

Graduate and Professional Student Council Student Research Week (SRW) Spring 2018

Background

The Graduate and Professional Student Council (formerly the Graduate Student Council) created Student Research Week (SRW) as a one-day poster event in 1994. This year, the program celebrated its 21st annual research extravaganza March 19-23, 2018. Per its website (<http://srw.tamu.edu/>):

This four-day competition highlights student research occurring on the Texas A&M campus. Students who participate are provided a venue to present their work through either oral presentations or poster sessions. This event allows students, faculty, and the community to see the depth and breadth of research conducted at Texas A&M. For the past 20 years, SRW has been a valuable tool in meeting the university's mission of academic, research, and service excellence. SRW is a premier program of the Graduate and Professional Student Council and is supported by several academic and nonacademic departments on campus.

The goals for SRW 2018 included increasing participation from judges, competitors, and volunteers; cutting down operation costs through sustainability; spotlighting research and sparking interdisciplinary conversations; and increasing the quality of the experience for all. Not only do students compete in SRW, they also have the opportunity to volunteer during the week and support their peers by attending any of the poster or oral-presentation sessions. Judges can be faculty, staff or graduate students.

Feedback was collected from the judges and competitors who participated in the SRW programs. This report covers the responses from both groups. This is the twelfth time that the Graduate and Professional Student Council has used Student Life Studies (SLS) to assist in evaluating this program.

Method and Sample

Both the judges' and competitors' surveys were developed and distributed using Qualtrics®, a software program that creates web-based surveys and databases. Responses were analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel® and Word®. The judges' survey contained six quantitative questions and three qualitative questions; due to branching technology, not all respondents saw all questions. One hundred fifty-four judges were emailed the survey link beginning April 19, 2018. Those who had not responded received three reminders and the survey closed on May 3, 2018; 67 completed at least some part of the survey, resulting in a 44% response rate, slightly higher than last year's 42% response rate.

The competitor survey contained eleven quantitative and four qualitative questions, and due to branching technology, not all respondents saw all questions. The survey invitation went out via email beginning April 19, 2018; Those who had not responded received three reminders and the survey closed on May 3, 2018. Of the 532 competitors successfully sent the survey, 163 completed at least some part of the survey, resulting in a 31% response rate, similar to last year's 30% response rate.

Results

Results are 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%. Tables list data in decreasing frequency or mean order for SRW 2018 unless otherwise noted. Summary themes are reported in this report; the entire list of comments can be found in a separate document. Comparisons to the previous years' surveys are given where appropriate. This report contains two sections: Judges Survey and Competitors Survey.

Judges Survey

When asked how many years they have judged SRW, 76% of the judges said one year, 10% said two years, 5% said three years, 3% said four years and 6% said five or more (n=67). Unlike the previous years, SRW organizers had each judge fill out a carbon copy rubric for each competitor. Respondents who had been judges two or more years were then asked which method they preferred in terms of feedback forms. Forty-seven percent (47%) did not have a preference between the years' methods, 40% preferred filling out only the carbon copy rubric form (this year's method), and 13% preferred filling out the rubric form and feedback form separately (previous years' method).

Judges were asked if they served as laymen judges, topic judges or served as both topic and laymen judges. Of those who responded (n=63), 52% served as laymen judges, 38% served as topic judges and 9% served as both laymen and topic judges. As a percentage of respondents, fewer judges responding to the survey served as both laymen and topic judges, and a greater percentage of responding judges served as only laymen judges, when compared to the last year's respondents (41% reported themselves as laymen judges, 39% as topic judges and 19% as both laymen and topic judges).

SRW organizers provided separate rubrics to laymen and topic judges to rate and provide feedback to the presenters. Those who served as laymen judges were asked if they found the laymen rubric a useful tool in providing feedback to the students. Of the 38 people who responded, 84% said yes the rubric was useful, 8% indicated that they did not use the rubric, 5% indicated that they were unsure and 3% said no the rubric was not useful. Topic judges were asked if they found the topic rubric a useful tool in providing feedback to the students. Of the 30 people who responded, 90% indicated that they found the rubric as a useful tool, 7% said they were unsure and 3% said no. Both laymen and topic judges were asked to provide comments regarding the quality of the judges' rubrics. The 15 responses were primarily positive, saying they were easy to understand. A few people thought they were very detailed, while others thought they were not applicable to all disciplines. Please see the attached qualitative document for the full input of the judges regarding the rubric.

Judges were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with specific features of the event on a four point scale. Table 1 illustrates that the judges were most satisfied with the on-site check-in and least satisfied with the SRW Website.

	Very Satisfied (4)	Satisfied (3)	Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	2018 Mean (sd) [n]
On-site check-in	56%	42%	--	2%	3.53 (.60) [59]
Packet Information	46%	51%	1%	2%	3.41 (.62) [59]
Judging Schedule	41%	49%	5%	5%	3.26 (.77) [61]
SRW Website	28%	61%	6%	6%	3.11 (.74) [54]

Table 1: Student Research Week Satisfaction

Those judges who indicated dissatisfaction were asked to provide reasons why they were dissatisfied. Nine responded, and two indicated they were contacted to judge very late by the organizers of SRW. Others found the website lacking; either it was missing information or was challenging to navigate.

All respondents were asked how the Graduate and Professional Student Council could improve the next SRW, and 32 judges provided a variety of responses. Comments included wanting better communication before and during the event about scheduling, requirements of judging, signage, and instructions. They also wanted the presenters to have a larger audience. A couple of judges noted that several of the posters did not actually present research and several of the competitors did not show up. As a solution, several judges suggested developing a reward system, or giving certificates of participation for students who show up and present.

Competitor Survey

Using a check-all-that-apply format, students that participated in Student Research Week (SRW) were asked if they had presented their research prior to SRW 2018. Table 2 illustrates that many had presented their research in class or for a conference before SRW 2018. Those who selected “other” were provided the option to write in where they had presented their research. Answers included lab meetings, group meetings, and other conferences.

Prior to SRW 2018, I have presented my research: (select all that apply)	2018 Percent [n=163]	2017 Percent [n=196]	2016 Percent [n=313]
For a class presentation	37%	35%	27%
At a professional conference	35%	35%	25%
None of the above	32%	35%	41%
At a departmental seminar	22%	27%	22%
At more than one professional conference	20%	19%	15%
Other	6%	7%	8%

Table 2: Research Presentations

Students were asked if they referenced the feedback forms on srw.tamu.edu. A little over one-third (34%) of the competitors reported referencing the feedback forms while preparing their presentation. Those students (n=50) were asked if having access to the feedback form influenced their presentation. Three-quarters (78%) said yes. The students who did not access the feedback form (66%, n=148) were asked why they did not. Using a check-all-that-apply format, 84% did not know the form was available, 10% did not have enough time, 8% said reviewing the form would not have affected their presentation. The two “other” responses (2%) indicated that one student made a poster and one student did not participate.

Competitors were asked if the judges’ feedback they received on the feedback form was valuable. Of 148 respondents, 37% said yes, 33% did not receive feedback, 21% were neutral, and 9% said no. Those that answered yes and neutral were asked to explain what was most useful. The 42 comments addressed communicating the research and results, organizing the poster, body language, and future research paths. Several students commented that they did not receive feedback or that the judges provided minimal information that did not give them actionable improvements.

Those who indicated not finding the feedback from the judges valuable (n=14) were asked to choose from a check all-that-apply list of reasons as to why. As noted on Table 3, on the next page, the most frequently chosen reason was that the competitors did not think the feedback provided on the form would be useful in helping them improve, although that reason was chosen less frequently this year than in 2017 or 2016. However, a greater percentage than in the previous two years found the feedback on the form unclear. Those who chose “other” (n=5) were asked to comment; most said they got conflicting or minimal feedback.

What reason(s) did you find the feedback from the judges <i>not</i> valuable?	2018 Percent [n=14]	2017 Percent [n=20]	2016 Percent [n=37]
I do not think the feedback provided on the form will be useful in helping me improve.	43%	55%	81%
Other	36%	30%	10%
I found the feedback on the form unclear.	36%	10%	10%
I did not receive my feedback form because I did not attend the Closing Ceremony.	14%	25%	7%
I did not receive my feedback form because I did not pick it up after the event.	14%	20%	7%
I did not receive a feedback form because my judge(s) did not fill one out.	7%	5%	7%

Table 3: Judges' Feedback Not Valuable

Competitors also responded to a series of questions about their overall Student Research Week experience. Table 4 shows that SRW increased competitors' confidence in presenting their research. The responses have been fairly consistent and positive over the past three years.

Overall, my Student Research Week experience. . .	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2018 Mean (sd) [n]	2017 Mean (sd) [n]	2016 Mean (sd) [n]
Helped me feel more confident in presenting research	47%	44%	6%	3%	3.36 (.72) [141]	3.42 (.62) [207]	3.40 (.55) [202]
Increased my awareness of student research at Texas A&M	41%	50%	7%	2%	3.31 (.67) [137]	3.33 (.64) [204]	3.32 (.56) [200]
Contributed to my overall learning/development	39%	51%	7%	2%	3.28 (.69) [140]	3.32 (.74) [208]	3.43 (.57) [211]
Provided a supportive/constructive environment to present my research	40%	48%	8%	4%	3.24 (.77) [143]	3.23 (.75) [208]	3.30 (.64) [212]

Table 4: Overall Experience

Competitors rated different features of the Student Research Week. As noted in Table 5, on the next page, competitors were mostly satisfied with the on-site check-in process and least satisfied with the headshots.

Student Research Week:	Very Satisfied (4)	Satisfied (3)	Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	2018 Mean (sd) [n]
On-site check-in	39%	54%	4%	3%	3.30 (.67) [140]
SRW Website	27%	60%	12%	1%	3.12 (.66) [138]
Headshots	35%	46%	8%	11%	3.04 (.95) [52]

Table 5: Feature Satisfaction

Those who indicated they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with any of the aspects of Student Research Week were asked to explain why. The 24 comments addressed the difficulty using the SRW website, scheduling of presentations, and not having enough time to receive headshots.

Competitors were asked if they had download the SRW app, 57% had not downloaded and 43% had downloaded the app. Those who indicated they had downloaded the app were then asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the following aspects of the Student Research Week app. Table 6, illustrates that these competitors were most satisfied with the presentation schedule and least satisfied with the presenter information provided via the app.

SRW App:	Very Satisfied (4)	Satisfied (3)	Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	2018 Mean (sd) [n]
Presentation Schedule	39%	54%	4%	3%	3.19 (.78) [58]
Push Notification Reminders (headshots, closing ceremony, etc.)	27%	60%	12%	1%	3.11 (.85) [46]
Presenter Information	35%	46%	8%	11%	3.00 (.89) [56]

Table 6: App Satisfaction

Those who indicated they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied were also asked to explain why. The 10 comments addressed the lack of organization in the app, not enough information, and issues displaying the presenter information.

Using a check-all-that-apply format, students that did not download the Student Research Week (SRW) app were asked why they chose not to download the app. Shown on Table 7 on the next page, the primary reason competitors reported for not downloading the app was simply they were not interested in doing so and secondly, they were not aware of the app.

Why did you <i>not</i> download the app?	2018 Percent [n=93]
I was not interested in downloading the app.	66%
I was not aware of the app.	35%
I used the online version of the app.	9%
The app was not compatible with my device.	4%

Table 7: App

When given the opportunity to provide suggestions for improvement, 70 competitors took the time to respond. A majority of the suggestions focused on needing improved communication of presentation schedules, details about the event (location of check-in table, time of awards ceremony), and specific time slots for the oral presentations and poster judging. Numerous students addressed the lack of response from SRW when competitors emailed with questions or conflicts. Several respondents reported the website did not contain enough detailed information. There also seemed to be some confusion of when students were supposed to check in before presenting and when judges started the sessions. Competitors also received conflicting information about whether this was an excused absence. A few people noted the confusion of registering teams.

The Graduate and Professional Student Council provided SWR competitors' UIN and their demographics were gathered through the university student database. Table 8 on the next page shows the demographics of competitors and the respondents of the competitors' survey, in descending order of the competitors' demographics.

Competitors		
Classification	Registered n=533	Respondent n=159
Senior	40%	37%
Doctoral	33%	36%
Masters	14%	14%
Junior	8%	8%
Sophomore	2%	2%
Professional	2%	--
Other	1%	--
Freshman	<1%	1%
College	n=533	n=157
College of Engineering	23%	18%
Agriculture & Life Sciences	20%	16%
Veterinary Medicine	14%	10%
Liberal Arts	10%	13%
Science	10%	11%
Education and Human Development	8%	9%
Geosciences	6%	10%
Architecture	3%	5%
Medicine	3%	1%
Public Health	2%	3%
Bush School of Government and Public Service	1%	1%
Mays Business School	<1%	1%
Sex	n=533	n=159
Female	61%	60%
Male	39%	40%
Race/Ethnicity	n=533	n=157
White	48%	47%
International	24%	23%
Hispanic or Latinx of any race	15%	14%
Asian	7%	8%
Black or Multi-racial with Black	3%	5%
Multi-racial excluding Black	2%	1%
Unknown	1%	3%
American Indian	<1%	1%
First Generation Status	n=533	n=157
Not First Generation	57%	59%
Unknown	27%	27%
First Generation	16%	14%

Table 8: Competitor Demographics

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, Student Research Week seems to have fulfilled its mission by recognizing student research at Texas A&M and providing students with the opportunity to present research they have been addressing. Being able to present their research seems to have helped student competitors feel more confident and prepared in presenting their research.

Overall, the communication between SRW and judges, SRW and competitors, and between the judges and competitors continues to be indicated by both judge and competitor respondents of the surveys. There seemed to be some confusion about presentation times, and not all students received feedback from multiple judges. SRW may want to continue to explore ways to make the presentations at a more specific time, rather than having students be there for large blocks of time. In addition, several people noted the lack of email communication when they contacted SRW with issues. Although those who downloaded the app were satisfied with it, a few students noted that there was conflicting information from the SRW app and the SRW website. SRW may want to improve the information on both the website and the app. Assigning more staff to market the app, answer emails more timely as the event draws near, as well as creating and making a detailed program available two weeks prior to the event to include the presentation times could reduce the complaints from both competitors and judges.

Graduate and Professional Student Council is encouraged to share the results of this assessment and resulting improvements to SRW with their stakeholders, including faculty, staff and competitors of the event. Reading all of the qualitative responses may also provide more details of both the competitors and judges experiences, which can be used in future planning and determining what areas need improvement in their efforts to accomplish their goals of improving the quality of the experience for all.

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