

Offices of the Dean of Student Life
New Student & Family Programs
Family Weekend
April 2017

Background

Family Weekend is a special time dedicated to Aggie parents and families. This annual weekend is organized by the Family Weekend Committee, comprised of eight student leaders and supported by the Office of New Student & Family Programs, in the Offices of the Dean of Student Life. According to its website (<http://familyweekend.tamu.edu/>) "Family Weekend has been a Texas A&M tradition since its inception in 1919. Although it has seen several name changes over the years, Family Weekend has remained a constant for students and families at Texas A&M University. As the host of activities ranging from the formerly held Bevo Burn Barbeque to the newest Family Weekend tradition, Aggie Family Game Night, Family Weekend Committee is a sponsored student organization that manages all aspects of Family Weekend. Family Weekend gives Aggie students a chance to express their gratitude to those who have impacted their lives."

This year Family Weekend was held April 7-9th 2017 and consisted of events and activities such as Aggie Ring Day, athletic events, awards ceremonies, receptions or Open Houses, and a Yell Practice. Additionally, there are events sponsored by academic colleges, university departments, and student organizations. The Family Weekend Committee and New Student & Family Programs wanted to gather feedback on this new event to assist in making improvements for future years. This is the second time Student Life Studies has helped in assessing Family Weekend.

Method and Sample

The survey was developed using Qualtrics®, survey design software that creates web-based forms and databases. Of the 14 questions, ten were quantitative, two were qualitative, and two were demographic. The data was analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel®.

The generic survey link was sent to families through listservs by New Student & Family Programs and other departments who held an event during Family Weekend. The survey link was also available on the Family Weekend website. Families were able to take the survey after Family Weekend until the survey was closed on April 25, 2017. It is unknown how many individuals knew about the survey or had access to the link to determine a response rate; however, 379 took some part of the survey.

Results

Results reported as means, standard deviations, and frequency percentages for the number of people (n) who responded to each question. For ease of reading, 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 contained in this report; the entire list can be found in a separate document. Comparisons to last year will not be made because the focus of the questions changed.

Family members were asked to rate their overall experience with Texas A&M Family Weekend. Over half (53%) rated the weekend as very positive, 39% said it was positive, and 6% were neutral. Additionally, 2% rated the weekend as negative, and 1% as very negative (mean=4.42/5.00; sd=.73; n=327).

Using a select all that apply format, family members were asked to identify the events they attended during the weekend. Table 1 shows that almost two-thirds of respondents attended the Aggie Mom’s Boutique; however, nobody responding to the survey attended the Class Councils 11-11 Day Silent Auction. Those selecting the “other” response option were provided the opportunity to write in a response. Many listed events sponsored by specific student organizations or colleges. Some talked about walking around on campus and going to the Bonfire Memorial or George Bush Presidential Library.

What events did you attend? (Select all that apply)	Frequency Percentage
Aggie Mom’s Boutique	61%
Other	40%
Texas A&M Spring Football Game	33%
Aggie Ring Day	26%
Baseball	25%
Corps of Cadets Unit Awards and Review	18%
Yell Practice	18%
Downtown Bryan Street & Art Fair	12%
Texas A&M Singing Cadets Spring Concert	6%
Mays Business School Open House	5%
Fish Drill Team & Ross Volunteer Awards Ceremony	4%
Softball	4%
Aggie Bands Award Ceremony	3%
Aggie Family Game Night	3%
Aggies Abroad Breakfast	3%
Corps Leadership Certificate Awards Ceremony	3%
Kappa Alpha Theta’s 5K	3%
Family Weekend Shabbat Dinner	2%
Freudian Slip Improv Show	2%
LAUNCH Honors Brunch	2%
Parsons Mounted Calvary Review	2%
Vice President’s Open House	2%
Buck Weirus Spirit Award Ceremony	1%
Friends of the Sterling C. Evans Library Annual Meeting	1%
Nursing School Tours	1%
Women’s Tennis	1%
Who’s Who Awards Ceremony	<1%
¡Un Fin de Semana con Su Aggie!	<1%
Class Councils 11-11 Day Silent Auction	0%

Table 1: Family Weekend Events (n=325)

When asked if they felt welcomed at Texas A&M Family Weekend, two-thirds (66%) of families strongly agreed with that statement. Additionally, 28% agreed, 5% were neutral, and 1% disagreed. Nobody selected the strongly disagree option (mean=4.59/5.00; sd=.64; n=325).

Families were asked a series of questions about their experience and knowledge related to Family Weekend. Table 2, in descending order by yes responses, indicates that almost half of families were aware of the Parents of the Year recognition. However, just over one-third used the TAMUMobile App during Family Weekend.

Statements	Yes	No	n
Are you aware of the Parents of the Year Recognition during Family Weekend?	46%	54%	317
Did you receive a printed Schedule of Events?	42%	59%	323
Did you use the TAMUMobile App for the schedule of events during Family Weekend?	35%	65%	324

Table 2: Family Weekend Experience

To understand the effectiveness of the marketing efforts, family members were asked how they heard about Family Weekend/Family Weekend events. Using a select all that apply format, Table 3 demonstrates more than half of the family learned about Family Weekend from their student. Those selecting the “other” response option were provided the opportunity to write in a response. Several respondents heard about Family Weekend through the Corps of Cadets or an Aggie Mom’s Club. Some mentioned attending previous years or finding out about it through social media. A few also said they were former students so just knew about the event.

How did you hear about Family Weekend/ Family Weekend Events? (Select all that apply)	Frequency Percentage
Your student	58%
Aggie Family Newsletter	45%
Familyweekend.tamu.edu	29%
New Student Conference	23%
Other	19%
Family Weekend Facebook	17%
Other Aggie Families	15%
Aggiefamilies.tamu.edu	9%
Postcard	8%
Family Weekend Twitter	3%
Heard about Family Weekend Events once I arrived on campus	3%

Table 3: Family Weekend Marketing (n=325)

Furthermore, families were asked about the social media they use, also through a select all that apply question. Table 4 reveals that Facebook is the most common social media platform. Those who wrote in a response to the “other” option indicated LinkedIn, Pinterest, Skype, and Whatsapp.

What social media do you use? (Select all that apply)	Frequency Percentage
Facebook	86%
Instagram	40%
Twitter	33%
Snapchat	19%
None	9%
Other	2%

Table 4: Social Media (n=319)

Using a select all that apply option, families were asked why they attended Family Weekend. Table 5 illustrates a majority attended to visit their student. Additionally, nobody indicated they did not know it was Family Weekend until arriving on campus. Those selecting the “other” response option were provided the opportunity to write in a response. Many reported attending Family Weekend to attend a specific event sponsored by the student organization their student is involved with or to attend or volunteer at the Aggie Mom’s Boutique. Some commented on coming to campus to learn more about what their student is involved with, support their student, or just to be on campus.

Why did you choose to attend Family Weekend? (Select all that apply)	Frequency Percentage
To visit with my student	88%
To attend Ring Day	21%
To attend Aggie Athletics Event	19%
To attend Corps of Cadet event(s)	19%
To attend a specific awards ceremony	16%
Other	15%
I didn't know it was Family Weekend until I arrived on campus	0%

Table 5: Motivation for Attending (n=316)

Family members were asked for suggestions of events for future Family Weekend and a wide range of responses were shared. Family members would like to see more events scheduled overall with recommendations including a Fightin’ Texas Aggie Band performance, a cookout/BBQ, tours of Kyle Field, academic tours or open houses, music concerts, and general events similar to the Family Game Night. There were several who commented on the overall cost of Family Weekend and would like to see the university work with hotels to not charge so much for rooms that weekend, offer free parking, and not charge for all separate events. Several commented on advertising events earlier, sending an email to families, and having a printable schedule posted online earlier. While on campus over the weekend, families would like to see more signage, increased shuttles and transportation, and more concessions/beverages or dining options available. One person wanted to see the Taste of Aggieland come back and another would like to have midnight snacks offered after Midnight Yell. Additionally, there were a number of comments regarding Aggie Ring Day. Some felt that the event is too crowded and needs to be moved to a different location. Others recommended not having Aggie Ring Day the same weekend as Family Weekend, also due to crowding.

When asked about areas of improvements for Family Weekend, there were many similar comments seen from the question before including offering more events in general, the overall cost being too expensive due to hotels and paid parking, increased engagement with each academic college, and having a printable schedule. Some other recommendations from family members included providing a map for the Aggie Mom’s Boutique, increasing the communication prior to the weekend especially for parking, events, and photo opportunities, and having less scheduling conflicts especially with award ceremonies and athletic events. Several families also talked about how crowded everything was both on and off campus. Some suggested offering shuttles from hotels to campus, not scheduling Ring Day and Family Weekend at the same time, and communicating more about parking and directions.

Families were asked where they stayed while in Bryan/College Station for Family Weekend. As seen in Table 6, on the following page, almost half of families stayed in hotels/motels in the Bryan/College Station community. Those selecting the “other” response option were provided the opportunity to write in a response. Most wrote in that they stayed with family or friends in the area, that they live here, or an RV lot in the area. A couple family members commented on the hotels being extremely overpriced for Family Weekend.

Where did you stay during Family Weekend?	Frequency Percentage
College Station or Bryan Hotel/Motel	45%
Did not use overnight accommodations	17%
Other	17%
With my student	14%
Surrounding City Hotel/Motel	4%
AirBnB or other rental property	4%

Table 6: Accommodations (n=316)

Using a select all that apply format, families were asked about the classification of their student(s). Table 7 shows that almost half of families had a freshmen attending Texas A&M.

What year is your student (check all that apply if multiple students)	Frequency Percentage
Freshmen	45%
Sophomore	24%
Junior	20%
Senior	16%
Graduate/Professional Student	3%
Prospective/Incoming Student	2%

Table 7: Accommodations (n=314)

The final question asked families for their zip code. The results from this question can be found in a separate document.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The 2017 Family Weekend seemed to have been a success. Families were generally positive about the weekend overall and felt welcomed at Texas A&M. Many appreciated the opportunity to visit their student and learn more about the activities in which their student may be a member.

There were numerous recommendations on a variety of topics. One involved communication, especially of the events and parking on campus. The Family Weekend Committee may want to develop additional content for the website, as well as share that with other departments and organizations that sponsor events as part of the weekend. Additionally, having a printable schedule on the website as well as available on campus would be appreciated by families. Some family members indicated learning about Family Weekend from other departments, such as the Corps of Cadets and academic colleges. The committee may consider developing messages that these areas could also send out to families to provide consistent marketing and details. Furthermore, Facebook seemed to be the social media platform used by a majority of the families so sending timed posts through Facebook may help share necessary information.

The Family Weekend Committee may want to explore options to bring extended stakeholders together during the planning process of Family Weekend to brainstorm/discuss options in scheduling events to have less overlap, having consistent marketing and messages for families, and general logistics so everyone could be a resource to families visiting campus. These extended stakeholders could include colleges, departments, and student organizations hosting events over the weekend, Transportation Services, TAMU Marketing and Communications, Athletics, and The Association of Former Students. Families visiting campus see Family Weekend as a Texas A&M

University event, not individual organizations or one student organization. Working with various stakeholders could help in having more coordinated efforts throughout the weekend and representing Texas A&M in addition to individual organizations. Additionally, it might be worth discussing with stakeholders if Family Weekend should continue to be scheduled the same weekend as Ring Day or not.

The overall cost of attending Family Weekend was a concern for many families. The highest cost mentioned was hotel rates. While families realized that Family Weekend and the university do not control these, the committee may want to work with university officials to explore options in working with the Bryan/College Station community.

The Family Weekend Committee and New Student and Family Program staff are encouraged to read all the comments to gain a fuller understanding of the themes provided in this report. Additionally, the committee and staff are encouraged to identify Family Weekend stakeholders and share the results of this assessment with them. This includes all organizations hosting events during the weekend, departments in the Division of Student Affairs, the 2017-2018 Family Weekend Committee, Transportation Services, TAMU Marketing and Communications, Athletics, The Association of Former Students, and Bryan/College Station Chamber of Commerce.

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