

# Memorial Student Center (MSC) Spencer Leadership Conference Evaluation Spring 2018

## **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 conference focuses on leadership development through the exploration of three pillars: Self-Aware Leadership, Innovative Leadership, and Selfless Leadership.

The conference was held in Dallas, TX on February 15 - 17, 2018. During the conference, delegates attended programs and discussions featuring leaders in business, industry, education, and public service. This is the ninth year that Student Life Studies has worked with MSC Spencer to assess this conference; the last time was in 2015.

## **Methodology**

The survey was developed using Teleform®, a survey development software that creates scannable paper-based surveys and databases. Data was analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel®.

The 35-question survey contained 28 quantitative and seven qualitative questions. The survey was distributed to delegates on the final day of the conference. Of the 35 students who were given the survey, 34 completed it, yielding a 97% response rate.

## **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 unless otherwise noted. Those selecting N/A or that they did not attend a specific session were removed from the analysis. Summary themes for the qualitative questions are contained in this report; the full qualitative responses can be found in a separate document. Comparisons to previous years are not being made since the last year a formal assessment was conducted in 2015.

Delegates were asked about their understanding of different leadership perspectives. Table 1 reveals that delegates' responses mostly agreed feeling inspired to pursue lifelong excellence in leadership and leadership opportunities, followed by having a better understanding of their own leadership style.

<b>As a result of MSC LEAD Spencer Leadership Conference...</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (4)</b>	<b>Agree (3)</b>	<b>Disagree (2)</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (1)</b>	<b>2018 Mean (sd)</b>
<b>I feel inspired to pursue lifelong excellence in leadership</b>	88%	12%	--	--	3.88 (.33)
<b>I feel inspired to pursue leadership opportunities on campus</b>	77%	24%	--	--	3.76 (.43)
<b>I have a better understanding of my own leadership style</b>	38%	62%	--	--	3.38 (.49)

Table 1: Understanding of Leadership Styles (n=34)

Students were requested to choose one of the three leadership perspectives (self-aware leadership, selfless leadership, or innovative leadership) and tell what that leadership perspective means to them. The three leadership perspectives were selected equally from the 33 delegates who responded to the question, with 33% each reporting self-aware leadership, selfless leadership, and innovative leadership. Those who chose self-aware leadership commented that it means knowing your own personal pillars, taking responsibility for your actions, and continuing to grow or focus on your personal development. Delegates who selected selfless leadership defined it as putting others before yourself, working for your team and not yourself, doing what is best for the greater good, and benefiting others. Innovative leadership was defined by delegates as leading in new ways or changing how things are done to continue to grow.

Delegates were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with several statements regarding conference activities and opportunities. Table 2 shows they felt the conference provided a valuable mentoring experience at the community service project and interaction with leaders from a variety of fields. Delegates reported being less positive about the time to reflect on things learned during the conference. Additionally, students were provided the opportunity to elaborate on any of their ratings and 26 wrote a comment. Many of the comments were positive or sharing appreciation for the directors who planned the conference. Some delegates would have liked to have more time for group discussion and reflection, more communication prior to the conference, and additional pre-conference events.

<b>The MSC Spencer Leadership Conference...</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (4)</b>	<b>Agree (3)</b>	<b>Disagree (2)</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (1)</b>	<b>2018 Mean (sd)</b>
<b>Provided a valuable mentoring experience at the community service project</b>	79%	18%	3%	--	3.76 (.50)
<b>Provided valuable interaction and networking opportunities with leaders from a variety of fields</b>	62%	38%	--	--	3.62 (.49)
<b>Provided valuable interaction with other speakers</b>	53%	41%	6%	--	3.47 (.62)
<b>Taught me how to apply my leadership skills to my college experience</b>	53%	41%	6%	--	3.47 (.62)
<b>Provided valuable interaction with other students</b>	41%	56%	3%	--	3.38 (.55)
<b>Had seamless transitions from one activity to the next</b>	38%	50%	12%	--	3.26 (.67)
<b>Provided adequate communication about conference activities and requirements prior to the trip</b>	44%	38%	12%	6%	3.21 (.88)
<b>Provided adequate time to reflect on things I learned during the conference</b>	38%	38%	21%	3%	3.12 (.84)

Table 2: Overall Conference Experience (n=34)

When asked about the effectiveness of the mentors and small groups in helping to prepare for the conference, 15% of the delegates found them very effective, 39% reported them as effective, 36% said they were somewhat effective, and 9% felt they were ineffective (Mean=2.61; sd=.86; n=33). Furthermore, delegates were provided the opportunity to explain their response to their ratings of the mentors and small groups and 31 wrote a comment. Those who rated the mentors and small groups very effective or effective commented that they were able to ask questions, be engaged in the conversation, network with other students, and get good explanations or breakdown different pillars. Others felt the groups were helpful and provided consistency. However, some felt the groups needed more interactions and that the communications could be challenging for some. Those reporting the mentors and small groups were somewhat effective stated that their groups did not meet often or did not have enough time.

Others would have liked more casual opportunities to get to know their group. Finally, delegates who rated the mentors and small groups as ineffective noted the discussion was surface level and that they did not know one another well. One felt there should have been more time together during pre-conference activities.

Respondents were asked to rate each of the speakers and round tables during the conference. Table 3, on the following page, indicates that delegates were most positive about Jeff Schiefelbein, Dr. Chris Dowdy, and Dr. Jessica Moore. Alternatively, the delegates were not as excited about Claire Mendenhall-Almanza or Dr. Hak Choy. Additionally, delegates were asked to identify which speaker's discussion of leadership resonated with them the most and least. Of the 34 comments provided for resonating the most, Jeff Schiefelbein was reported by almost two-thirds of the delegates. Other speakers mentioned Dr. Hak Choy, Dr. Chris Dowdy, Jim Drebelbis, Hannah Donaldson, Dr. Jessica Moore, Rachel Hayden, and the Southwest Airlines round table. Alternatively, there were 33 comments provided for the speaker who resonated the least with the delegates including Cameron Collins, Claire Mendenhall-Almanza, Dr. Hak Choy, Tiffany Beadine, James Hunter, Jim Drebelbis, and Rachel Hayden. Furthermore, both round tables (Southwest Airlines and Alvarez & Marsal) were mentioned.

<b>Please rate the speakers/round tables on the leadership content of their speech.</b>	<b>Excellent (5)</b>	<b>Above Average (4)</b>	<b>Average (3)</b>	<b>Below Average (2)</b>	<b>Poor (1)</b>	<b>Mean (sd) [n]</b>
<b>Jeff Schiefelbein</b>	88%	9%	3%	--	--	4.85 (.44) [34]
<b>Dr. Chris Dowdy</b>	67%	24%	6%	3%	--	4.55 (.75) [33]
<b>Dr. Jessica Moore</b>	62%	27%	12%	--	--	4.50 (.71) [34]
<b>Alvarez &amp; Marsal Round Tables</b>	47%	38%	12%	--	3%	4.26 (.90) [34]
<b>Southwest Airlines Round Table</b>	44%	32%	18%	6%	--	4.15 (.93) [34]
<b>Hannah Donaldson</b>	32%	47%	18%	3%	--	4.09 (.79) [34]
<b>Tiffany Beadine</b>	29%	50%	18%	3%	--	4.06 (.78) [34]
<b>Cameron Collins</b>	36%	30%	27%	6%	--	3.97 (.95) [33]
<b>James Hunter</b>	39%	21%	36%	3%	--	3.97 (.95) [33]
<b>Dr. Marisa Suhm</b>	29%	38%	24%	9%	--	3.88 (.95) [34]
<b>Rachel Hayden</b>	33%	30%	24%	12%	--	3.85 (1.03) [33]
<b>Jim Drebelbis</b>	21%	32%	29%	18%	--	3.56 (1.02) [34]
<b>Dr. Hak Choy</b>	21%	24%	38%	15%	3%	3.44 (1.08) [34]
<b>Claire Mendenhall-Almanza</b>	15%	27%	29%	21%	9%	3.18 (1.19) [34]

Table 3: Conference Speakers and Round Tables

When asked to rate their overall experience during the MSC Spencer Leadership Conference, 59% of the delegates reported their experience as excellent and 41% said their experience was above average (Mean=4.59; sd=.50; n=34). None of the delegates rated their overall experience as average, below average, or poor. For anyone who rated the conference below average or poor, they were asked to explain their ratings. None selected these response options and no comments were shared.

Delegates were asked to provide any suggestions they had to improve the conference and 32 respondents shared. The most common suggestions related to the pre-conference events. Delegates would like more time (both structured and casual) to get to know other delegates prior to the conference. Many felt the speakers for the pre-conferences were good but would like more time to ask questions, similar to what happened at the conference. Several delegates mentioned getting information earlier such as dates, packing list, etc. During the conference, delegates suggested having more diverse speakers and making sure their speeches connect with one of the three leadership pillars.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Overall, the conference was a positive experience for students. Delegates were able to define the three leadership perspectives. Additionally, delegates reported being inspired to pursue lifelong excellence in leadership, feeling inspired to pursue leadership opportunities on campus, and gaining an understanding of their leadership style.

The delegates offered several suggestions that MSC Spencer Leadership Conference staff might want to consider implementing for future years. Pre-conference events were mentioned the most, and the conference staff might want to look at the purpose of these events and if they are structured to accomplish this. It seems more intentionality with the pre-conferences events could be beneficial. If possible, allow more time for the delegates to ask questions to speakers. This will also get the delegates thinking of questions to ask speakers and what to expect while on the conference. Furthermore, planning structured socials and encouraging delegates to get together would help students meet one another prior to the conference. The pre-conference events may also be a valuable time to introduce the ideas of the mentors and small groups, if not already being done. This may be good ways to structure small groups to meet and discuss a pre-conference speaker and getting to know one another. It may be good to set some minimum expectations for the facilitators of these small groups to ensure a more consistent experience for all the delegates.

There were some suggestions related to the communication prior to the conference. The director staff may want to explore options for increasing communication and what information is shared. It may be worth planning dates for pre-conference events very early and including those on the application, as well as sharing again when students are selected to be a delegate. Furthermore, sharing the packing list earlier might make it easier for delegates to be prepared for the conference. The directors may look at adding some extra time to the last pre-conference event scheduled for the fall semester and discuss the packing list with delegates at that time. This would provide the break for delegates to bring clothing from home or purchase clothing if needed for the conference.

Finally, during the actual conference weekend, the director staff may want to think through the schedule and if there is too much planned for the weekend. Several delegates commented on not being on time, as well as not having enough time for networking, asking questions to speakers, and reflecting on what they are learning. It may be worth having fewer speakers, but have more quality time and experience with the speakers selected. Additionally, being intentional with providing opportunities for delegates to reflect on what they are learning throughout the conference allows students to really process and make meaning of the experience. The director staff might look at scheduling small group discussions after speakers and having questions for each group to discuss. Another option could be developing journals for the delegates and including reflection prompts on what was learned from a speaker, why that was important, and how a delegate could apply that information after the conference ends.

The MSC Spencer Leadership Conference staff may want to consider developing learning outcomes for the participants, if that has not already been done. It also may be beneficial to develop outcomes for the pre-conference events and what those should accomplish, which may be similar to the conference outcomes. This would allow the leadership to know if the students attending the pre-conference events and the actual conference are getting the intended purpose the planners had for these events.

MSC Spencer Leadership Conference staff is encouraged to read all the qualitative comments provided to better understand delegates' feedback. Additionally, the staff is strongly encouraged to share these assessment results with all those who are part of the planning process and include it as part of the transition materials for the 2018-2019 director staff.

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