Memorial Student Center
Student Conference on National Affairs 63
Spring 2018

Background
According to its website (http://scona.tamu.edu/), the Memorial Student Center (MSC) Student Conference on National Affairs (SCONA) was founded in 1955 in order to bring national and foreign policy issues to Texas A&M University. The purpose of the conference is to provide "programs for students across Texas, the nation, and the world to exchange ideas and discuss the role of the United States in the global community." The theme for SCONA 63 was "New World Disorder: Reconsidering America's Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships" and was held February 15-17, 2018. The conference, which brings together delegates from all over the world, focused on "delving deeper into issues that are complex, regionally specific and affect the global community as a whole." SCONA 63 utilized speakers and team facilitators with first-hand experience in the topic to guide delegates in the creation of a policy paper.

This is the tenth time the MSC SCONA committee has worked with Student Life Studies to assess various aspects of the conference.

Method and Sample
The survey was produced using Teleform®, a software program that creates scannable paper surveys and databases. Of the 19 questions on the survey, 12 were quantitative and seven were qualitative. Data was analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package and Microsoft Word®. The paper survey was distributed to all conference delegates at the conclusion of the conference. Of the 140 delegates who received the survey, 34 completed it, yielding a 24% response rate, significantly lower than the 80% response rate from 2016, the last time the experience of conference delegates was assessed.

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, frequency percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%. Tables are in descending mean order for 2016 unless otherwise stated. In addition, qualitative themes are contained within this report, while the full qualitative responses can be found in a separate document. Comparison data to previous years will be provided where appropriate. In 2016, the scale was changed, removing "neutral" as an option, so this report will provide 2016 and 2018 results using ratings of 4=strongly agree, 3=agree, 2=disagree, and 1=strongly disagree.

Delegates were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements about this year's conference activities. Table 1 illustrates delegates increased their knowledge of the United States' role in the global community and heard a variety of viewpoints. Participants were less positive about Mr. Hyung-gil and the communication before the conference (in 2016, the mean was 3.18).

Statement	(4) Strongly Agree	(3) Agree	(2) Disagree	(1) Strongly Disagree	2018 Mean (sd) [n]
I increased my knowledge of the United States' changing roles, responsibilities, and relationships by participating in conference activities	67%	33%	--	--	3.67 (.48) [33]
SCONA 63 provided and environment that freely explores ideas/perspectives that are different than my own	64%	36%	--	--	3.64 (.49) [33]
Dr. Joseph Han's in-depth account of life in North Korea and his subsequent escape illustrated the experience and worldview of a North Korean citizen and how it may differ than my own	53%	41%	6%	--	3.47 (.62) [34]
General Frank J. Grass conveyed the role that NORTHCOM, NORAD, and the National Guard play in defending America against foreign and domestic threats	38%	59%	3%	--	3.35 (.54) [34]
Congressman Louie Gohmert delivered insight about the roles and responsibilities of a public policy maker in today's political climate	49%	39%	3%	9%	3.27 (.91) [33]
Mr. Kim Hyung-gil effectively detailed the role of diplomatic tactics in regards to nuclear proliferation	21%	71%	9%	--	3.12 (.54) [34]
The quality of communication prior to the conference was satisfactory.	30%	46%	15%	9%	2.97 (.92) [33]

Table 1: Speakers and Overall Conference Experience (*Question not asked)

Participants were asked to share their feedback regarding the speakers. Of the 26 people who commented, most were complimented the speakers. A couple of participants had a hard time understanding Dr. Han, and a few people thought Gen. Grass did not particularly engage the audience. Other suggestions included having more time for questions and not having speakers in the late afternoon. In addition, participants were asked for speaker recommendations; those are provided in a separate document.

Delegates were also asked a series of questions specifically pertaining to their roundtable experiences during the conference. Table 2 demonstrates the roundtable experience was positive for the delegates. When asked about what they found most valuable, respondents appreciated the insight from their facilitator and hearing diverse perspectives. When asked about what they valued least, several people mentioned the length of the paper and lack of time to research. A couple of people did not like the skits.

Statement	(4) Strongly Agree	(3) Agree	(2) Disagree	(1) Strongly Disagree	2018 Mean (sd) [n]	2016 Mean (sd) [n]
My roundtable facilitator(s) provided useful insight during the roundtable discussions	79%	21%	--	--	3.79 (.41) [34]	3.63 (.63) [100]
I practiced valuable communication skills from the roundtable discussions and policy-making process	68%	32%	--	--	3.68 (.48) [34]	3.68 (.49) [100]
My roundtable host adequately accommodated my needs during the roundtable sessions	65%	35%	--	--	3.65 (.49) [34]	3.76 (.43) [100]
I found value in the roundtable policy presentations and skits	41%	47%	12%		3.29 (.68) [34]	3.73 (.47) [98]

Table 2: Roundtable Discussion

Delegates were asked how they heard about MSC SCONA by selecting options from a provided list. Table 3 reveals that professors and word of mouth (although down 21% from 2016) continue to be the main methods used to find out about MSC SCONA. The Other responses included people who attended last year, SCUSA, and Tom Elliot.

How did you hear about MSC SCONA? (Select all that apply)	2018 Percent (n=33)	2016 Percent (n=99)	2015 Percent (n=91)
Professor and Institution	34%	32%	39%
Word of mouth	28%	51%	32%
Email	16%	24%	17%
Other	8%	18%	30%
Social Media	8%	13%	6%
Flyer	6%	9%	3%

Table 3: Marketing

Delegates were asked what they learned at SCONA 63 and how they would use this information. Participants (n=22) addressed policy construction, using the military for various purposes, and personal skills such as a broader world view and communicating with others.

Conference participants were asked to provide suggestions for next year's conference. Similar to last year, suggestions (n=22) included improving the quality and quantity of food, providing a clearer schedule in advance, improving communication, and managing the schedule better.

A similar question asked delegates what suggestions they had for next year's conference topic. Some suggested topics included social media/technology, economic policy, environmental refugees, space, and science and national security.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, delegates were very positive about their experiences and could articulate what they learned through the speakers and activities, particularly related to policy development. Similar to previous years, some delegates noted the lack of quantity and quality of food.

Once again, MSC SCONA is encouraged to focus on specific learning outcomes for several years to monitor growth of the conference. MSC SCONA may want to consider looking at ways to connect this program with global competence outcomes, particularly the ability to "recognize diverse economic, political, cultural, and religious opinions and practices." This will help in assessing the conferences success and areas to focus on in the future. In terms of measuring learning, MSC SCONA may want to explore evaluating the final policy presentations as a demonstration of their learning. Perhaps the roundtable facilitators, with some basic training, could complete a rubric for each group. While that would not measure individual learning, it would provide a measure of the group to communicate foreign and domestic policy recommendations.

In the future, MSC SCONA may also want to ask demographic questions to registrants when they register online, as well as collect UIN information from TAMU participants, in order to conduct demographic analysis. If not already done so, MSC SCONA may want to evaluate the International Strategic Crisis Negotiation Exercise (ISCNE) that is a pre-conference experience coordinated with the U.S. Army War College.

Qualitative themes were included in this report, and MSC SCONA is encouraged to read all comments from delegates to gain a fuller understanding of their experience and the conference's impact. MSC SCONA should also consider sharing the results of this assessment with those who are involved with the planning and implementation of the event.

Report Prepared for: Madison Collier and Raye Leigh Stone, MSC SCONA
Report Prepared by: Darby Roberts, Student Life Studies
Report Prepared on: April 13, 2018
Survey Created by: Barb Schumacher, Student Life Studies
Analysis Prepared by: Barhate Bhagyashree, Student Life Studies