

Student Activities

Freshman Leadership Organizations

Student Experience - Spring 2020

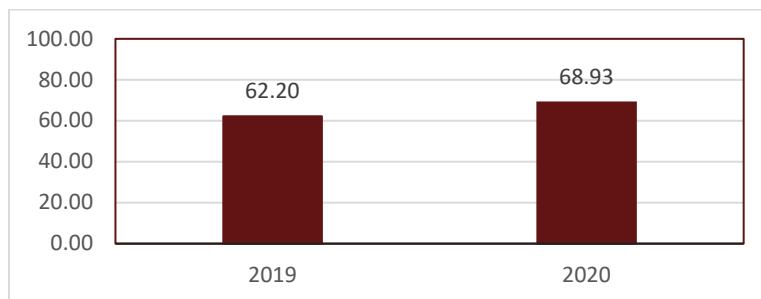
Purpose of Assessment

The Department of Student Activities wanted to better understand students' experience as it relates to their membership in one of the Freshman Leadership Organizations (FLOs). Specifically, Student Activities wanted to look at students' expectations from their FLO experience, if students actually received what they expected, if there were any unexpected benefits due to their membership, and if students would recommend their FLO to new incoming students. Additionally, the department wanted to learn how supported students felt by their FLO and if this changed as the university moved to a remote environment. Student Life Studies worked with Student Activities last spring for the first time to assess students' experience in Freshman Leadership Organizations.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Student Life Studies identified some key findings and developed actionable recommendations Student Activities and the Freshman Leadership Advisory Council (FLAC) may take based on the results. However, staff and student leaders may identify other findings using their knowledge and understanding of the FLO community. Staff members and student leaders are strongly encouraged to read all the results and qualitative comments to gain a fuller understanding of students' experiences.

- Overall, with a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of +68.93, students highly recommended their Freshmen Leadership Organization to incoming freshmen. Given the NPS range of -100 to +100, generally, a positive score or anything above zero is considered a good score. Anything at +50 is considered excellent, and above +70 is considered "world class." Additionally, the NPS for students recommending their FLO increased by +6.73 compared to last year. This is a very positive NPS and one that FLAC may want to share during recruitment for new students, especially with sharing why students recommend their FLO based themes from the 77% who were considered promoters.



- There were a wide range of expectations students had for joining a Freshmen Leadership Organization. Generally, these expectations were met, specifically the expectations for making friends, getting involved on campus, having fun, participating in service events, attending social events on-campus and off-campus, learning about themselves, and being in an organization connected to what they believed in. Alternatively, there were a gaps between what students expected to received and what they actually received, specifically, building leadership skills, and joining a group with similar people to them. FLAC may want to explore how FLOs believe they build leadership with their freshmen and facilitate a process to share ideas between FLOs. Additionally, FLAC might consider hosting all-FLO meetings that could focus on leadership theories or models to help freshmen create a leadership foundation.

- Several years ago there was narrative during recruitment with freshmen that students needed to be in a FLO in order to be successful at Texas A&M. While some students (14%) indicated this as one of the expectations, it would seem those comments are used less during recruitment. However, this increased slightly compared to the previous year. Several students specifically commented that being in a FLO was not necessary to being involved or successful during your freshmen year.
- There were several comments from different questions that students did not always feel like they were a good match for their FLO or that their FLO was not what they expected based on what they heard during recruitment. FLAC might work with individual FLOs about being transparent during recruitment to find students that are a better fit for their organization.
- FLO members gave lots of praise to their FLO and the creativity to staying connected when the university moved to a remote environment. However, students also clearly reported that it was not the same as being together in person. If there would be a need to move to a remote environment in the future, it is recommended that FLAC share with the individual FLO what freshmen reported worked and what they wanted to make the remote experience more engaging to FLO members.
- Freshman Leadership Organizations promote leadership for first-year students; however, there is limited information if being in a FLO catapults student engagement or leadership. FLAC might explore options to conduct follow-up assessments with sophomores and juniors to find out how they are involved in leadership, service, or organizations.
- The nature of this assessment was to look at the experience of first-year students in their Freshmen Leadership Organization. It is recommended that FLAC and the FLAC advisor share the overall information gathered from this survey with advisors and students leaders for all individual FLOs. In sharing these results, it may lead to discussions about how to use the results and make continuous improvements for all FLOs.

Method and Sample

The electronic survey was developed using Qualtrics®, survey design software that creates web-based forms and databases. The 18-question survey contained 10 quantitative and eight qualitative questions. Due to branching technology, not all respondents saw all the questions. Additionally, student demographics were gathered to better understand organizational membership. Data were analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel® and Microsoft Word®.

The survey link was sent via email to 1,035 first-year students in all of the Freshman Leadership Organizations on April 23, 2020. One email address was not valid; therefore, the student did not receive the survey link. Non-respondents received up to three reminders before the survey closed on May 4, 2020. Of the 1,034 receiving the survey link, 520 took some part of it, yielding a 50% 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%. Tables are listed in descending mean or frequency order for 2020, unless otherwise stated. Summary themes of the qualitative questions are contained in this report; an entire list can be found in a separate document. Comparisons to the previous will be made where appropriate.

FLO members were asked to indicate the expectations they had of their FLO experience prior to joining their organization from a provided list. Based on the expectations students selected, they were then asked which of those expectations they actually received from their FLO experience. Both questions allowed students to select as many expectations they had or that they received. Table 1, in descending order based on expectations prior to joining their FLO for spring 2020, demonstrates almost all students joined a FLO to make friends and get involved. This was similar to the results in 2019; however, both increased this year. Additionally, a vast majority of the students reported receiving these two expectations from their FLO involvement. The results are similar to the previous year; although for this spring, almost all expectations were selected at a higher percentage compared to the previous year.

Students selecting the “other” response option for either question were given the opportunity to write a comment. One student wrote that they expected to grow with Christ prior to joining the FLO. Furthermore, one student reported that they learned more about God from their FLO.

Expectations (select all that apply)	Spring 2020 What expectations did you have of your FLO experience prior to joining? [n=520]	Spring 2020 Which of the expectations that you had for your FLO experience, did you actually receive from your FLO? [n=484]	Spring 2019 What expectations did you have of your FLO experience prior to joining? [n=496]	Spring 2019 Which of the expectations that you had for your FLO experience, did you actually receive from your FLO? [n=461]
Make friends	97%	93%	95%	90%
Get involved on campus	96%	90%	92%	82%
Have fun	88%	84%	82%	77%
Participate in service events	77%	73%	69%	63%
Build leadership skills	77%	69%	78%	70%
Attend social events on-campus	76%	72%	65%	58%
Network with other students	75%	69%	66%	56%
Thought it would be cool to be in a FLO	72%	61%	66%	52%
Join a group of similar people	64%	55%	62%	52%
Attend social events off-campus	60%	57%	52%	45%
Learn new things about myself	55%	52%	52%	49%
Organization was connected to things I believed in	43%	41%	36%	33%
Network with former students/professionals	31%	25%	32%	24%
Form study groups with students in my major	30%	24%	27%	21%
Thought everyone else was joining a FLO	26%	11%	23%	9%
Thought I needed to be in a FLO to be successful at A&M	14%	5%	11%	4%
Other	<1%	<1%	1%	1%
I did not have any expectations	<1%	--	<1%	--

Table 1: FLO Expectations

Students reporting they received what they were expecting from their FLO experience were given the opportunity to further describe the expectations they received. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the 248 comments were about making friends or building relationships. Students discussed meeting people similar to them, in the same major, and being able to meet a diverse group of people. Several students mentioned that their FLO provided a community or a home for them at Texas A&M. Additionally, students mentioned doing community service, gaining or developing leadership skills, learning about themselves, growing personally, and getting involved. Many students talked about the fun they had with their FLO and the memories they created. Furthermore, many reported that their FLO met, and most often exceeded their expectations. Finally, there were a few students who talked about their FLO helping in the transition to college and learning about Texas A&M. These responses were similar to the previous year.

Students indicating they did not receive the expectations they had prior to joining their FLO were asked to explain why they felt that way and 11 students responded with varying comments. Some students said they thought there would be more leadership training, service opportunities, community service, and events. A few students reported it was not a good fit or that they were different than many other freshmen who joined their FLO. Some students explained that they did not receive the expectations they expected because they did not try enough or that they experienced personal issues during the year.

All respondents were asked to explain anything they received or learned through their FLO membership that they did not expect. A majority of the 222 comments expressed that they gained what they expected, but that it was much more or higher quality than they expected. Students expected to meet others or even gain friends, but did not expect to meet their best friends, be part of such a strong community, or find their home. Some students did not expect to learn so much about themselves or to gain as much personal growth as they ended up receiving. Students mentioned learning about leadership, service, time management, professionalism, networking, as well as gaining confidence. Alternatively, a few students reported that they did not expect to be treated so rudely by student leaders in their FLO, have ideas forced on them, or that there would be so many cliques within the organization. These responses were similar to the previous year.

Students were asked to rate how supported or unsupported they felt by their FLO in different areas. Table 2 reveals that students generally reported feeling supported in all three areas; however, responded that they were the most supported personally.

	Very Supported (4)	Supported (3)	Not Supported (2)	Not at all Supported (1)	Mean (sd) [n=367]
Personally	77%	18%	4%	1%	3.72 (.57)
Socially	74%	22%	4%	1%	3.68 (.59)
Academically	51%	41%	7%	1%	3.41 (.68)

Table 2: FLO Support

Additionally, students were asked how the level of support from their FLO changed, if at all, since the university moved to a remote environment due to COVID-19. Table 3, on the following page, illustrates that just over half of the students felt the level of support remained the same socially and personally; with almost two-thirds feeling that the level of support remained the same academically. Additionally, almost one-third of students felt the level of support increased personally; however, one-quarter reported the level of support decreased socially.

	Level of Support Increased (3)	Level of Support Remained the Same (2)	Level of Support Decreased (1)	Mean (sd) [n=367]
Personally	31%	55%	14%	2.17 (.65)
Socially	23%	52%	25%	1.98 (.69)
Academically	18%	61%	21%	1.97 (.63)

Table 3: Changes in FLO Support

To better understand any change in the level of support students felt, respondents were asked to explain their response, and 219 wrote a comment. Students who reported feeling the level of support was the same talked about continuing to have meetings, lunch buddies, and studying together. They talked about regularly having online hangouts through Zoom, GroupMe or House Party, as well as one-on-one connections with phone calls and FaceTime. Students who felt the level of support had increased shared that leaders checked in with them more frequently and made the extra effort to keep in touch. They indicated communications were through Zoom, texts, and even having a texting buddy system. Several talked about a focus being on their wellness during this challenging time. Alternatively, students reporting the level of support decreased said there were less opportunities to get together, leaders did not reach out much, meetings and events were cancelled, and that leaders did not even ask how they were doing. Many felt that because they could not physically be together that support decreased.

Students were asked to think specifically about changes their FLO made since the university moved to a remote environment. Based on what changes their FLO made, students were asked in two separate questions what their FLO has done that worked well for them and what they wished their FLO would have done during this time.

When responding to what has worked well that the FLOs have done, 211 students shared comments. A majority talked about continuing with meetings through Zoom such as General Committee Meetings (GCMs), subcommittee meetings, zoom buddy meetings or their end of year banquet. Many students reported that having the meetings at the same time as they were during the year helped keep their schedule normal and that they appreciated having something to look forward to attending. While Zoom was the most common platform mentioned, FLOs also utilized House Party, group texts, email, social media, Netflix, Instagram, FaceTime and Google Slides to find ways to connect with one another. Several students appreciated the extra effort involved to the community and staying connected. FLOs came up with creative ideas such as Imessage game brackets, meme wars, Tik Tok wars, creating playlists, writing letters, live cooking shows, and other fun competitions. Many students commented on events being cancelled; however, a couple of FLOs found ways to move their service projects and programs online or created new virtual programs. A few students also mentioned that they appreciated that meetings were not required or that points were not being kept.

Alternatively, 176 students commented on what they wish their FLO would have done during this time. A majority of these comments were praises for their FLO or indicating that they felt their FLO did everything they could have under the given circumstances. However, some students reported that they would have liked to see more meeting in general such as their all FLO meetings, subcommittee meetings, study time, or family meetings/hangouts. Furthermore, students would have liked for meetings to be consistent and scheduled. Some students expressed a desire to have a buddy system created, to continue with planned activities in virtual format, and to have some final end of year activity.

Using a Net Promoter Score (NPS) question, FLO members were asked how likely they were to recommend joining their FLO to an incoming student. The NPS is an index ranging from -100 to +100 and measures the willingness of someone to recommend a product or service to others. Respondents were given the options of zero to 10 with 10 being most likely to recommend their FLO to others. Scores of a nine or 10 are promoters, a score of seven or eight are passives, and scores six and below are detractors.

Given the NPS range of -100 to +100, generally, a positive score or anything above zero is considered a good score. Anything at +50 is considered excellent, and above +70 is considered “world class.” As seen on Figure 1, the Net Promoter Score for the FLOs was +68.93. This resulted in a slight increase from last spring when the NPS was +62.2.

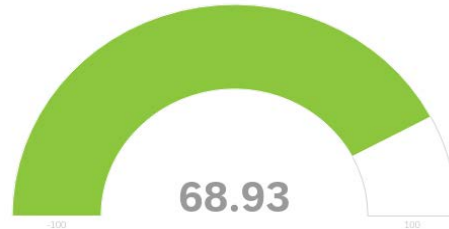


Figure 1: Net Promoter Score

Figure 2 shows the breakdown of promoters, passives, and detractors. Just over three-fourths (77%) of the FLO members were promoters, 14% were passive, and 8% were detractors. This is similar to the previous year when 76% of students were promoters, 11% were passive, and 13% were detractors. Additionally, Table 4 provides a more detailed breakdown of the Net Promoter Score and reveals that over two-thirds of the respondents scored their FLO recommendation at 10; which is a 1% decrease from last year.

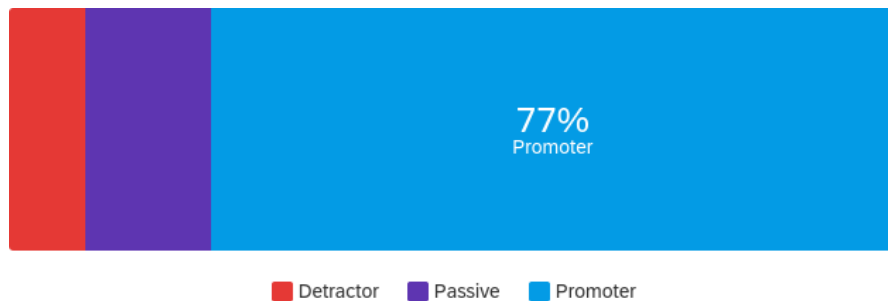


Figure 2: Breakdown of NPS Scores

Net Promoter Score		2020 Frequency Percentage [n=354]	2019 Frequency Percentage [n=318]
Promoter	10	69%	70%
	9	9%	6%
Passive	8	10%	7%
	7	4%	4%
Detractor	6	3%	2%
	5	2%	3%
	4	1%	2%
	3	1%	2%
	2	1%	2%
	1	<1%	1%
	0	<1%	1%

Table 4: Breakdown for the Net Promoter Score

Respondents were provided the opportunity to explain their zero to ten rating for recommending their FLO and 227 wrote a comment. Promoters expressed numerous positive comments regarding their experience in their FLO. Many said it was the best decision they had made or that it was life-changing. Several said being part of their FLO was a great way to meet friends, gain leadership skills, network with others, and do community service. Other words promoters used to describe their experience included great, awesome, fun, and amazing. Students considered to be passive reported that being in a FLO was a great way to meet friends, have an upper-class mentor, and have fun. However, some also commented that FLOs are time-consuming, not for everyone, and are not the end-all-be-all for one's freshman year. There were several different reasons detractors rated their FLO the way they did. Many talked about the FLO not being what they expected. For some, this was not having enough socials and for others it was not having enough service and leadership experiences. Other reasons mentioned included FLOs being a big time commitment, there being drama with the counselors, and not having enough events outside of meetings.

Furthermore, students were asked how their rating changed, if at all, since the university moved to a remote environment. Of the 351 responses, 15% said their rating increased, 80% reported their rating remained the same, and 5% indicated that their rating decreased.

The final question gave students the opportunity to share any other feedback or suggestions they had to improve their FLO and/or the FLO system and 95 chose to write a comment. Several students shared praises for their FLO or did not have any recommendations for improvement. A few talked about the online or virtual environment as hard, disappointing to not have in-person events, and not as impactful as the first semester. However, students also expressed appreciation for the effort of FLOs and student leaders to continue to provide support and community. Several students shared thoughts on the FLO recruitment process. Some suggestions included explaining more about what FLOs are, being honest about the culture of each FLO, improving the marketing of FLO applications, sharing the time commitment during the recruitment process, and recording the All-FLO Informational and posting it online. Additionally, students recommended emphasizing FLO equality, having more FLO unity, planning more socials and co-FLO activities, and increasing the diversity of members in FLOs.

Student Activities provided the Freshman Leadership Organization that students were members of, as well as students University Identification Number (UIN). Table 5, on the following page in descending order by the 2020 survey respondents, shows the demographics as of spring 2020 for the Freshman Leadership Organizations by the full FLO membership and the survey respondents. The survey respondents were representative of the FLO membership. Additionally, demographics were gathered through the student information system, based on the UINs. Table 6, on page 9, displays this information in descending order for each category by the 2020 survey respondents. A majority of the respondents were female, white, sophomores, students in the College of Engineering, and students who were not first generation.

	2020 FLO Members [n=1,035]	2020 Survey Respondents [n=520]	2019 FLO Members [n=1,086]	2019 Survey Respondents [n=496]
MSC Aggie Leaders of Tomorrow (ALOT)	10%	9%	9%	8%
MSC Freshmen in Service and Hosting (FISH)	9%	9%	8%	7%
Freshman Leaders Establishing Excellence (FLEX)	7%	9%	7%	6%
Freshmen Reaching Excellence in Engineering (FREE)	8%	8%	6%	8%
Fish Council	6%	7%	5%	4%
Aggies Selflessly Serving in Shaping Tomorrow (ASSIST)	5%	7%	4%	4%
Freshman Leaders in Education and Human Development (FLED)	6%	6%	6%	4%
Aggie Fish Club (AFC)	5%	6%	5%	5%
Freshmen Leaders in Progress (FLiP)	5%	6%	5%	8%
Freshmen Leaders In Christ (FLIC)	6%	5%	6%	7%
Freshmen Organizing and Running Mixed Events (FORME)	5%	5%	5%	6%
Progressively Reaching Excellence in Professionalism (PREP)	5%	5%	5%	5%
MSC Freshman Leadership International (FLI)	6%	4%	5%	4%
Freshmen Aggies Spreading Tradition (FAST)	5%	4%	5%	5%
Fish Aides	4%	4%	4%	4%
Freshman Leaders On Campus (FLOC)	4%	4%	5%	6%
Freshmen Liberal Arts Reaching Excellence (FLARE)	5%	3%	5%	4%

Table 5: Freshman Leadership Organizations

	2020 FLO Members [n=1,030]	2020 Survey Respondents [n=520]	2019 FLO Members [n=1,080]	2019 Survey Respondents [n=494]
Classification				
Sophomore	52%	55%	44%	45%
Freshman	45%	42%	54%	53%
Junior	3%	4%	2%	2%
Senior	<1%	--	<1%	<1%
College				
Engineering	30%	29%	28%	26%
Mays Business School	17%	15%	15%	13%
Liberal Arts	13%	12%	13%	13%
General Studies	11%	11%	11%	9%
Education & Human Development	9%	11%	9%	11%
Veterinary Medicine	7%	8%	7%	7%
Science	5%	7%	5%	6%
Agriculture and Life Sciences	5%	5%	9%	11%
Public Health	2%	2%	1%	1%
Architecture	2%	1%	1%	2%
Geosciences	1%	1%	1%	1%
Sex				
Female	53%	60%	53%	59%
Male	47%	40%	47%	42%
Ethnicity				
White	64%	66%	71%	74%
Hispanic or Latino	18%	16%	16%	14%
Asian	10%	9%	7%	7%
Multi-Racial excluding Black	3%	4%	3%	3%
Black only or Multi-Racial with Black	3%	4%	2%	2%
American Indian	1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Unknown or Not Reported	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
International	<1%	<1%	<1%	--
First Generation				
No	81%	80%	88%	89%
Yes	13%	14%	11%	11%
Unknown	6%	7%	1%	<1%

Table 6: Student Demographics

Department and Organization Background

According to its website (<https://studentactivities.tamu.edu/about-us/>), the Department of Student Activities “fosters and supports leadership, learning, and involvement opportunities that enhance the growth and development of students and recognized student organizations. As members of the university community, we are committed to a philosophy of shared responsibility that develops leaders of character dedicated to serving the greater good, and we subscribe to the Texas A&M core values of Respect, Excellence, Leadership, Loyalty, Integrity, and Selfless Service.”

According to its website (<https://flac.tamu.edu/about/>), the Freshman Leadership Advisory Council (FLAC) serve as “the over-arching body of the 18 official FLOs. Since FLOs are members of FLAC, we coordinate recruitment between them, create events, establish rules, and uphold standards to ensure every FLO provides a quality experience. FLAC is not a FLO.” Throughout the year there were 18 Freshman Leadership Organizations (FLO) at Texas A&M University; however, just before this survey was being administered one FLO left FLAC, and therefore the survey was sent to the members of 17 FLOs.

Student Life Studies

The email distribution of this survey in April 2020 coincided with the move of all courses to online delivery, and shelter at home executive orders caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This change could have an effect on the survey response rate and the feedback provided by students.

The Department of Student Life Studies provides quality assessment services, resources and assessment training for departments in the Texas A&M University Division of Student Affairs and student organizations. Services by Student Life Studies are funded, in part, by the Texas A&M University Advancement Fee. Results of this project and other assessment projects done through Student Life Studies can be found at <https://studentlifestudies.tamu.edu/results/>. Additionally, anyone can follow Student Life Studies on Facebook.

To work with Student Life Studies for future assessment projects, please fill out the Assessment Questionnaire at <https://slsform.dsaapps.tamu.edu/>.

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