

Grad Camp

Graduate and Professional Student Council

Fall 2017

Background

Grad Camp is an ‘extended orientation event hosted by the Graduate and Professional Student Council (GPSC) every fall that brings together new students for a once in a lifetime learning and networking experience in Aggieland.’ (<http://www.gpsctamu.org/grad-camp.html>) There are established programs similar to this that address freshmen and transfer students, but this event was developed in 2009 specifically for graduate students.

Three Grad Camps were planned on campus, on August 17, August 24, and August 26, 2017; however, due to challenges presented by Hurricane Harvey the August 26th date was cancelled. Current graduate students served as counselors. Activities included meeting in small groups, and listening to short presentations by speakers with questions and answers.

GPSC developed learning outcomes for both the counselors and the campers for the event:

- Grad Camp counselors and chairs will develop their facilitation skills so they can lead small group discussions, and welcome new students as they make connections to campus.
- New graduate and professional students will network with new colleagues, and be introduced to some of the main traditions on campus.
- New graduate and professional students will become familiar with the culture and traditions of Texas A&M University.
- New graduate and professional students will feel more prepared for graduate school by becoming aware of the resources available to them at Texas A&M.

This is the eighth time that GPSC has collaborated with Student Life Studies to assess Grad Camp. The evaluation included assessing chairs, counselors and participants in an effort to improve the overall camp experience. Significantly fewer graduate and professional students participated in the 2017 camps than participated in the 2016 camp, in part due the August 26th date cancellation and other campus closings surrounding Hurricane Harvey.

Method and Sample

The counselor/chair survey was developed and analyzed using Qualtrics[®], a software program that creates web-based surveys and databases. The survey contained 31 questions; 25 quantitative and seven qualitative. The counselor/co-chair survey was sent to 29 students on September 29, 2017 through an email invitation, and 19 responded, resulting in a 66% response rate. Due to branching technology, not all respondents saw all questions.

The 38 question participant survey (four fewer than the 2016 survey) was also produced and analyzed using Qualtrics[®]. The participant survey included 33 quantitative questions, and five qualitative questions. Due to branching technology, not all respondents saw all questions. The participant survey was sent to 109 students, 75% fewer than the 438 students who received the survey in 2016. The students received the survey through an email invitation on September 14, 2017; 38 completed at least some part of the survey, for a 35% response rate, 7% higher than last year’s 28% 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%. Summary themes are included in this report; the entire list can be found in a separate document. This report contains two sections: Counselor/Chair Survey and Camper/Participant Survey. Demographics were pulled from the Student Information System database for participants (counselors and campers) and respondents and are reported in each section.

Counselor/Chair Survey

The demographics for counselors/chair indicated that survey respondents and participating counselors/chair were female, masters' students, white and international students and their first generation status was unknown. Table 1 lists the demographics of both the respondents and all counselors/chair who were sent the survey and the demographics are presented in descending order by respondent.

Demographics	2017 Respondents [n=19]	2017 Counselor/Chair [n=29]
Gender		
Female	61%	55%
Male	39%	45%
Ethnic Origin		
White Only	33%	28%
International	33%	41%
Hispanic or Latino of any race	17%	17%
Asian Only	11%	7%
Black only or multi-racial with Black	6%	3%
Multi-racial excluding Black	--	3%
First Generation Student		
Unknown	42%	45%
Not First Generation	37%	35%
First Generation	21%	21%
Classification		
Masters	61%	69%
Doctoral	39%	31%
Academic College		
Engineering	33%	38%
Education	17%	14%
Veterinary Medicine	17%	10%
Agriculture	11%	10%
Business	11%	7%
Science	6%	7%
Public Health	6%	3%
Bush	--	7%
Liberal Arts	--	3%

Table 1: Counselor/Chair Demographics

The first question asked if 2017 was the first year that the respondent had served as a counselor for Grad Camp. Of the 19 respondents, 18 (95%) indicated that this was the first year working with Grad Camp. Experienced counselors/chair were asked to compare Grad Camp 2017 to their previous experience. Table 2, shows that the one respondent thought that counselor training and Grad Camp overall stayed the same from previous years; however, communication was found to be worse when compared to their previous experience.

	Much Better (5)	Better (4)	The same (3)	Worse (2)	Much Worse (1)	2017 Mean [n=1] (sd)	2016 Mean (sd) [n=3]
Overall	--	--	100%	--	--	3.00	2.67 (.58)
Counselor training	--	--	100%	--	--	3.00	1.67 (.58)
Communication	--	--	--	100%	--	2.00	2.00 (1.00)

Table 2: Comparison to Previous Grad Camps

Those counselors who responded that it was their first time as a Grad Camp counselor were asked if their role as counselor at Grad Cap was what they expected. Of the 8 respondents 94% said yes and 6% or 1 respondent said no. The respondents who said no were asked why the role as counselor was not as they expected, and the respondent indicated that they thought there would be more for the counselors to do to help logistically.

The next set of questions asked the students about the results of their participation as a counselor in Grad Camp. Responses, shown below in Table 3, were mostly positive in regards to counselors feeling better connected to Texas A&M, and less positive about becoming more knowledgeable about Texas A&M and resources available to them as graduate and professional students. However, students responded more positively than in 2016

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2017 Mean (sd) [19]	2016 Mean (sd) [n=17]
I am better connected to the Texas A&M campus, community and culture	63%	32%	--	5%	--	4.53 (.77)	4.18 (.64)
I am more knowledgeable about Texas A&M and the resources available to me as a graduate and professional student	63%	16%	16%	5%	--	4.37 (.96)	3.59 (.94)

Table 3: Results of Participation

Respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with various components of Grad Camp; the results are listed in Table 4 on the next page. Counselors were most satisfied with the facilities for Grad Camp and least satisfied with counselor training.

	Very Satisfied (4)	Satisfied (3)	Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	2017 Mean (sd) [n]	2016 Mean (sd) [n]
Facilities (Alumni Center)	58%	21%	21%	--	3.37 (.83) [19]	3.63 (.50) [16]
Website	39%	50%	11%	--	3.28 (.67) [18]	3.06 (.68) [16]
Email communications	37%	53%	11%	--	3.26 (.65) [19]	2.81 (.91) [16]
Counselor Training	32%	47%	21%	--	3.11 (.74) [19]	*

Table 4: Counselor satisfaction
 *Not Asked

Counselors indicating that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the website or email communications were given an opportunity to expand on why they were not satisfied. Two responded, mentioning the organization and lack of attendance at counselor training and the confusion surrounding the websites referencing both 2016 and 2017 Grad Camps.

The students were then asked for their agreement with a series of statements about the result of their Grad Camp volunteering. Table 5, on the next page, shows counselors indicated the highest level of agreement about being glad they participated in Grad Camp 2017 and that they would recommend new students to attend. Respondents felt less positive about volunteering for future Grad Camps. Counselors agreed to all statements at a higher level than counselors in 2016.

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2017 Mean (sd) [n]	2016 Mean (sd) [n]
I am glad I participated in Grad Camp 2017	61%	33%	6%	--	--	4.56 (.62) [18]	3.88 (1.15) [16]
I would recommend that new students attend Grad Camp	67%	28%	--	--	6%	4.50 (.99) [18]	4.06 (1.00) [16]
I made new friends and acquaintances	56%	33%	11%	--	--	4.44 (.71) [18]	4.27 (.59) [15]
I feel more comfortable in my role as a graduate student at Texas A&M	61%	22%	17%	--	--	4.44 (.78) [18]	3.27 (1.10) [15]
I learned about the core values of Texas A&M	57%	33%	6%	--	6%	4.33 (1.03) [18]	3.88 (.72) [16]
I feel a stronger affinity with Texas A&M	61%	22%	11%	--	6%	4.33 (1.09) [18]	3.88 (.62) [16]
I am more familiar with the traditions of Texas A&M	57%	33%	6%	--	6%	4.33 (1.03) [18]	3.69 (.79) [16]
If time were not a factor, I would participate in/volunteer as a counselor/chair for Grad Camp again	61%	22%	6%	6%	6%	4.28 (1.18) [18]	3.50 (1.32) [16]

Table 5: Result of Grad Camp

The next set of questions asked counselors to rate how well Grad Camp met their expectations. The results are displayed in Table 6, on the next page. The response means improved over those of 2016, falling between met expectations and exceeded expectations. However, as in 2016, respondents found that communication about their role and expectations least met their expectations.

	Far exceeded expectations (5)	Exceeded expectations (4)	Met expectations (3)	Fell short of meeting expectations (2)	Fell far short of meeting expectations (1)	2017 Mean (sd) [n=18]	2016 Mean (sd) [n=16]
How utilized I felt in the overall mission of Grad Camp	24%	18%	47%	12%	--	3.56 (.98)	2.44 (.73)
Amount of training provided to me as a counselor	22%	22%	44%	11%	--	3.50 (1.04)	2.50 (.63)
Communication about my role and expectations	22%	17%	33%	28%	--	3.33 (1.14)	2.19 (.75)

Table 6: Expectations about Grad Camp

The students were asked about the likelihood that they would stay connected with the campers in their Discussion Groups. Of the 15 who responded, 67% said they were likely to stay connected, 27% said unlikely, and 7% stated they were very likely to stay connected. No one indicated they were very unlikely to stay connected with the campers in their Discussion Groups (mean=2.40, sd=.63).

When asked if they had planned events or outings to attend with the campers from their Discussion Group, 40% of the 15 respondents said yes, 33% said no and 27% said not yet, but that they planned to do so. Those counselors who answered yes, or not yet, but planned to do so were asked what events they had planned or are planning to attend with the campers from their Discussion Groups. Responses included First Friday, Midnight Yell, Yell practice, Silver Taps and a pot luck. Those who responded no to the question about planning events to attend with the campers from their Discussion Group were asked why not; the three respondents shared they did not have the opportunity to meet campers again and they had not shared contact information.

The counselors were then asked a series of qualitative questions. Students were asked to give one quote about Grad Camp 2017. Included in the 10 responses was “Howdy” and “Gig’em”, and they indicated that Grad Camp was a place to meet new friends and start the Aggie network.

The next question asked the counselors what Grad Camp Staff did well during the event. Responses touched on the staff finding good speakers, content, and it was well organized. Finally, the students were asked what the staff could do better for the next Grad Camp. Fourteen counselors responded to this question, and many indicated that communication and expectation to counselors could be improved as well as some of the training for counselors. Others mention food, advertisement and avoiding conflicts with other orientations that graduate students may attend.

Camper/Participant Survey

Demographics for the campers and respondents, shown below in Table 7, indicate that they were similarly represented ethnically, by sex and by classification. However, respondents were more likely from the colleges of education and agriculture, and less likely from the college of engineering than all campers and not first generation students. In Table 7, demographic frequencies are displayed in descending order by respondent.

Demographics	Respondents [n=38]	Campers [n=104]
Sex		
Female	54%	54%
Male	46%	46%
Ethnic Origin		
White Only	50%	47%
International	26%	27%
Hispanic or Latino of Any Race	11%	11%
Asian Only	8%	6%
Black Only +2 or more/1 Black	3%	6%
Unknown or not reported	3%	2%
Multi-racial excluding Black	--	2%
American Indian Only	--	1%
First Generation Student		
Not First Generation	47%	55%
Unknown	32%	28%
First Generation	21%	17%
Classification		
Masters	79%	81%
Doctoral	21%	17%
PB Non-degree	--	3%
Academic College		
Education	24%	16%
Engineering	21%	34%
Agriculture	21%	16%
Bush	8%	11%
Business	5%	4%
Public Health	5%	5%
Architecture	5%	6%
Liberal Arts	5%	3%
Science	3%	3%
Geosciences	3%	3%
Veterinary Medicine	--	1%

Table 7: Participant Demographics

The first question asked the respondents which Grad Camp 2017 they attended. Of the 29 respondents, 59% indicated they attended Session A, Thursday August 17 and 41% said they attended Session B, Thursday August 24th.

Respondents were asked about the likelihood that they would participate in a variety of activities. Table 8 indicates that students were likely or very likely to identify themselves as an Aggie and encourage friends to attend Texas A&M. Respondents were least likely to participate as a Grad Camp counselor for 2018 Grad Camp; those who indicated that they were very likely, likely or didn't know if they would participate as a Grad Camp counselor in 2018 were asked to share their name and email address so that GPSC could contact them the following year. Eleven provided their names and email addresses which can be found in the qualitative comments document accompanying this report.

	Very Likely (5)	Likely (4)	I don't know (3)	Unlikely (2)	Very Unlikely (1)	2017 Mean (sd) [n]	2016 Mean (sd) [n=102]
Identifying myself as an Aggie	71%	23%	3%	3%	--	4.63 (.69) [35]	4.52 (.81)
Encouraging a friend to attend Texas A&M	71%	20%	9%	--	--	4.63 (.65) [35]	4.49 (.81)
Earning an Aggie Ring	60%	29%	9%	3%	--	4.46 (.78) [35]	4.43 (.86)
Staying involved with Texas A&M after graduation	60%	26%	11%	3%	--	4.43 (.82) [35]	4.21 (.82)
Giving back to Texas A&M in some way	51%	31%	17%	--	--	4.34 (.77) [35]	4.17 (.69)
Participating in a tradition like Silver Taps, Muster, or Midnight Yell	65%	18%	9%	6%	3%	4.32 (1.12) [34]	4.26 (.90)
Getting involved with an organization or group on campus	60%	23%	9%	6%	3%	4.31 (1.05) [35]	3.97 (.99)
Participate as a counselor for Grad Camp 2018	14%	20%	31%	17%	17%	2.97 (1.3) [35]	*

Table 8: Camper Likelihood of Participation
*Question not asked

Students were then asked to rate their level of satisfaction with components of Grad Camp. The responding campers were most positive about the facilities used for Grad Camp and were also positive about email communications. The students were less satisfied with the website and the length of the program. The full breakdown of camper’s responses are noted below in Table 9.

	Very Satisfied (4)	Satisfied (3)	Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	2017 Mean (sd) [n]	2016 Mean (sd) [n]
Facilities (Alumni Center)	55%	43%	1%	1%	3.57 (.56) [35]	3.52 (.58) [102]
Email communications	38%	55%	5%	2%	3.26 (.56) [35]	3.29 (.65) [102]
Overall value of my registration fee	30%	51%	13%	6%	3.17 (.66) [35]	3.06 (.82) [102]
Overall quality of the program	31%	57%	8%	4%	3.09 (.71) [34]	3.16 (.73) [102]
Overall length of the program	23%	53%	20%	5%	3.06 (.68) [35]	2.93 (.79) [102]
Website	27%	65%	7%	1%	3.00 (.59) [35]	3.18 (.59) [100]

Table 9: Participant Satisfaction with Camp

Participants that indicated being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the website or email communications were given an opportunity to explain their response. Explanations from the five students that chose to answer included comments indicating the website was not updated, communication was confusing and that grad camp should introduce students to the culture and spirit of Texas A&M.

The next question asked the students about how they perceived the effectiveness of different components of Grad Camp. Table 10, on the next page, indicated that campers found the speakers at the Clayton W. Williams, Jr. Alumni Center to be the most effective, and the Discussion Groups the least effective, and less than in 2016.

	Very Effective (5)	Effective (4)	Neutral (3)	Ineffective (2)	Very Ineffective (1)	2017 Mean (sd) [n=35]	2016 Mean (sd) [n]
Speakers at the Alumni Center	60%	26%	11%	3%	--	4.43 (.82)	4.19 (.78) [101]
College breakout session during lunch	29%	51%	17%	3%	--	4.06 (.77)	3.82 (1.02) [100]
Facilitation of the Discussion Groups by the Counselors	26%	49%	9%	11%	6%	3.77 (1.14)	*
Discussion Groups	26%	34%	23%	17%	--	3.69 (1.05)	3.92 (.99) [101]

Table 10: Effectiveness of Grad Camp

The students were asked to compare themselves to friends and classmates who had not attended Grad Camp in regards to a series of questions. Of the 35 campers that responded, 29 (83%) thought that they were more knowledgeable about Texas A&M and the resources available to them as a graduate or professional student, while 11% thought they were not more knowledgeable and 6% did not know. Eighty percent (80%) also indicated that they were better connected to the Texas A&M campus, community and culture than their classmates who had not attended Grad Camp; 11% indicated that they did not think they were better connected, and 9% did not know.

Campers were then asked for their agreement with a series of statements about the impact of Grad Camp. The answers, displayed in Table 11 on the next page, show that the students felt most strongly that they learned about the core values of Texas A&M, and that they were more familiar with the traditions of Texas A&M, similar to the previous year.

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2017 Mean (sd) [n=35]	2016 Mean (sd) [n=99]
I learned about the core values of Texas A&M	60%	34%	6%	--	--	4.54 (.61)	4.37 (.80)
I am more familiar with the traditions of Texas A&M	51%	40%	9%	--	--	4.43 (.66)	4.30 (.86)
I feel a stronger affinity with Texas A&M	57%	23%	17%	3%	--	4.34 (.87)	4.21 (.93)
I am glad I attended Grad Camp 2017	54%	29%	11%	3%	3%	4.29 (.99)	4.03 (1.00)
I feel more comfortable in my role as a graduate student at Texas A&M	37%	43%	14%	6%	--	4.11 (.87)	4.03 (.85)
I would recommend that new graduate students attend Grad Camp	54%	20%	11%	9%	6%	4.09 (1.25)	3.99 (1.09)
I made new friends and acquaintances	40%	31%	20%	9%	--	4.03 (.99)	3.70 (1.20)

Table 11: Impact of Grad Camp

Respondents were asked about how the Yell Practice held at the end of camp added to their overall experience. Again, 35 responded; 77% said Yell Practice positively affected their overall experience at Grad Camp, and 23% indicated it made no difference to their overall experience at Grad Camp. No respondents indicated that Yell Practice negatively affected their overall experience at Grad Camp.

The graduate students were then asked a series of qualitative questions. Students were asked to give one quote about Grad Camp 2017. Many of the 22 responses said Grad Camp was a great experience and enabled graduate students to build their Aggie network and make friends. Specific comments can be found in the attached qualitative documents.

The next question asked the campers what Grad Camp Staff did well during the event. Responses touched on the breakout sessions, organization of the event, friendliness and welcoming environment. Finally, the students were asked what the staff could do better for the next Grad Camp. Of the 21 campers who responded to this question, common responses included more professionally oriented breakout groups, especially for graduate students not coming directly out of their undergraduate years, and needing common interests or areas of student among each breakout group.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, Grad Camp fulfilled its mission and the participating students indicated that the learning outcomes set forth for them were met. Students who attended learned about Texas A&M traditions, values, identified themselves as an Aggie and networked with new colleagues. The majority also thought themselves more knowledgeable about resources at Texas A&M than their graduate student counterparts who did not attend the camp. They found the speakers and lunchtime college breakout sessions effective, but the Discussion Groups and their facilitation less effective.

Counselors and chair also felt that they were better connected to Texas A&M and like the campers, they were able to network with new colleagues. In most every aspect about participating as a counselor or chair, these respondents were more positive about their Grad Camp experience than their 2016

counterparts. Still, they were least satisfied with their counselor training. Also, the communication about their roles and its expectations was the aspect which least met the counselors' expectations about their Grad Camp experience. GPSC should also continue on working to improve training to build facilitation skills for the counselors, as participants found the facilitation of the Discussion Groups one of the lesser effective components of Grad camp. Incorporating a more direct way to measure the counselor's facilitation skill building during their scheduled training, like a rubric, may also provide the training director staff and advisor a better insight on the improvements counselors' facilitation skills and whether further follow-up training is needed. Student Life Studies can assist GPSC in building a direct measure to assess facilitation skill training if needed.

When asked about improvements for the future, counselors, chair and campers commonly mentioned improving communication as reflected in both the information provided on the website and the timeliness of email communication. Graduate and Professional Student Council (GPSC) could work to ensure that communication before and during the event is clear to avoid miscommunication for both the counselors/chair and the campers. Finally, scheduling of the Grad Camps so that there are less conflicts with other orientations graduate students need to attend may bolster the number of attendees back to or beyond levels seen in 2016.

GPSC leadership is also encouraged to read all comments made by students to gain a full understanding of the themes of this report. GPSC could to share the results of this report with other stakeholders, such as those who presented programs and the staff and participants.

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