

Memorial Student Center (MSC) Spencer Leadership Conference Evaluation Spring 2020

Purpose of Assessment

The MSC Spencer Leadership Conference focuses on leadership development through the exploration of three pillars: Self-Aware Leadership, Innovative Leadership, and Selfless Leadership. Approximately 44 student delegates attend preconference programs during the fall semester, and attend the conference held in Dallas in January. The conference includes programs and small group discussions featuring leaders in business, industry, education and public service. Delegates were surveyed to assess their experiences and learning during the conference as well as during preconference events.

Method and Sample

The preconference experiences survey was developed using Qualtrics®, a software program that creates web-based surveys and databases. The survey included 14 questions of which 12 were quantitative, and two were qualitative. The open link survey was provided through a QR code to respondents as they attended their last preconference event on February 1st. As the survey was available through a QR code, a response rate cannot be determined, however 34 responded to at least one question. The data was analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel®.

The conference survey was developed using Teleform®, a survey development software that creates scannable paper-based surveys and databases. Data was analyzed using SPSS® and Microsoft Excel®. The 19-question survey contained 12 quantitative and seven qualitative questions. The survey was distributed to delegates on the final day of the conference. Of the 40 students who received the survey, 40 completed it, yielding a 100% response rate, which was higher than the 2019 73% response rate.

Key Findings with Recommendations

Student Life Studies identified several key findings and developed actionable recommendations the department may take based on the results. However, MSC Spencer staff may identify other findings using their knowledge and understanding of the conference and delegates. Staff members are strongly encouraged to read all the results and qualitative comments to gain a fuller understanding of students' experiences.

- The delegates were positive about their overall Spencer Leadership Conference experience. All agreed or strongly agreed the conference taught them how to apply their leadership skills to their college experience. Over 90% of the delegates indicated valuable preconference events were provided and there was adequate communication about the conference prior to the trip, provided ample time for reflection and effective preparation for conference events.
- Delegates indicated that they would have liked more opportunities to get to know the other delegates both during preconference events and during the conference itself. MSC Spencer staff may want to add some social and casual preconference events for the delegates to get to know one another, and perhaps add in some less structured time during the conference for delegates to interact, if feasible. MSC Spencer staff could also consider holding a session for delegates to interact with the speakers.
- The small groups and the small group leaders were rated as effective or very effective in helping the delegates prepare for the conference. Delegates expressed that the small group leaders facilitated the small groups well, prompting reflection and discussion among the group. However, delegates also indicated they would like the leaders to provide more in-depth discussions. MSC Spencer staff may want to find ways to train small group leaders for more effective discussion techniques.

- Other improvements that MSC Spencer staff may want to review include more reflection time during the conference, introducing the list of speakers and providing detailed conference schedules during preconference events.

Results

Results include frequency percentages, means, and standard deviations (sd) for the number of people (n) who responded to the question. For ease of reading, percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%. Tables are listed in descending mean order for 2020 results unless otherwise noted. Summary themes for the qualitative questions are contained in this report; the full qualitative responses can be found in a separate document. Comparisons to last year’s results are included where applicable. The results are reported in two sections; Preconference Experience and Conference Experience.

Preconference Experience

The survey began by asking delegates about their understanding of MSC Spencer’s leadership perspectives after attending the preconference events. Table 1 reveals that delegates’ agreed or strongly agreed they understood the meaning of selfless service more clearly and learned about innovative leadership and self-authorship.

As a result of attending MSC Spencer Leadership Preconference events...	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2020 Mean (sd) [n=34]
I learned more about selfless service	65%	35%	--	--	3.65 (0.49)
I understand more clearly the meaning of innovative leadership	59%	38%	3%	--	3.56 (0.56)
I have a greater understanding of self-authorship	59%	32%	9%	--	3.50 (0.66)

Table 1: Understanding of Leadership Styles Pre-conference

Students were asked to provide an explanation of how they learned one of the three pillars during the preconference events and were asked to begin by including the name of their chosen pillar. Of the 32 who responded, 53% chose selfless service, 22% chose self-authorship and 25% chose innovative leadership. Delegates who selected selfless service defined it as putting others before yourself, working for others and not yourself, seeing a need, and filling it by using your skills to benefit others in need. Delegates defined self-authorship as how an individual’s decision-making can impact the whole group and the decisions you make now will exert influence on future decisions. Innovative leadership was defined by delegates as using you own unique experience to lead and develop new solutions. It was also described as not being tied to the tried and true methods and a willingness to share a person’s failures and learn from them.

Delegates were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with several statements regarding conference activities and opportunities. Table 2, on the next page, shows they all agreed or strongly agreed that the preconference events provided adequate communication about requirements for participation in preconference activities prior to events. While still rated positively, delegates were least agreeable that they were provided opportunities to get to know other delegates.

MSC Spencer...	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2020 Mean (sd) (n=34)
Provided adequate communication about requirements to participate in the preconference activities prior to the events	68%	32%	--	--	3.68 (0.48)
Provided ample time to reflect during the preconference	59%	41%	--	--	3.59 (0.50)
Provided adequate communication about the preconference activities prior to the events	65%	29%	6%	--	3.59 (0.61)
Provided valuable preconference events	56%	44%	--	--	3.56 (0.50)
Provided a good perspective of what the conference would be like	47%	44%	9%	--	3.38 (0.65)
Provided opportunities to get to know other delegates	29%	56%	12%	3%	3.12 (0.73)

Table 2: Overall Preconference Experience

When asked about the effectiveness of the small group leader in leading reflection time, discussions and activities, two thirds of participants found the group leader was effective or very effective in guiding these activities. However, one delegate reported the small group leader did not provide adequate facilitation in activities, as noted below in Table 3.

Please rate how effective your small group leader was in facilitating...	Very Effective (4)	Effective (3)	Somewhat Effective (2)	Ineffective (1)	2020 Mean (sd) (n=33)
Reflection time	49%	49%	3%	--	3.45 (0.56)
Discussions	42%	49%	9%	--	3.33 (0.65)
Activities	46%	39%	12%	3%	3.27 (0.80)

Table 3: Small Group Leader Ratings

Delegates were asked to provide any suggestions to improve the preconference events and 32 respondents shared their ideas. Delegates suggested more time (both structured and casual) to get to know other delegates prior to the conference and during the small group interactions. Delegates also suggested an itinerary should be provided and they needed to be informed on what they would be expected to do throughout the preconference events.

Conference Experience

Delegates were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement whether the conference fostered their understanding of the three pillars of leadership as a result of conference attendance. Table 4, on the next page, reveals that delegates' agreed or strongly agreed they understood the meaning of innovative leadership and self-authorship. On the other hand, although the majority of delegates strongly agreed or agreed they learned more about selfless service, 3% disagreed they did not learn more about this pillar. However, the mean for selfless service is comparable to the 2019 delegates' mean.

As a result of attending the MSC Spencer Leadership Conference...	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2020 Mean (sd) [n=40]	2019 Mean (sd) [n=32]
I understand more clearly the meaning of innovative leadership	87%	13%	--	--	3.87 (.34)	3.81 (.40)
I have a greater understanding of self-authorship	78%	23%	--	--	3.78 (.42)	3.50 (.62)
I learned more about selfless service	73%	25%	3%	--	3.70 (.52)	3.72 (.46)

Table 4: Understanding of Leadership Styles after conference attendance

Delegates were asked to select on one of the leadership pillars and explain what the chosen pillar meant to them. The 39 responses revealed 46% learned about self-authorship whereas 33% and 21% of delegates understood more about innovative leadership and selfless-service, respectively. Participants were asked to explain their chosen pillar through write-in comment. Those who selected innovative leadership indicated this pillar meant finding new modus operandi, leading with a genuine passion and finding or using someone’s ideas and make improvement upon them. Delegates who chose self-authorship explained that they learned they have to create their own path, prepare for possible changes in their career paths and choose and write their own version of leadership. Finally, selfless service, to those delegates who selected it, indicated giving back to the community, focusing on others and putting others’ need before their own needs and wants and contribute without asking for payback.

Delegates were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with several statements regarding conference activities and opportunities. Table 5, on the next page, shows delegates all agreed or strongly agreed that the diverse set of speakers broadened their understanding of leadership and communication about conference requirements was adequate prior to the trip. Delegates were least agreeable about communication on preparation for conference activities prior to the conference. Additionally, delegates could elaborate on any of their ratings and 32 provided their opinions. Many of the comments were positive as delegates found the MSC Spencer conference provided speakers from different walks of life and these speakers supplied a number of different perspectives on leadership. A majority of comments revealed delegates’ desires to have more time for small group discussion and reflection. Some also indicated they would have liked a more detailed conference itinerary earlier to better plan for the conference events.

The MSC Spencer Leadership Conference...	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2020 Mean (sd) (n=40)	2019 Mean (sd) (n=32)	2018 Mean (sd) (n=34)
Provided a diverse set of speakers to broaden my understanding of leadership	74%	26%	--	--	3.74 (0.44)	*	*
Provided adequate communication about conference requirements prior to the trip	55%	45%	--	--	3.55 (0.50)	*	*
Taught me how to apply my leadership skills to my college experience	55%	43%	3%	--	3.53 (0.55)	3.63 (.70)	3.47 (.62)
Enabled me to develop a professional network in a variety of fields	50%	48%	3%	--	3.48 (0.55)	*	*
Provided ample time to reflect on things I learned during the conference.	36%	49%	15%	--	3.21 (0.70)	*	*
Provided adequate communication about conference activities prior to the trip	23%	53%	23%	3%	2.95 (0.75)	*	*

Table 5: Overall Conference Experience
*not asked

When asked about the effectiveness of the small group leaders in facilitation of discussion and reflections, 45% of the 40 delegates who responded found them very effective, 43% reported them as effective, 13% said they were somewhat effective, and no one reported that they were ineffective (Mean=3.33/4.0, sd=.69). This rating was similar to last year's rating (Mean=3.24/4.0, sd=.75, n=32). Furthermore, delegates could write in an explanation of their response and 40 wrote a comment. Many delegates complimented their small group leaders on effective facilitation of group discussion and guiding questions that provided a platform for more discussion. Some delegates, however, indicated a desire for their leaders to provide for more in-depth discussions.

Respondents were asked to identify which speaker's discussion of leadership resonated with them the most and the least. Of the 40 who commented, nearly half of the delegates indicated Jeff Schiefelbein's discussion of leadership resonated the most. Other speakers mentioned Dr. Chris Dowdy, Dr. Weir and Judge Mitchell. Alternatively, there were 40 comments provided for the speaker who resonated the least with the delegates. Most delegates listed the speeches of Lieutenant Commander Warren Moore and Rob Casso resonating the least with them.

When asked to rate their overall experience during the MSC Spencer Leadership Conference, 76% of the delegates rated their experiences excellent, 21% selected the above average while 3% rated the conference experience as average (Mean= 4.74/5.0, sd=.50, n=38). Last year 84% of the delegates reported their experience as excellent and 16% said their experience was above average (Mean=4.84/5.0, sd=.37, n=31). Like last year, none of the delegates rated their overall experience as below average, or poor. Anyone who rated the conference below average or poor were provided a space to explain their ratings. None selected these response options, but five commented this question is not applicable and three shared they enjoyed the conference experience.

Delegates were asked to provide any suggestions to improve the conference and 37 respondents shared their ideas. Delegates suggested that they would like more time (both structured and casual) to get to know other delegates prior to the conference and during more small group interactions on conference. Delegates also

suggested a desire to know more about speakers prior to the conference and opportunities to network with speakers. A few also recommended having more reflection time at conference.

Background

According to the organization's website, (<http://spencer.tamu.edu/>) MSC Spencer is a conference "that seeks to provide a unique opportunity to sophomores to enhance personal leadership skills in the pursuit of life long excellence in diverse environments." The MSC Spencer Leadership Conference was held in Dallas, TX, February 5 -7, 2020, and during the conference, delegates attended programs and discussions featuring leaders in business, industry, education, and public service. They also participate in small group discussions prior to the conference. This is the 11th year that Student Life Studies has worked with MSC Spencer to assess this conference; the last time was in 2019.

Project Details

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, division staff 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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