Familia program involved and most understood it to be a series of events for underrepresented students to help them be successful. Additionally, most students reported they had connected with someone since coming to Texas A&M, which is an outcome for the program.

Furthermore, the students offered a variety of suggestions and ideas for what they would like to see in the spring semester and what programs would help them be successful, particularly academic support or tutoring assistance. The grant planning committee may want to look at these suggestions and build programs around those. Another idea may be to develop a series of quick electronic resources to email students on a weekly basis, or other frequency, to share some of the study skill tips, time management, and campus resources.

The grant planning committee is encouraged to read the qualitative responses to gain a better understanding of the themes represented in this report. The grant planning committee is encouraged to share results with their stakeholders. This could be sharing information with Residence Life staff, faculty and staff mentors, and the students involved.

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