

Offices of the Dean of Student Life
Off-Campus Student Services
Housing Fair
Fall 2017

Background

Off-Campus Student Services (OCSS) in the Offices of the Dean of Student Life at Texas A&M University hosts the annual Housing Fair. According to the OCSS website (<http://studentlife.tamu.edu/agoss.housingfair>), during Housing Fair “off campus properties present information about their properties to Texas A&M students, faculty and staff. Students can walk around and visit the various properties’ tables and gather informational materials, as well as pick up the latest copy of the Off-Campus Survival Manual.” Furthermore, the website reports that “local community resources, such as the Bryan and College Station police departments, also sponsor booths to provide additional information pertinent to students living off campus.”

This event has traditionally been held during the spring semester; however, due to feedback from previous years the annual Housing Fair was moved to the fall semester and held on October 25th from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the Memorial Student Center. OCSS wanted to assess both the students’ experience attending Housing Fair and the vendors (properties) who set up booths during the fair. Student Life Studies has worked with OCSS to assess this event since 2002.

Method and Sample

Two surveys were developed using Qualtrics®, survey design software that creates web-based forms and databases. The results from both surveys were analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel®.

The seven-question student follow-up survey contained five quantitative and two qualitative questions. Due to branching technology, respondents did not see all questions. An e-mail with the survey link was sent on November 21, 2017 to 1,861 students who attended Housing Fair. Non-respondents received up to three reminders to complete the survey before closing on December 7, 2017. Three email addresses were undeliverable; therefore, of the 1,858 students who received the survey, 128 responded to some part of it, yielding a 7% response rate.

The vendor survey included 31 questions; 22 were quantitative and nine were qualitative in nature. Not all respondents received all questions due to branching technology. On November 21, 2017 the survey link was sent through an email to 129 housing properties who purchased a marketing package or attended the fall 2017 Housing Fair; however, 16 were undeliverable or duplicate email addresses. Additional email messages were sent to those with duplicate email addresses to have each property receive the opportunity to provide feedback. Before the survey closed on December 7, 2017, non-respondents received up to three reminders to complete the survey. Of the 125 properties who successfully received the email with survey link, 45 completed some part of the survey, for a 36% 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 for the qualitative questions are reported in this report; the entire list can be found in a separate document. Comparison to previous years will be made where applicable. The student survey started being sent out as a follow-up after the event in spring 2016; however, students were not assessed in spring 2017. In spring 2017 changes were made to the vendor survey and

that year the survey was administered as a class project for graduate students in a Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education (SAAHE) class, and not through Student Life Studies. The results are divided into two sections: Student Follow-Up and Vendor Marketing and Housing Fair.

Student Follow-Up

The first question for students, using a check all that applies option, was about how they found out about the fall 2017 Housing Fair. Table 1 indicates that almost half of the respondents learned about Housing Fair through email or friends/word of mouth. Those selecting the “other” response option were provided the opportunity to write a response. A few students said through yard signs or posters and one person reported from a Listserv.

How did you find out about the Fall 2017 Housing Fair? Please check all that apply.	Fall 2017 Frequency Percentage [n=113]	Spring 2016 Frequency Percentage [n=37]	Spring 2015 Frequency Percentage [n=467]	Spring 2014 Frequency Percentage [n=568]
Email	46%	*	*	*
Friends / Word of mouth	43%	63%	41%	44%
Walk in / Day of advertising	22%	21%	13%	17%
Social media**	17%	5%	12%	16%
Off-Campus Student Services (OCSS) website	4%	*	*	*
Banner hanging from Koldus building	4%	8%	9%	*
Newsletter	4%	11%	7%	3%
Other	4%	10%	18%	14%
Digital ad in the MSC	2%	11%	6%	1%

Table 1: Marketing

*Response Option Not Provided

**Prior to Fall 2017 Facebook was listed as the only social media option

Students were informed that Housing Fair was moved from the spring semester to October and then asked if it was held at a good time of the year. Just over three-fourths agreed with this statement (42% strongly agreed and 36% agreed). Additionally, 16% were neutral regarding Housing Fair being held at a good time of the year and 6% disagreed. Nobody selected the strongly disagree option (Mean=4.14; sd=.90; n=114).

When asked if they had arranged their housing for the next academic year, 45% of the students reported they had arranged their housing, 43% indicated they had not yet made arrangements but had started searching for housing, and 8% said no and that they had not started searching yet. Additionally, 4% stated that they did not need housing in the Bryan/College Station area for the upcoming academic year. In the spring of 2016, 90% of the respondents reported they had arranged their housing for the upcoming year, 3% said they had not yet made arrangements, and 3% were looking.

Students who needed housing in the Bryan/College Station area for the next academic year (n=109) were asked if the fall 2017 Housing Fair provided them with helpful information that had or would assist them in their search. A majority agreed that Housing Fair provided helpful information (43% strongly agreed and 40% agreed). Furthermore, 13% were neutral, 3% disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed (Mean=4.22; sd=.85; n=106). This is similar to the results in spring 2016 (Mean=4.32; sd=.68; n=37).

A follow-up question asked students who were in agreement or neutral about Housing Fair providing helpful information (n=102), what resources provided at Housing Fair did they find most useful in their search, with a select all the applies option. A majority (81%) reported finding the handouts from the properties at Housing Fair useful and 49% indicated the Off-Campus Survival Manual was useful. Additionally, 4% selected the “other” response

option and were given the chance to write in a response. One student said the apartment finder, one student reported that the property websites were useful, and one student said the list of all places at the event.

There also was a follow-up question for students who disagreed or strongly disagreed that Housing Fair provided helpful information (n=4). These students were asked what else they had used or were using in their housing search for the upcoming academic year. Students reported word of mouth, visiting places, friends, social media, and driving around town.

The final question on the survey for all respondents asked what they would have liked to have learned about off-campus living that they did not find or learn about at Housing Fair. Students talked about wanting to learn more about bus routes to different properties or areas of town, floor plans, and prices. Some talked about knowing which properties were pet-friendly, near west campus, or length of leasing contract. One person suggested having a fact sheet with information from all the properties at Housing Fair and it could include similar basic information to allow students to compare properties or narrow their list based on information important to them. A few students indicated wanting more information about the process for selecting housing and that this was their first time looking at apartments and not knowing what to look for in their search.

Student demographic information was gathered from students who swiped into Housing Fair with their student ID. Table 2, on the following page, shows this data for the students who responded to the survey. Most students were white, female, under-classmen in the College of Engineering.

	Frequency Percentage
Classification	
Freshman	38%
Sophomore	24%
Junior	16%
Senior	13%
Masters / Doctoral	8%
College	
Engineering	27%
Liberal Arts	17%
Agriculture	13%
Science	13%
Veterinary Medicine	9%
Education	8%
Mays Business School	5%
Geosciences	3%
Architecture	2%
General Studies	2%
Public Health	2%
Gender	
Female	77%
Male	23%
Ethnicity	
White Only	41%
Hispanic or Latino	26%
Asian Only	16%
Black Only and 2 or More/1 Black	8%
International	6%
2 or More/Excluding Black	4%
First Generation Status	
Continuing Generation	57%
First Generation	34%
Unknown	8%

Table 2: Respondent Demographics (n=128)

Vendor Marketing and Housing Fair

Respondents were initially asked about the type of vendor they represented. Over two-thirds (68%) indicated they were a property, 30% were a management company, and 2% said they were a locator service. Those representing a property (n=30) were asked two follow-up questions to find out their property type and size. Table 3 illustrates that most properties were apartment complexes with 500 or less beds.

	Frequency Percentage
Property Type (select all that apply)	
Apartment Complex	97%
Townhome/Condo/Duplex	10%
Rental Homes	3%
Privatized Residence Hall	--
Other	--
Occupancy (by bed)	
0-500 beds	67%
501-1000 beds	20%
1001-2000 beds	13%
2001+beds	--

Table 3: Property Information (n=30)

Vendors were asked to rate their overall level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the Off-Campus Student Services marketing package. Using a 4-point scale, most reported being satisfied: 38% were extremely satisfied and 55% were somewhat satisfied. Furthermore, 5% reported being somewhat dissatisfied and 2% were extremely dissatisfied (mean=3.29; sd=.67; n=42).

Respondents were provided three components of the marketing package and asked to rank them from 1 being most beneficial to 3 being least beneficial. Table 4 demonstrates vendors felt the Housing Fair eligibility was the most beneficial. It should be noted that a lower mean score indicates the component being more beneficial.

Please rank the components of the marketing package from most (1) to least (3) beneficial.	1	2	3	Mean (sd)
Housing Fair Eligibility	64%	8%	28%	1.64 (.91)
Off-Campus Survival Manual	24%	48%	28%	2.04 (.74)
Aggie Search	12%	44%	44%	2.32 (.69)

Table 4: Marketing Package (n=25)

When asked if they were satisfied with the advertising opportunities, 87% of respondents stated they were satisfied and 13% said they were not satisfied. Vendors were provided four advertising opportunities and asked to rank them from most beneficial (1) to least beneficial (4). Table 5, on the following page, reveals that Housing Fair is viewed as the most beneficial advertising opportunity.

Please rank the advertising opportunities from most (1) to least (4) beneficial.	1	2	3	4	Mean (sd)
Housing Fair	65%	3%	13%	19%	1.87 (1.26)
Listed in the Off-Campus Survival Manual	23%	19%	39%	19%	2.55 (1.06)
Graphic ad in the Off-Campus Survival Manual	3%	52%	26%	19%	2.61 (.84)
Aggie Search	10%	26%	23%	42%	2.97 (1.05)

Table 5: Advertising Opportunities (n=31)

Vendors were asked several questions related to the marketing package. They were first asked if they were satisfied with the marketing package price. Just over half (55%) reported they were satisfied with the price, 24% were unsure, and 21% were not satisfied. When asked if they purchased a marketing package last year for the 2016-2017 year, 76% stated they had, 19% said they had not, and 5% were unsure. Finally, vendors were asked if they intended to purchase the 2018-2019 marketing package that would be released in the summer of 2018. Almost two-thirds (60%) indicated they would purchase the package, 36% were unsure, and 5% said they would not.

Those who said they were not satisfied with the marketing package pricing (n=9) were asked to explain their response. Two vendors wrote in a response indicating the cost was too high. One felt that Aggie Search was outdated for the cost and not advertised enough. The other reported that the traffic received did not warrant the cost. Furthermore, vendors who reported they would not be purchasing the 2018-2019 marketing package (n=2) were provided the opportunity to explain why they would not be purchasing the package. Again, One person stated that the package was overpriced for the traffic they received. The second vendor stated that they were not seeing a return on their investment on the Housing Fair. The vendor went on to say that the event had turned into a grab and go for students to collect swag rather than properties sharing information.

Using a select all that applies question, vendors were asked about specific services or benefits their property had participated in. Three-fourths (75%) reported participating in the fall 2017 Housing Fair, 65% said being listed in the Off Campus Student Manual, and 60% indicated advertising in the Off-Campus Survival Manual. There was a “none of the above” response option; however, nobody selected it.

Those who reported participating in the fall 2017 Housing Fair (n=30) were asked a series of questions regarding their experience at the event. Table 6, on the following page, demonstrates vendors reported being most satisfied with the load-in and load-out procedures; however, they were least satisfied with the lunch and the date change from the spring to the fall semester. Additionally, those who participated in the Housing Fair were asked for any feedback regarding the event. Almost all of the comments that were shared were related to the date change from the spring semester to the fall semester. Many vendors liked having the event in the fall semester but shared that students were not ready to commit to a year-long lease that started almost a year out. Some suggested having the event later in the fall semester and several expressed interest in having the event each semester. One vendor indicated there has always been confusion related to the online form being completed or not and not receiving important details about the event.

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Mean (sd)
I was satisfied with the load-in procedures.	70%	30%	--	--	--	4.70 (.47)
I was satisfied with the load-out procedures.	57%	43%	--	--	--	4.57 (.50)
I was satisfied with the communication leading up to Housing Fair.	47%	47%	3%	3%	--	4.37 (.72)
Housing Fair was helpful.	33%	47%	17%	3%	--	4.10 (.80)
The vendor packet given at check-in was useful.	30%	50%	20%	--	--	4.10 (.71)
I was satisfied with the date change from spring to fall for Housing Fair.	37%	23%	30%	3%	7%	3.80 (1.19)
I was satisfied with the lunch provided on the day of Housing Fair.	13%	63%	17%	--	7%	3.77 (.94)

Table 6: Fall 2017 Housing Fair (n=30)

Vendors who reported they advertised in the Off-Campus Survival Manual (n=24) were asked a series of questions related to their experience. They were first asked if they bought a graphic ad in the Off-Campus Survival Manual, and 67% reported they had, while 33% said they had not. Those who had purchased a graphic ad (n=16) were asked how helpful the ad was for them. Two vendors wrote in a response and indicated they were unsure or that it was not helpful because they had not received any leases from the guide yet. When asked if they knew that a map was not included in the Off-Campus Survival Manual, 79% of the respondents said no and 21% reported they did know.

Furthermore, vendors who advertised in the Off-Campus Survival Manual were asked to rate their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with aspects of their advertising. Table 7 shows that vendors reported being mostly satisfied with the manual's new look and the advertising opportunities.

	Extremely Satisfied (4)	Somewhat Satisfied (3)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Extremely Dissatisfied (1)	Mean (sd)
How satisfied were you with the Off-Campus Survival Manual's new look/lack of theme this year?	54%	42%	4%	--	3.50 (.59)
How satisfied were you with advertising opportunities in the Off-Campus Survival Manual?	46%	42%	13%	--	3.33 (.70)

Table 7: Off-Campus Survival Manual (n=24)

The final follow-up question for those who advertised in the manual provided an opportunity for vendors to share any feedback regarding advertising in the Off-Campus Survival Manual. One person shared that he/she preferred the manual not having a theme to allow properties to focus on their message and not fitting it with the theme. Another person indicated they felt the advertising was too expensive.

The survey had a question that asked vendors if there was any reason they did not participate in any of the programs or services provided by Off-Campus Student Services. This question would have been for anyone who

had selected the “none of the above” option to the question asking about which services or benefits their property participated in. Since nobody select the “none of the above” option, this question was not seen by any respondent.

The final three questions were asked of all survey respondents. Vendors were asked how Off-Campus Student Services could continue to grow in customer service and vendor relations as an office. Several offered positive comments indicating that the staff were responsive, helpful, courteous, and able to answer questions. Some expressed wanting more opportunities to work with Texas A&M, having less expensive options to select from, and changes with the resource tables.

When asked what other services or opportunities they would recommend Off-Campus Student Services incorporate in the marketing package, vendors suggested developing a renewal feature so the forms would not need to be filled out each year, hosting more Housing Fairs, having a social media presence, and giving more opportunities for property shout outs.

The last question asked vendors what benefits or changes in the marketing package would motivate them or keep them motivated to purchase the package in the future. There were a few suggestions including changing the date to later in the academic year, offering a renewal feature, and lowering the prices.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Students and vendors were generally satisfied with the fall 2017 Housing Fair. Students found information at the event to help them make arrangements for housing for the next academic year. Students were more positive about the date change from the spring semester to the fall semester than vendors. Vendors felt that students were not ready to make a decision and sign a lease that far out. The Housing Fair was the main benefit for vendors to purchase the marketing package.

There were some suggestions that staff in Off-Campus Student Services (OCSS) may want to explore to help students navigate Housing Fair in the future. Creating a comparable fact sheet with information such as occupancy, being pet-friendly, costs, being on a bus route, etc. may help students narrow down the properties they visit during Housing Fair. Additionally, having Transportation Service at Housing Fair or providing information related to bus routes for areas of town may be beneficial to students.

Vendors were least satisfied with the cost of the marketing package. OCSS staff may want to continue to explore marketing opportunities to advertise to students. This may be through social media, at New Student Conferences, or special programming.

Off-Campus Student Services staff is encouraged to read all the comments for a deeper understanding. Furthermore, staff is also encouraged to share these assessment results and subsequent changes with stakeholders such as students, vendors, and volunteers who work at Housing Fair.

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