Memorial Student Center (MSC)
Officer Student Learning Outcome
Spring 2016

Background

The Memorial Student Center (MSC) provides leadership development opportunities for students through its 16 programming committees and six resource areas. Each includes student officers who bring higher levels of experience to lead the committees and resource areas. The MSC wanted to more fully understand the MSC officer student experience and measure their learning within their officer role as it relates to the Texas A&M undergraduate learning outcome of working collaboratively. Specifically, the MSC wanted to assess the officers' abilities to work with others to support a shared purpose or goal and articulate collaboration skills developed as a result of their participation in the MSC. This is the second year MSC has worked with Student Life Studies on this project.

Method and Sample

The assessment was developed using Qualtrics®, a software program that creates web-based surveys and databases. It consisted of 11 questions; 10 questions were quantitative and one question was qualitative. The data was analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel®. Qualitative data was analyzed by three advisors within the MSC as well as by Student Life Studies to identify and code main themes which are presented in this report. The comments themselves can be found in attached, separate documents.

The instrument was sent to the MSC executives on March 28, 2016 as time was set aside that evening during their meeting to complete the survey on laptops. Non-respondents, however, received up to two reminders before the assessment closed on April 4, 2016. Of the 26 students who were sent the email, 24 completed some part of the assessment for a 92% response rate which was 12% higher than last year's 80% response rate.

Results

Results include frequencies, 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%. Qualitative responses were coded and those themes are contained within this report while the full qualitative responses can be found in a separate document. Also reported are the results of paired sample t-tests used to determine if whether there was a significant difference between reported before and after effects, reported as t, degree of freedom (df) and 2-tailed significance (Sig).

The instrument was designed to resemble a rubric. The MSC officers were asked to self-report their level of learning and skills regarding collaboration (working with others) through five statements at the beginning of their term in office and after working with others in their committee or resource area throughout the term. They were asked to rate themselves using the scale Exemplary=4 (this statement is true all or nearly all of the time), Proficient=3 (this statement is true most of the time), Sufficient=2 (this statement is true only some of the time) and Developing=1 (this statement is true rarely).

As noted in Table 1 on the following two pages, for all statements, at least 92% of the MSC officers rated themselves at a sufficient skill level at the beginning of their term in office. On average, growth was reported regarding all statements after working with others on their committees and resource areas throughout the term. For each of the five items, the after mean was compared to the before mean to test whether the gains were statistically significant, and for four out of the five items they were found to be statistically significant at $p < .05$ level between before and after using the comparison of means, Student t-test. Only the comparison of means between the before and after of statement "I can be depended upon to complete tasks and fulfill my responsibilities" was not found to be statistically significant.

	Exemplary (4)	Proficient (3)	Sufficient (2)	Developing (1)	Mean (sd) n=24	Paired sample t-test (df) [Sig.]
At the beginning of my term in office… During meetings, the most important- and difficult issues were put on the table to be resolved.	29%	42%	21%	8%	2.92 (.93)	
Now, after working with others in [[my committee]] throughout our term in office… During meetings, the most important- and difficult- issues were put on the table to be resolved.	75%	25%	--	--	3.75 (.44)	-4.239 (23) [.000]
At the beginning of my term in office… I could be depended upon to complete tasks and fulfill my responsibilities.	46%	46%	8%	--	3.38 (.65)	
Now, after working with others in [[my committee]] throughout our term in office… I can be depended upon to complete tasks and fulfill my responsibilities.	63%	38%	--	--	3.63 (.50)	-2.015 (23) [.056]
At the beginning of my term in office… My fellow team members and I ended discussions with clear and specific resolutions and calls to action.	29%	54%	8%	8%	3.04 (.86)	
Now, after working with others in [[my committee]] throughout our term in office… My fellow team members and I end discussions with clear and specific resolutions and calls to action.	63%	38%	--	--	3.63 (.50)	-3.984 (23) [.001]
At the beginning of my term in office… I knew what my peers in [[committee name]] were working on and how they contributed to the collective good of [[committee name]].	29%	46%	25%	--	3.04 (.75)	
Now, after working with others in [[my committee]] throughout our term in office… I know what my peers in [[committee name]] are working on and are contributing to the collective good of the organization.	46%	46%	8%	--	3.38 (.65)	-2.145 (23) [.043]

Table 1: Collaborative Learning Outcomes: Before and After Term

	Exemplary (4)	Proficient (3)	Sufficient (2)	Developing (1)	Mean (sd) n=24	Paired sample t-test (df) [Sig.]
At the beginning of my term in office… I held myself and others in [[committee name]] accountable for unproductive behavior.	17%	58%	21%	4%	2.88 (.74)	
Now, after working with others in [[my committee]] throughout our term in office… I hold myself and others in [[committee name]] accountable for unproductive behavior.	29%	71%	--	--	3.29 (.46)	-3.122 (23) [.005]

Table 1: Collaborative Learning Outcomes: Before and After Term (continued)

When reviewing the participants' individual results as a rubric, 20 participants or 83% indicated at least one step increase to at least one statement when comparing their skill level at the beginning of their term in office, then after working with others throughout their term in office. Sixty-seven percent (16 participants) reported one step increases to more than one statement and 21% or five participants reported a two or more step increase to one or more of the statements. However, 21% of the officers also reported decreases of one step to one or more of the statements.

The MSC officers were then asked to articulate an example of a time when they completed a task that contributed to successfully achieving a goal of their committee or resource area this year. They were asked to describe how they worked with others within their committee to successfully achieve that goal. Twenty–four responded and 23 detailed teamwork or coordinating work with others in the examples provided and reflected on its effect on themselves and fellow committee members.

As the officers were asked to describe actions and interactions within their examples, these responses were analyzed and coded using process or action coding. Table 2, on the next page, lists those processes or actions that officers articulated in their examples, how many were articulated and the number of respondents represented. In their examples, officers most frequently described themselves and those they worked with as communicating, creating, collecting, helping/assisting, and meeting. Least frequently mentioned actions were implementing, identifying, enforcing, setting standards, writing, providing, and training.

Process code descriptor.	Number within comments	Number of respondents
Communicating	32	15
Creating	13	10
Collecting	10	8
Helped/assisted	9	5
Meeting	9	5
Connecting	8	7
Worked (with)	8	6
Deciding	6	6
Coordinating	6	4
Producing	5	4
Delegating	5	4
Planning	4	4
Completing	4	3
Researching/finding	3	3
Engaged in/participating	3	3
Improving	3	3
Questioning/providing feedback	3	2
Marketing	3	2
Partnering	2	2
Adopting	2	2
Inviting	2	2
Organizing	2	2
Understanding	2	1
Confront	2	1
Implementing	1	1
Identifying	1	1
Writing	1	1
Providing	1	1
Training	1	1
Enforcing	1	1
Setting (standards)	1	1

Table 2: Process/Actions Described by Officers

Officers offered some notable examples of working in collaboration with others to develop improved processes, as well as articulated outcomes resulting from those collaborations. In the excerpts below, officers describe those collaborations, and the resulting decisions, actions and some outcomes:

That meeting, small as it may seem, really mattered. We saw a problem in our conference planning, researched our options, stopped and discussed it deeply and didn't leave the table until we had a feasible solution.

I drafted new programming policies… got those policies approved through E-Team, and implemented them in conjunction with my advisor and VPs throughout the organization through communication with chairs, the creation of explanatory materials, and the invitation to all members of the MSC to ask us questions at any point in time.

My advisor was crucial in improving my personal skills as far as engaging a group and letting their voices be heard, and in turn our directors were able to openly discuss any issues they were having with staff or the organizations as a whole. As we worked through these issues, we created action plans on different levels such as all staff culture, subcommittee culture, sophomore social involvement, and sophomore leadership development. This allowed us to identify weak points to focus on for next year and created a new level of trust among our staff members that is visible to our members and creates an overall more positive and productive environment.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Ninety two percent of the MSC officers reported sufficient or better skills relating to working in collaboration with others to achieve a goal prior to starting their terms in office, and overall they reported growth as a result of their work within their committees at the end of their term with none self- reporting in the developing skill level. The officers indicated the most gains in their abilities to put the most important and difficult issues on the table during their meetings, and secondly, to end discussions with clear and specific resolutions and calls to action. However, similar to last year, the officers also reported themselves least confident before and after their term in holding themselves and others accountable for unproductive behavior, although they reported growth in those skills over the term. Recognizing this area continues to present a challenge, MSC advisors may want to continue any development activities or trainings that were put into place this last year, to further enhance MSC officers' skill and comfort in facilitating accountability within their committees and resource areas.

Nearly all (96%) of the officers responding also articulated how they collaborated with others in their committees or resource areas in order to achieve a common goal. They spoke about how they created and promoted those collaborations, decisions and resulting actions, and reflected on effect the outcomes had on themselves and their committees.   MSC advisors may want to read through all the qualitative comments to gain a more thorough understanding of the officers' experiences in not only working with others, but the critical thinking they employed while working with their committees and resource areas.

It is recommended this report and results be shared with not only all the MSC advisors, but with other stakeholders within the MSC and the Division of Student Affairs who may be interested in the results and assessing other student organization leaders by instituting similar processes to measure their progress towards determined learning outcomes.