

Offices of the Dean of Student Life New Student and Family Programs Howdy Week Assessment 2021

Purpose of Assessment

Howdy Week is a series of events held just before the fall semester to welcome primarily new students to campus and is coordinated by New Student and Family Programs (NSFP) in the Offices of the Dean of Student Life. Howdy Week 2021 was August 22-29, 2021, and included a combination of virtual, hybrid, and in-person events. NSFP wanted to understand the event coordinators' experience, specifically with the process to submit events for Howdy Week and how organizations find out about submitting events. Additionally, NSFP wanted to assess students' experiences with Howdy Week. Student Life Studies has worked with New Student and Family Programs assessing event coordinators for Howdy Week since 2017; however, this was the first time assessing students.

Key Findings with Recommendations

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

- Event coordinators were generally satisfied with the submission and approval process, and they expressed appreciation for NSFP staff for the planning and executing Howdy Week.
 - Some coordinators would like to see a clearer, step-by-step checklist for the process. NSFP might consider if there could be an automatic email that is sent to coordinators when an event is submitted to confirm their program was received and include a more detailed checklist for what needs to be done next. The confirmation email could also highlight the event planner resource more, especially since 43% reported not knowing about this resource.
- Over three-fourths of the students indicated they attended at least one program or event during Howdy Week and 89% reported it being an extremely positive or somewhat positive experience. The biggest challenge students faced were long lines and overcrowded events.
 - Howdy Week planners could look at how programs are described to students to help them identify the events that are for them. Additionally, NSFP could work with coordinators to be more prepared for the large number of events, especially those with food and giveaways and encourage some programs to be offered more than once to help spread students' attendance throughout the week.
- Coordinators expressed wanting more coordination from NSFP, especially with room reservations. Additionally, students shared that they were not able to attend Howdy Week events due to the date they moved into the residence hall or activities with other areas of campus.
 - NSFP might explore the options to create a Howdy Week committee with specific departments involved to help coordinate some of the deadlines and information for both event coordinators and students. Departments might include housing to help when scheduling move-in appointments, the Office of the Commandant for the FOW schedule, Transportation Services for the timing of bus routes, University Center and Special Events for space reservations, and Student Activities for necessary forms in MaroonLink.
- New Student and Family Programs is also encouraged to share results with their stakeholders, such as all event coordinators, Aggie Orientation Leaders, Offices of the Dean of Student Life, and others.

Method and Sample

Two electronic surveys were developed using Qualtrics®, a software program that creates web-based surveys. Results from both surveys were analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software program, and Microsoft Excel®.

The 17-question coordinators survey included 12 quantitative and five qualitative questions. Due to branching technology, not all respondents saw all questions. The survey link was sent through email on August 30, 2021, to the coordinators hosting events during Howdy Week. Non-responders received up to three reminders before the survey closed on September 18, 2021. Of the 63 coordinators receiving the survey, 52 responded to some part of it, yielding an 83% response rate (7% higher than in 2020).

The student survey contained seven questions, three were quantitative and four were qualitative. Due to branching technology, not all students saw all questions. The survey link was sent through email to 13,523 new first-year and transfer students on August 30, 2021. Non-respondents received up to three reminders before the survey closed on September 18, 2021. Of the 13,523 new students receiving the survey, 1,709 completed some part of it, yielding a 13% response rate.

Results

Results are reported as means, standard deviation (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%. Tables are in descending order based on the 2021 results, unless otherwise stated. The summary themes are contained in this report, while the full listing can be found in a separate document. Comparison to previous years will be made where applicable. This report is divided into two sections: Coordinator Survey and Student Survey.

Coordinator Survey

Coordinators were asked to report their estimated attendance of the different events they hosted. Respondents saw a separate question regarding the attendance based on the event title provided by NSFP. Respondents received this question up to five times depending on the number of events they hosted. Table 1 shows the results of these questions combined for the 65 events that provided an estimated attendance. Approximately one-third of the events had more than 500 students in attendance.

Event Attendance	Frequency Percentage [n=65]
501 or more	34%
101-300	26%
26-100	23%
301-500	12%
1-25	5%

Table 1: Event Attendance

Using a select all the apply question, coordinators were asked how they heard about submitting an event for Howdy Week. Table 2, on the following page, indicates almost half of all coordinators hosted events in previous years. Additionally, 50% of coordinators heard about submitting an event through some form of email communication. Those selecting the “other” response option were provided the opportunity to write a comment. Of the eight written responses, coordinators said their organization, other student leaders or staff members, or reaching out to NSFP.

How did you hear about submitting an event for Howdy Week?	Frequency Percentage [n=52]
Coordinated program for Howdy Week in previous years	48%
Bulk mail	27%
Student Activities email	23%
Website	17%
Other	15%
Social media	10%

Table 2: Hearing about Submitting Howdy Week Events

When asked if the event approval process was easy after submitting the Howdy Week event form, 73% of the 52 coordinators reported that it was easy, 17% said that it was somewhat easy, and 10% shared that it was not easy. Coordinators who felt the approve process was somewhat easy or not easy (n=14) were asked a follow-up question about what issues they had during the Howdy Week event approval process. Eleven respondents shared a wide range of experiences including not knowing all the approvals or forms that were needed, not knowing who to contact, lack of communication, and that the process took too long. A couple indicated that there were too many people or pieces involved in the approval process.

Coordinators were asked if the communication from the Howdy Week Coordinator was clear after submitting the event form. Almost all coordinators agreed that the communication was clear: 52% strongly agreed, 40% agreed, 6% were neutral, and 2% disagreed (M=4.42/5.00; sd=.70; n=52). Nobody selected the strongly disagree option. Coordinators who disagreed that the communication was clear (n=1) were asked in a follow-up question to share what could be improved with the communication. The individual who responded expressed that providing communication about the venue reservations would improve the communication.

Respondents were asked for any suggestions to improve the Howdy Week event submission process and 19 provided ideas. Approximately one-quarter of the feedback was positive about the process and appreciated the Howdy Week staff. Several suggested allowing more time or to start earlier in the summer. Many expressed that they would like clearer, even step-by-step process, especially on getting the necessary approvals. A few said they would appreciate receiving an email confirmation that their event was submitted or some form of confirmation in late July in case anything about the planning process changed.

Coordinators were asked if they would find a Howdy Week event planner information session helpful if it were offered for next year. Of the 52 coordinators who responded, 37% said yes it would be helpful, 42% indicated maybe, and 21% stated no it would not be helpful. This is a slight decrease in coordinators indicating this type of session would be helpful compared to last year when 45% said yes, 32% indicated maybe, and 23% said no.

When asked if they marketed their own event(s) beyond it being posted on the Howdy Week website and the TAMU mobile app, almost all coordinators (92%) said they did do their own marketing and 8% reported they did not.

Coordinators were asked if they used the event planner resources such as the event planner guide and event planner website. Approximately one-quarter (23%) reported that they did use the resources while 77% shared that they did not. Those who used the event planner resources (n=12) were asked for ideas to improve the resources and three wrote comments. All indicated that the resources were helpful. One suggested adding a frequently asked questions section and one would have liked an outline for the location of resource tables. Coordinators who did not use the event planner resources (n=40) were asked a follow-up question about why they did not use the resources. Over half (58%) indicated they did not need to use it and 43% stated that they did not know about the event planner resources. Nobody selected the "other" response option to explain why they did not use the resources.

The last question asked coordinators to share any suggestions or recommendations they had for Howdy Week 2022. Twenty-two wrote a comment on a variety of topics. Over one-third of the comments were positive and expressed appreciation for the Howdy Week coordinators. Several would appreciate an easier process, especially in making reservations such as NSFP coordinating due dates or reservations. Other suggestions included having clearer deadlines, providing a map or outline to know where resource tables are located, increasing the signage on campus, and listing who to contact for different things.

Student Survey

Students were initially asked if they attended any programs during Howdy Week 2021. Over three-fourths (79%) of the 1,179 students stated that they attended a program during Howdy Week and 21% said that they did not.

Three follow-up questions were asked to students who attended Howdy Week events (n=936). The first question was to share the event(s) they attended or describe the event if they do not know the event name. There were numerous events listed from the 780 responding students including Rec-a-Palooza, Play with Puppies, Class of '25 Photo, Yell Practice, Party on the Plaza, Library Scavenger Hunt, Tailgate, Tunes with Town Hall, Movie, Popsicle Party, Ice Cream Carnival, and Chicken Wars. A full list of events can be found in a separate document.

When asked how their overall experience was attending Howdy Week programs, 45% said it was extremely positive, 44% stated it was somewhat positive, 7% indicated it was neither positive or negative, 3% responded it was somewhat negative, and 1% reported that it was extremely negative ($M=4.30/5.00$; $sd=.79$; $n=936$). Students who indicated they had a negative experience with Howdy Week programs (n=37) were asked what could have been done to make their experience better. Most of the 35 comments were about the overcrowded events and long lines, which often led to running out of food, t-shirts, and other giveaway items. A couple suggestions were given such as having more cooling stations, describing events better, offering multiple programs or events on multiple days, and scheduling bus routes that fit with the Howdy Week schedule for off-campus students.

The final question for students who attended Howdy Week programs was to share any suggestions for programs they would like to see for Howdy Week 2022. Many suggestions were offered by the 390 responding students. Most students wanted more – more food, more water, more t-shirts or giveaway items, more resources, more programs, more bus routes, and more events scheduled for Saturday. Many of the students talked about the overcrowding and long lines and suggested to be more prepared for that and offer events multiple times. A few talked about planning events that focused on students meeting other students more than about offices or resources, having all the Howdy Week programs listed on the Howdy Week schedule, and offering water games.

Students who reported they did not attend a program (n=243) were asked two follow-up questions to understand why they decided to not attend anything. Table 3, on the following page, reveals that students not being moved in and scheduling conflicts were the two main reasons for not attending events. Those indicating that they were attending another university-sponsored event were asked to share what event. The events listed the most were Fish Orientation Week (FOW) with the Corps of Cadets and sorority recruitment or recruitment for a Greek organization. Those selecting the “other” response option had the opportunity to write a response. Some of the more common reasons included having to work, getting COVID-19, events being crowded, and attending FOW.

Why were you unable to attend any Howdy Week 2021 programs?	Frequency Percentage [n=241]
I was not moved-in yet	25%
Scheduling conflicts	23%
I was attending another university-sponsored event	14%
Health and safety concerns	12%
Programs did not interest me	12%
Other	9%
I did not know about it	5%

Table 3: Reasons for Not Attending Howdy Week Programs

The second follow-up question for those who did not attend a program asked students to share any program or types of programs they would like to see for Howdy Week 2022. A variety of responses were shared by 33 students. Several reported that the events that were scheduled looked good and to keep those. Other ideas included a music festival, job fair for on-campus employment, games or carnival, service programs and financial programs. Others reported to have more events each day or events that were not so crowded. One student would have appreciated knowing about Howdy Week before scheduling an appointment to move into the residence halls.

Student demographics were gathered from the university student database based on the Universal Identification Number (UIN) provided by New Student and Family Programs. Table 4, on the following page, displays the demographics for all students receiving the survey (survey population) and students who responded to the survey. Results are in descending order based on the survey respondents for each category. Most students were female, White, freshmen, in the College of Engineering, not first-generation, and first-year students. In most cases the survey respondents were representative of the survey population; however, there was a slight over representation of female, top 10 percent, and first-year students who responded to the survey.

Student Demographics	Survey Population [N=13,354]	Survey Respondents [n=1,706]
Sex		
Female	51%	59%
Male	49%	41%
Ethnicity		
White	57%	53%
Hispanic or Latino	24%	25%
Asian	12%	15%
Multi-Racial excluding Black	3%	4%
Black or Multi-Racial with Black	3%	3%
International	1%	1%
American Indian	<1%	<1%
Unknown or Not Reported	<1%	<1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<1%	--
Classification		
Freshman	72%	78%
Sophomore	20%	16%
Junior	8%	6%
Senior	<1%	<1%
College		
Engineering	30%	35%
Agriculture and Life Sciences	12%	13%
Liberal Arts	14%	11%
Education and Human Development	9%	9%
Sciences	8%	9%
Mays Business School	10%	8%
Veterinary Medicine	6%	6%
Architecture	4%	3%
General Studies	4%	3%
Geosciences	1%	2%
Public Health	2%	2%
Nursing	<1%	<1%
First Generation Status		
Not First Generation	79%	79%
First Generation	20%	20%
Unknown	1%	1%
Top 10 Percent		
Top 10 Percent	42%	51%
Not Top 10 Percent	58%	50%
Student Type	[n=13,523]	[n=1,709]
First-Year	82%	91%
Transfer	18%	10%

Table 4: Student Demographics

Background

Howdy Week is coordinated by New Student and Family Programs in the Offices of the Dean of Student Life and takes place just before each semester at Texas A&M University. Howdy 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.

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, 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://studentlifestudies.tamu.edu/aqform/>.

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