

Memorial Student Center (MSC) Fall Leadership Conference (FLC) August 2017

Background

The Memorial Student Center (MSC) Fall Leadership Conference (FLC) is an annual event that occurs the week before the fall semester begins; this year’s conference was held on August 22nd through August 24th, 2017. The theme of the 65th Annual MSC Fall Leadership Conference was *Equipping Leaders to Serve Today for Tomorrow*. According to the organization’s website (<http://flc.tamu.edu>), MSC FLC “...unites student leaders and cultivates leadership skills through interactive programs and speakers. Students, staff and former students gather to focus on personal growth while learning from each other and having a great time.”

Program outcomes for the conference included giving new student leaders the opportunity to network with other leaders, staff, administrators and former students. MSC FLC also intended for delegates to increase their perspective of leadership; this year’s conference focused on the book *Small Acts of Leadership* by G. Shawn Hunter. Conference activities, such as focus group sessions, speakers, and group activities, are designed to accomplish all aspects of the program outcomes. This is the 15th year MSC FLC has worked with Student Life Studies to assess their conference.

Methodology

The evaluation was created using Teleform[®], a software program that creates scannable paper surveys and databases. The conference evaluation contained 20 questions; 17 questions were quantitative, and three were qualitative. The data was analyzed using SPSS[®], a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel[®]. Seventy-one students attended the conference and 71 completed the survey, yielding a 100% response rate, which is a 17% higher response rate than last year.

Results

Results include frequency percentages, means, and standard deviations (sd) for the number of people (n) who responded to the questions. For ease of reading, frequency percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%. Not applicable responses were removed from analysis. In addition, summary themes are contained within this report, while the full qualitative responses can be found in a separate document. All tables are listed in descending order for percentage or mean of the 2017 data. Comparisons will be made to previous years where applicable.

The first question, in a check-all-that-apply format, asked delegates how they heard about MSC FLC. Table 1 demonstrates that this year the most delegates found out about MSC FLC from their organization advisors, at a higher percentage than in previous years. There was also an increase in students learning about MSC FLC through email and a friend, but a decrease in those who heard about the conference from former delegates and from previously attending the conference.

How did you hear about MSC FLC? (Check all that apply)	2017 Percent (n=71)	2016 Percent (n=75)	2015 Percent (n=81)
Student Organization Advisor	75%	68%	57%
E-mail	28%	24%	27%
MSC FLC Staff	17%	16%	14%
Former Delegates	13%	20%	12%
Friend	14%	10%	11%
Previously attended MSC FLC	10%	11%	12%
Social Media	1%	--	--

Table 1- MSC FLC Marketing

Delegates were asked their level of agreement with a series of statements about their enhanced understanding of the focus of each of the six speakers' presentations. As noted in Table 2, delegates strongly agreed or agreed that Shawn Hunter's presentation provided them a better understanding of goal setting and defying convention. The fewest delegates agreed that gained a better understanding of creativity and problem solving from listening to Dr. Elsa Murano's presentation.

MSC Fall Leadership Conference Experiences: Speakers	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2017 Mean (sd) [n=71]
I have a better understanding of goal setting and defying convention as a result of listening to Shawn Hunter speak on day 1.	47%	51%	3%	--	--	4.44 (.55)
I have a better understanding of the topic of leading by example as a result of listening to LTG John A. Van Alstyne speak on day 2.	54%	35%	11%	--	--	4.42 (.69)
I have a better understanding of the topics of being present and gratitude as a result of listening to Regent Elaine Mendoza's talk on day 1.	48%	42%	7%	3%	--	4.35 (.74)
I have a better understanding of the topic of taking risks as a leader as a result of listening to Col. Michael Fossum talk on day 2	51%	31%	10%	7%	1%	4.23 (.99)
I have a better understanding of the topic of grit as a result of listening to LTG Randy House speak on day 3.	41%	35%	14%	10	--	4.07 (.98)
I have a better understanding of the topics of creativity and problem solving as a result of listening to Dr. Elsa Murano speak on day 2.	38%	31%	21%	9%	1%	3.96 (1.03)

Table 2- Speakers' Topic Focus

The delegates were asked to write in comments they had regarding the speakers. Most indicated they enjoyed the speakers, found them engaging and appreciated that the speakers seemed to have read the book and related to it during their presentations. Some also commented that they would like less of the presentation style speakers, and more interactive forums to engage with the speakers, similar to the focus groups.

Respondents were asked their level of agreement with statements regarding their experience participating in the focus groups during the conference. As noted in Table 3, on the next page, delegates were most favorable about their focus groups' discussion being constructive and inclusive, and that response rating was higher than in 2016 and 2015. Although still positive, like in previous years the delegates were least positive about there being adequate time for focus groups.

MSC Fall Leadership Conference Experiences: Focus Groups	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2017 Mean (sd) [n=71]	2016 Mean (sd) [n=75]	2015 Mean (sd) [n=84]
The discussion during my focus group was constructive and inclusive	83%	16%	1%	--	--	4.82 (.43)	4.73 (.58)	4.54 (.63)
My focus group further explored the FLC theme, Equipping Leaders to Serve Today for Tomorrow	70%	27%	3%	--	--	4.68 (.53)	4.68 (.52)	4.54 (.63)
There was adequate time for focus groups	62%	34%	1%	3%	--	4.55 (.67)	4.59 (.66)	4.54 (.65)

Table 3- Focus Group Experience
(1 not asked, 11 question featured last year's theme)

When asked to select which focus group session they found most valuable, the 71 delegates most often selected focus group session 5 (24%). Focus group session 3 secured 21% of the selections, focus group session 6 was selected by 19% of the delegates, and session 4 was selected by 18% of the delegates. Focus group sessions 2 and 1 garnered 15% and 4% of the most valuable selections, respectively. Delegates were then asked to share any additional comments about the focus groups; 45 responded and many complimented specific leaders, and others indicated that they found the discussion and reflection of the groups helpful in getting to know one another and the focus group leaders. Some would have preferred a more impactful reflection project.

Students were also asked about their agreement with several statements regarding their overall conference experiences. Their responses are in Table 4 below. Delegates were more positive about their conference experiences than in previous years, although their ratings of those experiences were in the same order as previous years.

MSC Fall Leadership Conference Experiences	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2017 Mean (sd) [n]	2016 Mean (sd) [n]	2015 Mean (sd) [n]
I will take back what I learned to my organization	82%	18%	--	--	--	4.82 (.39) [71]	4.61 (.52) [74]	4.66 (.55) [83]
I had ample opportunities to network with other student leaders	61%	37%	1%	1%	--	4.56 (.60) [71]	4.51 (.58) [73]	4.45 (.81) [84]
The conference theme helped me grow as a leader	55%	39%	4%	1%	--	4.48 (.65) [71]	4.24 (.64) [74]	4.54 (.63)
I had ample opportunities to network with faculty and staff	44%	50%	3%	1%	1%	4.34 (.74) [70]	4.14 (.88) [74]	4.30 (.78) [83]
I had ample opportunities to network with former students	48%	37%	13%	3%	--	4.30 (.80) [71]	4.03 (.94) [74]	4.29 (.84) [84]

Table 4- Conference Experiences (1 not asked)

Delegates were then asked for their opinion regarding which days would work best for next year's FLC. Sixty-four percent selected the option Thursday through Saturday before Howdy Week, and 36% selected the option same as this year (Tuesday through Thursday of Howdy Week).

Lastly, delegates were asked to share any additional comments about the overall conference. Many of the 43 comments were complimentary, saying that the experience was great. Many appreciated the networking opportunities with other student leaders and former students and would like to see more of that. Others suggested more time for activities and less speaker time, and more time to spend with Deans and Vice Presidents' focus groups.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Delegates seemed to have a positive experience at the MSC Fall Leadership Conference, and found the theme and the focus on the book, *Small Acts of Leadership* cohesively presented throughout the conference. They seemed to appreciate the time and opportunity to network with other student leaders, faculty and former students during the conference and gained information from the speakers and focus groups to take back to their organizations. However, it seems many would prefer more time to interact and network with former students and faculty and staff.

As recommended in previous years, MSC FLC leadership may want to establish specific learning outcomes for the conference along with the program outcomes, which could both be measured from year to year. Although the speakers this year seemed to present more cohesively to the theme presented through the focus on the book *Small Acts of Leadership*, providing delegate learning outcomes to speakers and focus groups leaders could enable them more guidance as they organize, prepare and deliver presentations, and facilitate focus groups. Perhaps learning outcomes could be focused on the mission of the conference, and the specific leadership skills organizers intend delegates to cultivate while attending the conference. Developing these learning outcomes could also inform more interactive discussion and activities for the delegates, as some found the degree of sitting and listening less engaging.

The MSC FLC leadership may also want to consider adding a follow-up assessment, especially if a follow-up session is planned later in the fall. Asking delegates to reflect on their experience a few months after the conference can help determine the mid and long-term impact of the conference. A follow-up assessment could address issues such as whether or not delegates have implemented anything they learned, ask what they used from MSC FLC in their organizations.

The MSC FLC leadership is encouraged to share this information with their delegates, speakers, and focus group leaders so they know their input was valued. The MSC FLC leadership is also encouraged to share this report with the new MSC Fall Leadership Conference leadership, so they can incorporate any changes into the planning of the 2018 conference.

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