

Southwestern Black Student Leadership Conference

A Legacy in Living Color: SBSLC 2018

January 18-20, 2018

Background

In January 2018, the Southwestern Black Student Leadership Conference (SBSLC) held its 30th annual conference on the campus of Texas A&M University. The website (<http://dms.tamu.edu/engagement/sbslc/>) describes the SBSLC history and mission as:

In 1989, innovative collegians at Texas A&M University produced a forum by which African American students in the southwest could assemble to address the problems and concerns that affected the Black community. The Southwestern Black Student Leadership Conference (SBSLC) is held each January, uniting hundreds of students and advisors, nationally renowned speakers, and a variety of corporations from throughout the entire country.

This year's theme, *A Legacy in Living Color*, focused on encouraging young professionals to be leaders in three core areas: economic empowerment, civic engagement and political involvement.

In 2018, SBSLC provided program outcomes for those that participated. They were:

- SBSLC participants will have the opportunity to participate in workshops that will educate them on issues of leadership, community, health, relationships, culture, race and ethnicity.
- SBSLC participants will be challenged, inspired and recharged from the keynote addresses made during the conference.
- SBSLC participants will have the opportunity to make formal and informal connections with their peers at various institutions across the world.
- SBSLC participants will be connected with corporations and graduate schools in efforts to gain admissions into graduate programs or obtain internship and employment opportunities.

This year, the SBSLC staff developed surveys for the participants about their overall experience, organizations at the career fair, participants at the Charles E. Williams II Advanced Leadership Institute (ALI), advisors, and attendees at each of the workshops. SBSLC has worked with Student Life Studies since 2001 on the conference assessment.

Method and Sample

For the conference, there were about 575 student attendees, 48 advisors, 22 career and graduate school fair representatives, and nine vendors. Twenty-two students attended the Charles E. Williams II Advanced Leadership Institute (ALI).

The five surveys were developed using Teleform[®] and Qualtrics[®], survey design software that creates scannable and web-based forms and databases. The data was analyzed using SPSS[®], a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel[®]. Table 1, on the following page, describes each survey.

Survey	Quantitative Questions	Qualitative Questions	Type	2018 Response Rate	2017 Response Rate	2016 Response Rate
ALI	7	2	Paper	59%	0%	100%
Advisor	11	2	Web	62%	56%	72%
Career Fair	5	2	Web	90%	63%	56%
Overall	5	3	Paper	33%	49%	35%
Workshop	5	2	Paper	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 1—Description of Each Survey

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%. Qualitative summary themes are conveyed in this report; entire lists can be found in separate documents. Comparisons to previous years are limited due to the change in the rating scale, more specifically 5-point to 4-point.

This report is divided into four sections: The Charles E. Williams II Advanced Leadership Institute (ALI), Advisor, Career and Graduate School Fair, and Overall Conference.

The individual workshop evaluations will not be covered in this report but can be found in a separate document. As noted in Table 1, the same seven-question survey (five quantitative, two qualitative) was given to each person at each workshop attended. Surveys were returned from 50 workshops. The attendance at each program varied.

Charles E. Williams II Advanced Leadership Institute (ALI) Evaluation

Twenty-two (22) of the SBSLC student participants attended the Advanced Leadership Institute (ALI) and most filled out the evaluation.

SBSLC established several program outcomes for the institute. Table 2, shows that participants reported positively on all outcomes. Participants were most positive about being able to apply what they learned towards organizations they are involved in, feel part of a cohesive group, gain a more in-depth understanding of leadership, and understand leadership in a cultural context.

As a result of participating in the Advanced Leadership Institute, I...	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2018 Mean (sd) [n]
Can apply what I learned to my involvement in organizations on my campus	92%	8%	--	--	3.92 (.28) [13]
Feel part of a cohesive group	92%	8%	--	--	3.92 (.28) [13]
Gained a more in-depth understanding of leadership	92%	8%	--	--	3.92 (.28) [13]
Understand leadership in a cultural context	92%	8%	--	--	3.92 (.28) [13]
Gained a more in-depth understanding of my personal leadership style	77%	23%	--	--	3.77 (.44) [13]

Table 2—Advanced Leadership Institute Outcomes

Participants were asked what they found interesting about the current year’s discussion topics. The comments from the 12 responders included the value of communication, being aware of different leadership skills, and the three B’s (Be, Become, Be known for). Please see the attached qualitative responses for full detail.

When asked for ideas for improvements, 10 participants responded. Recommendations included an increase of time for open discussions and more efficient timing of conference sessions with ALI sessions.

Advisor Evaluation

The advisors who attended the SBSLC conference had their own program track to attend in addition to the other conference events and sessions with the students. When asked if their institution will likely attend SBSLC next year, 100% of those advisors who responded (n = 29) said their institution would attend.

Table 3, indicates responding advisors' agreement with several statements regarding the conference. Advisors had positive responses overall. They appreciated how professional and accommodating the staff was during the conference. They were least positive about the registration process and the communication with the SBSLC staff prior to the conference.

Statement	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2018 Mean (sd) [n]
The SBSLC staff was professional during the conference	79%	21%	--	--	3.79 (.42) [29]
The SBSLC staff was accommodating during the conference	76%	24%	--	--	3.76 (.43) [29]
I will be able to apply what I learned in the SBSLC Advisor workshop series	58%	42%	--	--	3.58 (.50) [26]
The SBSLC Advisor Workshop series contributed to my professional development	54%	46%	--	--	3.54 (.51) [28]
SBSLC met my expectations for my students' learning	52%	41%	7%	--	3.45 (.63) [29]
The SBSLC Advisor workshop series helped me better understand my role as an advisor	38%	61%	--	--	3.38 (.50) [26]
Communication with SBSLC staff before the conference was professional	38%	55%	7%	--	3.31 (.60) [29]
The registration process was manageable	29%	32%	29%	11%	2.79 (.99) [28]

Table 3—Advisor Experiences

Advisors provided feedback on how they prefer SBSLC communicate updates and upcoming events in a select-all-that apply response. The website was most popular, selected by 38% of the responders. The Advisors' Digest emails was selected by 31% of responders, biweekly e-newsletters by 22%, and social media by 9%. Five advisors who selected social media specified Facebook and Twitter.

When asked about the most positive experiences at SBSLC, many of the 26 responders enjoyed and appreciated the networking opportunities provided for the students and advisors. Others noted the events such as Spiritual Charge and Poetry Slam were most impactful for both students and advisors, and they enjoyed watching their students interact with students from other institutions and engage in leadership development. Advisors were then asked how the conference could be improved for them; 25 offered opinions. Some advisors recommended having more sessions focused on advisors, or at least roundtable discussions with open dialogue for only advisors. Many talked about having the need for conference schedules, earlier posting of session and workshop information and making certain that information presented in the Advisors’ Digest was clear and correct. Many also talked about their hopes of improvement for the Registration/Check-In process. A few thought pre-conference communication needed improvement, especially for those attending the ALI sessions. There were some lengthy, specific recommendations that can be found in the attached qualitative documents. Lastly, advisors were asked which hotel they used while attending SBSLC. Hilton was most popular, selected by 38% of responders. Aloft was second popular, selected by 21% of responders, Hampton Inn by 14% and Hyatt Place by 14%. Three advisors who selected other specified Best Western Premier and Fairfield Inn.

Career and Graduate School Fair Evaluation

Twenty-two graduate school and employer representatives, 26 fewer than attended SBSLC 2017, were asked to respond to a series of statements regarding their satisfaction with participating in the career and graduate school fair. Table 4, indicates that the organizations were mostly satisfied with all aspects of the event. Respondents felt most positive about the SBSLC staff being professional during the conference.

Statement	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2018 Mean (sd) [n]
The SBSLC staff was professional during the conference	68%	26%	--	5%	3.58 (.77) [19]
The students who visited my booth exhibited professionalism	65%	30%	--	5%	3.55 (.76) [20]
There was adequate time for making connections with students	68%	21%	5%	5%	3.53 (.84) [19]
Communication regarding accommodations was clear	53%	41%	6%	--	3.47 (.62) [17]
Communication with SBSLC staff before the Career Fair was professional	60%	26%	10%	5%	3.37 (.90) [19]

Table 4—Career Fair

The organization representatives were asked what the most positive attributes of the career fair were, and 15 respondents made comments. Comments focused on the interaction with students, professionalism of students and staff, the turnout and the location. They were also asked how the career fair could be improved. Fifteen (15) people responded to that question, and most comments referenced a need for better communication before the event, along with better recruitment of students. Some indicated challenges with communication in regard to correct dates and times, signage for companies/agencies to event location and registration process. Others just complimented the event.

Overall Evaluation

This year, of approximately 575 attendees, 191 surveys were returned to Student Life Studies for analysis. Table 5 details the participants' responses to the SBSLC program outcomes for the attendees of the overall conference. Generally, most participants were positive about their experience, and were most positive about the having the opportunity to network with other participants from other colleges and universities. However, they did not feel confident about the connections made with future employers or internship opportunities at the Career Fair.

As a result of participating in SBSLC, I was able to...	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2018 Mean (sd) [n]
Network with other participants from other colleges and universities	52%	37%	9%	2%	3.39 (.73) [186]
Connect with others spiritually by attending the Spiritual Charge	54%	28%	16%	2%	3.34 (.82) [96]
Make connections I intend to maintain	48%	37%	13%	2%	3.30 (.78) [187]
Connect with future graduate programs at the Career Fair	32%	26%	22%	19%	2.72 (1.11) [152]
Connect with future employers or internship opportunities at the Career Fair	30%	27%	21%	21%	2.67 (1.13) [154]

Table 5—SBSLC Outcomes

Respondents were asked what knowledge, skills, or inspiration they gained from the SBSLC keynote speakers. Comments varied, but many reported being inspired to make change and take action, use knowledge and facts to advocate for the Black community, and others said they gained knowledge about their culture and embraced Black culture. Some learned about and were inspired to leave a legacy, and to gain confidence in themselves to use their voices for change. Many respondents' comments seemed to reflect more of what they learned or were inspired by from attending the workshops, such as increasing their public speaking and networking skills, personal goal/vision setting, professional and workplace knowledge, financial planning skills, résumé writing skills and how to apply for graduate school. Many students indicated they were inspired to take what they had learned back to their own campuses, apply those skills within student organizations, and lead and activate positive change for their community.

Feedback was also requested regarding any changes or new programs they plan to implement on their campus as a result of attending SBSLC. Many of the 144 who commented talked about challenging themselves, connecting more with other minority groups on campus, along with educating their black community on various topics, such as mental health and money management strategies. Other comments centered on the idea of being more outspoken, creating healthy relationships, while also challenging one another to get out of their comfort zone.

Respondents were asked for improvements for the conference. Many of the 168 who left suggestions included the topics of the conference schedule, organization of the conference, as well as the communication of the schedule needing improvement. Respondents indicated conference schedule communication prior to the conference should be more in advance of the conference. Regarding the workshops, many would like to see more, see more diverse topics, and potentially see workshops hosted by college students. Quite a few suggested having social activities that promote the networking and co-mingling of students from different schools.

Logistic improvements were also offered, especially pertaining to the transportation (bus) schedules. The sizes of the rooms created challenges. Quite a few suggested that the closing banquet be shorter. Many respondents also spoke about improving the career fair to include more diverse employers, graduate schools and opportunities directed at underclass students (internships opportunities). SBSLC organizers should review the attached qualitative response document to gain further insight to specific improvement recommendations from participants.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, participants, advisors, and other constituents attending the SBSLC appreciated the content and inspiration provided by the conference and the professionalism of the staff. The majority of the conference was well received and most program outcomes developed for the attendees seemed to have been met. The networking opportunities the conference affords its participants was well appreciated, as were the opportunities for the students to increase their cultural knowledge, leadership and professional skills. However, many attending expressed the need for improvements in scheduling workshops, communicating the schedules, and transportation at the conference. Many provided specific suggestions that SBSLC organizers may want to review and consider when planning next year's conference. Those suggestions can be found in the attached, qualitative documents.

The Advanced Leadership Institute participants seemed to thoroughly enjoy their program. They were very positive about being able to apply what they learned to the organizations they are involved in. Based on the participants' suggestions, SBSLC may want to look in allowing students to attend various workshops in addition to ALI, and allow more time for discussion amongst the participants.

The advisors appeared to have a positive experience at the conference and were pleased with the professionalism of the SBSLC student staff. Many of the advisors made some suggestions for adding advisor discussion groups or roundtables or more programming directed specifically for them. While the website and Advisor's Digest were the most preferred forms of communication, quite a few recommended a need for improvement regarding communication of the conference schedule before and during the conference.

Overall, student participants and advisors would like to see more workshops, or improved scheduling of workshops. Some suggested repeating at different times those workshops that have been popular and well attended at previous conferences, so that more students have opportunity to attend them. Suggestions also included having the workshops more interactive and actionable, so that student attendees have set plans of action for change and improvements that they can take home with them after attending. SBSLC organizers may want to consider and plan to work with some of their repeat presenters in updating their presentations into more interactive workshops for next year's conference. Since potential presenters have to submit a proposal, SBSLC organizers could add that interaction element to the proposal template to know how presenters plan for interaction.

The career fair representatives indicated a positive experience with the SBSLC staff and conference participants, slightly more so than previous years. However, representatives would like to have had better communication before the event, by receiving more effective information in regard to the schedule of the fair, including dates and times. Those students attending also felt that the career fair was lacking variety and in employment and internship opportunities. The students also expressed that there should be less graduate schools in the future. SBSLC career fair organizers may want to inform the employer representatives prior to or at registration about the classification of the students who have historically attended, so employers can be prepared for and adjust the information provided, geared toward more pre-professional, pre-graduation opportunities they avail students. As well, further preparing students regarding how to optimize their interactions at career fairs, perhaps as an opportunity for career exploration and information gathering, may also increase the students' satisfaction with the event. Finally, the number and diversity of career fair representatives is yet a concerning area, students would still like to see more and employers representing more diverse industries. For the 2019 conference, the staff may want to focus on getting more of a variety of professional and graduate schools involved as well as companies looking to hire graduates or place interns.

This year, the response rate of the overall conference evaluation was quite lower than last year. For The Charles E. Williams II Advanced Leadership Institute (ALI), the response rate was also lower than it has been in the previous years, more specifically 2016 to 2018. Although assessment of each component of the conference may not be warranted each year, if they are created, plans are needed to execute the evaluations. If not already doing so, SBSLC staff could also measure the student learning of its student executive staff resulting from their involvement in SBSLC, developing student learning outcomes for those students and assessing their learning.

SBSLC staff is encouraged read through the attached documents containing respondents' full qualitative comments to gain more insight into the participants experience with the conference. SBSLC staff should also share appropriate assessment results with other stakeholders (employers coming to the career fair, other universities participating in the conference, as well as other departments at Texas A&M, for example). Key assessment results could also be included in marketing initiatives for the conference.

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