

Student Experience in the Research University 2017

Meaningful Learning Experiences

Texas A&M University

Background

The Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) is a consortium of research institutions in the Association of American Universities who administer a common survey in an effort to generate knowledge and help further the goals of higher education in general and at the member institutions specifically. The SERU survey is a comprehensive survey of all undergraduate students at Texas A&M University (TAMU) intended to give faculty, students, and administration in-depth insights into the undergraduate experience. SERU was administered at TAMU in the spring, 2017. A total of 6,655 undergraduates completed the survey, representing 14% of the overall undergraduate population.

The SERU has been administered at Texas A&M five times (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2017). The next iteration will be in spring 2019. The survey itself contains a required module, and institutions can then choose additional modules and can create a set of institutional specific questions. The survey included students at the Galveston branch campus but not the Qatar branch campus.

The final question of the survey asked undergraduate students: "What was one of the most meaningful learning experiences you have had at Texas A&M University?" Nearly 40% of the total respondents (n=2,509) answered the question. Some students only wrote one word, while others used the maximum 500 characters. In the summer and fall of 2018, the Department of Student Life Studies' staff developed a system to code the responses into 21 categories that emerged from the data. Some comments spanned multiple categories, based on the breadth and depth of the content. The coding did not distinguish between positive and negative comments about that topic.

Results

As shown in Table 1, on the following page, the frequency of comments ranged from 707 to six. The broad themes that emerge from the categories are curricular (course, academics, interaction with faculty, experiential learning, research, pedagogy, and class project), co-curricular experiences (organization, co-curricular, volunteer, and employment), and personal development (self-discovery, diversity, people, belonging, global, teamwork, transition, and integration). Some comments transcended more than one category, so there are more responses for this question than the number of respondents who completed the survey. About 200 students indicated they had not yet had a significant learning experience at Texas A&M or did not answer the question; several of those students indicated that they were in their first semester at Texas A&M.

The report is organized by category, from most responses to least responses. Table 1 also indicates the page number beginning each category description and select quotes. Appendix 1, on page 17, shows the demographics of the students who responded to this question.

Category	Number of Responses	Page Number
Self-Discovery	707	2
Diversity	518	3
Organization	328	4
People	291	6
Course	286	6
Academics	265	7
Interaction with Faculty	248	8
Co-curricular	257	9
Belonging	229	10
Global	131	10
Experiential Learning	92	11
Research	84	12
Teamwork	78	13
Transition	49	13
Volunteer	49	14
Pedagogy	45	15
Class Project	43	16
Employment	31	16
Integration	11	17

Table 1—Meaningful Learning Experience Categories

Self-Discovery

Respondents in this category reflected on what they learned about themselves and how they relate to or operate in their environment. Specifically, some students analyzed their values, learned to ask for help, and realized that life is not always fair. A few students even talked about student conduct and/or even not being enrolled for a period of time for various reasons.

I've learned how to ration food in a pinch, I've overcome depression and alcoholism, I've learned the value of handling money the hard way. How to be a better person, how to deal with a parents [sic] divorce and coping with the constant stress of and, lack of sleep, and crippling debt. But most importantly I learned to never give up, and whenever you get kicked down in the dirt, you just gotta get back up and keep fighting. Cause nothing easy was ever earned without shedding a few blood, sweat, and tears. (Senior Hispanic or Latino of Any Race, Not First Generation, Engineering, Not Top 10%, Male)

You are an adult and you have to act like an adult because Texas A&M is not easy. You have to go out and seek help because it will not be handed to you. It will be worth it, but you have to work for it. (Sophomore, White Only, Not First Generation, Agriculture, Top 10%, Female)

As someone with experience in the workforce, returning to college just reinforced my beliefs that most college is a high efficiency daycare for children above the age of consent but below the threshold of maturity. (Junior, Multi-racial Excluding Black, First Generation, Liberal Arts, Not Top 10%, Male)

Getting help is crucial. Whether it be from an academic adviser or a tutor. There is always information out there that one cannot find without asking. I cannot stress enough how much I regret not meeting with my adviser more than one time my freshman year. (Sophomore, Hispanic or Latino of Any Race, First Generation, Engineering, Top 10%, Male)

Finding out who I am as a person. Everything at this school has built me to who I am today. It took 4 years but I'm finally figuring out me. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Education, Top10%, Female)

Of all the great learning experiences Texas A&M has made possible for me, I'd have to say the most important one is time management. With the right time management skills, a person can reach their full potential, filling their day with opportunities. Time management keeps students on track, arriving to class on time then to lunch and onto the next class. But when there time void within the schedule, an opportunity exist to eliminate priorities. (Sophomore, American Indian Only, Not First Generation, Engineering, Top 10%, Male)

I never expected it to be so difficult [sic] to succeed here. The challenges of attending classes in another language, and while all the time having to adjust to how things work in USA have been very demanding. However, that is what I was in need of, a proper challenge. It is not the content of the classes that have been most important, rather the tough survival it takes to be at A&M. It has taught me to never give up, how to survive in an environment with so many clever and smart people. After being here for four years i finally understand why my university is considered to be of such high esteem. While there is a lot of fun on and off campus activities, A&M makes one grow as a person, and teaches one how to fight and succeed. So while my time here so far have been difficult, I can't wait for my last semesters, and to see and interact with my fellow aggies. (Junior, International, Unknown, Liberal Arts, Not Top 10%, Male)

Learning to become a responsible adult, making appointments for myself, making sure I accomplish what needs to be done, increasing independence, finding balance in all aspects of life. (Junior, White Only, First Generation, Galveston, Not Top 10%, Female)

You have to do you. (Junior, Hispanic or Latino of any Race, Not First Generation, Veterinary Medicine, Not Top 10%, Male)

Diversity

The Diversity category addressed the recognition that people are different, whether that is race/ethnicity, religion, belief, or other characteristics. Students talked about racism and white supremacy. The semester before the SERU was implemented, Richard Spencer, a white nationalist, spoke at Texas A&M. Students had varying opinions about how the university handled the situation. Many respondents also talked about the learning that takes place when they take the time to listen and learn from each other.

I remember the time that I stepped foot on this campus and experienced culture shock because the students were predominantly Caucasian. Where I grew up, it was predominantly a Black, Latino, and Asian community. It was difficult for me to interact with them at first and I would feel

myself shy away because I looked different. In some instances, I was right. They wouldn't want to talk to me because I looked different and they assumed I would act different. However, I can also say I was wrong as well. I made many friends and a majority of them are Caucasian. They are some of my best friends and didn't point that I was different. You truly can't judge a book by its cover. (Senior, Hispanic or Latino of any Race, First Generation, Geosciences, Not Top 10%, Female)

I took INST 222 for my social sciences credit, which was kind of weird considering I'm a business student and that's an education course. However, it really changed my outlook on the world. I considered myself at the beginning of the semester to be very passionate about race issues and how they affect the classroom, being a woman of color who had just graduated high school with all of the experiences that come with it, so I thought the class would be a good idea for me to take, and it really was. The class helped me to evolve my perspective on the world in terms of race, and gave me an academic background on different concepts like privilege, white guilt and fatigue, and diversity. I feel much more prepared to confront racism, whether it's a white supremacist that holds a Nazi rally in the MSC or a microaggression I hear on the daily. (Sophomore, Asian Only, Not First Generation, Business, Top 10%, Female)

A black lives matter group verbally harassed me on campus because I was white. They said that my mission trips do no good (which is a white Christian stereotype- I have never been on a mission trip before) and that made me realize the feeling I had was something that black lives must feel everyday. It didn't real [sic] good to be stereotyped and so I shouldn't do it to others. (Sophomore, White Only, Not First Generation, General Studies, Not Top 10%, Female)

I came from a very small, conservative town in north Texas. We we're all middle class white kids who never really experienced any diversity. After coming to A&M I've gained such a better understanding of the racial/socioeconomic issues that face us. I've really changed my views as I've become more informed and I've gained valuable friendships that I would not have had if I had not attended Texas A&M. Meeting so many people with different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds has bettered my understanding of people, and really opened my eyes. (Senior, White Only, First Generation, Agriculture, Top 10%, Female)

Getting along with fellow peers and faculty even when we disagree on most topics. (Sophomore, White Only, Not First Generation, Galveston, Not Top 10%, Male)

Organization

Students explicitly named student, university, or community organizations where significant learning took place. Examples of organization membership or leadership included: Aggie Band, Aggie Coding Club, Aggie Emeralds, Aggie Experience Council, Aggies for Animal Rescue, Aggie Guide Dogs and Service Dogs, Aggie Honor Council, Aggie Transition Camps, Aggie Women in Business, Alternative Spring Break, American Medical Student Association, Amnesty International, Antioch Community Church, Asian Presidents' Council, Breakaway, Brotherhood of Christian Aggies, BUILD, Business Fellows Program, CARPOOL, Century Men's Society, Century Scholars, Century Singers, Chemical Engineering Society, Circle K International, CLUES, Corps of Cadets, Deaf Aggies and Friends, Engineers Without Borders, Fish Camp, FOCUS Learning Community, Freshmen Business Initiative, freshmen leadership organizations, HelpLine, Society, Howdy Camp, Impact, Lacrosse Club,

Memorial Student Center Committees, Muslim Student Association, National Society of Black Engineers, Pioneers Friday Church, Pre-Medical Society, Project Sunshine, Puerto Rican Student Association, Singing Cadets, Sounding Rocketry Team, Stock Horse Team, Student Affairs Fee Advisory Board, Student Bonfire, Student Engineers Council, Student Government, T-Camp, TAMECT, The Big Event, UNICEF, Venture: Base Camp, Veterinarians Without Borders, Women in Engineering, Woodson Black Awareness Committee, and Youth Impact. Students also mentioned being in fraternities or sororities (social and service), single gender organizations, athletic teams, and volunteer organizations. Other students did not mention the name of the organization, but described their learning.

The most significant learning experience I have had while at A&M was my co-curricular involvement with the Memorial Student Center (MSC). Through the MSC I have listen to and met many influential speakers ranging from military generals, authors and executives. I have been exposed to arts, cultures and politics and current events. The MSC has inspired my pursuit of life-long learning in a much greater way than any academic course. Additionally, it has allowed much better networking both with students and professionals than through my college. More importantly, I have developed many critical skills through my MSC involvement. I have lead teams, learned leadership theory, given presentations, written reports and grants, solved problems and analyzed data. I strongly believe the skills I have developed here are much more applicable to my learn [sic] term career interest and professional success than my academic coursework. (Senior, White only, Not First Generation, Engineering, Not Top 10%, Male)

I had the opportunity to serve as a co-chairperson and counselor multiple times for Fish Camp. This experience was one of the most impactful because I was able to obtain an invaluable amount of knowledge that I wouldn't be able to obtain inside the classroom. Not only did it give me the opportunity to grow in my leadership abilities, but it helped inspire my passion for this university and developed my personal values. Through my experiences, I was able to interact with so many incredible people from diverse backgrounds that taught me personal lessons about friendship, passion, service, development, and love. My intention for getting involved with Fish Camp was to impact the incoming freshmen class every year, just as I was coming to Texas A&M University. However, that organization and the people that participated impacted me more than I could have ever imagined. Looking forward to life outside of college, it taught me that you can have impactful experiential moments in and outside of the classroom. (Senior. Multi-racial excluding Black, Not First Generation, Geosciences, Not Top 10%, Male)

Joining the Corps of Cadets. It has taught me how to work with people from all different backgrounds to achieve common goals. It's shown me how to work hard and build community through adversity. It's taught me more about leadership than I ever could have hoped. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Agriculture, Not Top 10%, Female)

I am in DeAF (Deaf Aggies and Friends) and hearing about the deaf culture is very eye opening and gives me a new perspective on what it means to be deaf in a hearing world. (Freshman, White only, Not First Generation, Engineering, Not Top 10%, Female)

Being a part of CARPOOL has allowed me to express myself while helping my class mates when they are in need of a judgement free ride. (Junior, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Only, First Generation, Liberal Arts, Not Top 10%, Male)

I joined a multicultural sorority that I believed helped me become more social and interact with a more diverse group of people. (Sophomore, Hispanic or Latino of any Race, First Generation, Education, Top 10%, Female)

People

People was a broad category that addressed meeting people, making lifelong friends, caring for each other, a sense of welcome, and relationships.

Even though this isn't just one experience, I have just so greatly enjoyed all the staff and their passion for the university and it's values throughout my time here. Now that I'm almost graduating I know that it's something I'll miss until I come back to teach one day! (Senior, Multi-racial excluding Black, Not First Generation, Business, Not Top 10%, Male)

As a student at Texas A&M, I have been amazed time and time again by the fact that regardless of how different each individual is, we all come together as a family. I have never seen such a diverse group be there for each other in the way that this university has facilitated. The students here have different opinions, different backgrounds, and different futures, but when one of us is in need, the rest of us are there for them. It's a beautiful thing. I knew from the time I started at this university, that even though I transferred in and had an interesting background of my own, that I was joining a family. And I know that even when I graduate, that Aggie ring will warrant me a friendly, "Howdy!" wherever I go and an immediate connection with someone. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Veterinary Medicine, Not Top 10%, Female)

A&M has been a good experience and has helped me create many new friendships and helped me get involved in things I enjoy. Also, there are many networking opportunities. (Freshman, White Only, Not First Generation, Engineering, Not Top 10%, Male)

Although I still have experienced racism and prejudice at Texas A&M I've also realized that some people do use their privilege in order to help those without and it's nice to know I have that support from my peers. (Junior, Black only or Multi-racial with Black, First Generation, Veterinary Medicine, Not Top 10%, Female)

Course

Many students indicated a specific course and/or a specific instructor for a course as the most meaningful experience. For some students, the course made them think about their career, while others were excited about the content or its current application.

"Social Problems" with Professor Hernandez was the most intense, eye-opening experiences I have ever had. Everyday was like a Ted Talk! We went through so much material, but it was so fascinating because it was about the real world, real issues, and real people. It gave me this new sense of agency, like I could do something about the world. He inspired me to join a social justice group and start participating in community service. I'm going to a protest next month. I've always had distinct political opinions, but he increased my knowledge on so many other issues. (Junior, Unknown or Not Reported, Not First Generation, Liberal Arts, Not Top 10%, Female)

The most meaningful learning experience was my international business class with professor Vanita. I have learned so many things that are important to know to understand globalization, global politics, and why businesses do what they do. And in turn, how do businesses, governments, and policies impact our lives as citizens. (Senior, White Only, First Generation, Business, Top 10%, Female)

As a Geology major, we are required to take a five week course over the summer that tests our ability to combine the course work of many classes. The course required me to perform field geology in Utah, Colorado, and Montana. The work had a strong requirement for teamwork and group discussion. This course was different than any other, and challenged me like no other. The knowledge, memories, and friends I've gained there will always be attributed to one of the best experiences of my life. (Senior, Hispanic or Latino of any Race, First Generation, Geosciences, Top 10%, Male)

Being enrolled in Estimating 2 (COSC 375) was one the most meaningful learning experience I have had so far at A&M. The professor was great, and shared his knowledge of the subject to the point where I started to really enjoy it. I was challenged greatly in this class, since most of it revolved around group work. It gave me a great idea on what to expect in the working world, and how I can deal with people who do not like to contribute their fair share of the work required for a project. I learned how to be a competent individual and how to expect the most out of my group mates. The knowledge I gained in this class was critical to my experiences I will witness in the construction industry. (Junior, White Only, Not First Generation, Architecture, Not Top 10%, Male)

Academics

Respondents talked about their academic endeavors in general terms about their learning, their major/department/college, or the curricular experiences/courses they had. In addition, students expressed their opinions about the priority (or lack of) that the institution places on academics. Some students related their curricular experiences to their desired career options. Several students also commented on academic advising, both in the positive and the negative, as well as changing majors. Students also recognized the effort it took to be academically successful (time management, talking to faculty, study skills, etc.)

A&M has started to feel overly commercialized and business oriented at the expense of students. Great amounts of money are expended on sports facilities and this new hotel, while academic buildings are in disrepair. Moving disability services to West Campus is the perfect example of students being put last. It calls into question the values that this university claims to stand for. Being an international studies major was very disappointing. There are almost no INTS classes; the major is primarily made up of POLS and HIST classes that students have a hard time getting into. The quality of my professors and my courses have been poor, and good professors seem to be leaving the university. Very rarely have I felt as if the money I have given to A&M for my education has gone to good purpose. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Liberal Arts, Not Top 10%, Male)

Beginning my collegiate educational career on a bad foot my first semester has honestly been my most meaningful learning experience. I was extremely motivated after doing bad my first semester

and haven't gone below a 3.0 GPA since. (Sophomore, White Only, Not First Generation, Engineering, Top 10%, Male)

Taking classes outside my comfort zone. (Sophomore, White Only, Not First Generation, Public health, Not Top 10%, Female)

Having the ability to work on campus with a variety of faculty members including those outside of my major. Being able to freely express views on campus is also important for developing ones educational and social skills. The variety of classes offered at Texas A&M have the highest impact on my learning experience as I was able to take interesting electives outside my major and was able to connect that class to my major and increase my overall knowledge of many subjects at the same time. (Senior, Hispanic or Latino of any Race, Not First Generation, Education, Not Top 10%, Male)

I have had so much fun learning more about my major and interacting with professors and other students who share my love for my major. I cannot express how much I enjoy getting to go to class and learn more about the things I love most from other people who love it just as much as I do. (Junior, White Only, Not First Generation, Liberal Arts, Not Top 10%, Female)

I learned by being here that the major that I thought was for me wasn't. That is why I am transferring soon. I got to try my major out and that was what was most important to me. A&M has been a wonderful school to and provided me with many learning opportunities that showed me what I really wanted to be and do. (Sophomore, White Only, Not First Generation, Architecture, Not Top 10%, Female)

Interaction with Faculty

Students talked about the relationships they developed with faculty through the classroom and research, as well as out of class conversations. Students named specific faculty members and described their experiences. Respondents had some very inspirational, knowledgeable, and caring faculty who influenced their college career. Few students addressed negative interactions.

Dr. Mike Sandlin in the Health Department completely made my academic learning at Texas A&M. He is a once in a lifetime professor that everyone wishes they could have. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Education, Top 10%, Female)

After finishing my second Math exam of my first semester. I stayed behind to ask my Professor a question. Just before we left the testing room, we noticed that a student/cadet had left their phone in the room. I then began to work with my professor to track down where the cadet was living so that we may return his property. The Professor and I then walked together to the correct dorm as the professor spoke to me of his past experiences in the military. It was a very enjoyable getting to know my professor on a much closer level; and humbling to see him take the time out of his already late night to make sure that student got their property back. It showed me how much this professor cared for his students and all that he was willing to do for their well-being. (Sophomore, White Only, Not First Generation, Geosciences, Not Top 10%, Male)

Dr. Sieberts classes in the Agricultural Economics department. His classes were always a class that I looked forward to going to, other classes are not like his. He embodies the tradition of TAMU and for that he was an awesome professor. I learned a lot in his classes because he kept his students engaged in lecture, we were truly interested in what he had to say because he was so outgoing and cared about the students! (Junior, White Only, First Generation, Agriculture, Not Top 10%, Female)

Being able to go to such a large campus and having such small class sizes really shocked me. Professors actually got to know who I am and treated me as an individual, not just another student. (Sophomore, White Only, Not First Generation, Liberal Arts, Not Top 10%, Female)

I loved that Dr. J. D. Kim was my Math 151 professor. He taught me well. (Freshman, Hispanic or Latino of any Race, Engineering, Top 10%, Male)

I met with my economics professor Dr. Meer to discuss his class and he told me all about his research and how he initially began. He provided details about the economics department and the fast track masters program conjoint with the business school. Dr. Meer is approachable and took time to help me understand the research behind ECON 202. Now I am interested minoring, maybe even masters, in economics! (Freshman, White Only, Not First Generation, Business, Top 10%, Female)

Co-Curricular

Respondents described numerous experiences that they had including traditions (Muster, Silver Taps, Aggie Ring, Midnight Yell Practice, football games, etc.), university activities, and living environments. Students attended events such as Spring Leadership Exchange, Gilbert Leadership Conference, Aggies United, Posse Plus Retreat, Howdy Week, Breakaway, Veritas Forums, The Big Event, Alternative Spring Break and football games. They also engaged in learning communities, peer education/mentoring, and community service/volunteering.

The training provided by the Student Counseling HelpLine taught me how to talk to people who are dealing with something difficult, whether on a call at HelpLine or in person. This is a crucial skill for the career I want to pursue, and for being a friend who cares about others well. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Liberal Arts, Top 10%, Female)

The traditions are what make this campus unique and without them our identity as a campus is gone. I love being a Aggie because I feel like I am part of something bigger than myself and that is what most young people need at this time. (Junior, Hispanic or Latino of any Race, First Generation, Liberal Arts, Top 10%, Female)

As cliched [sic] as it sounds, "It starts with a 'Howdy' when you arrive, and it ends with a 'Here' at Muster." There is no greater embodiment of the the [sic] students and family that is Texas A&M than the fact that we stand united for our brothers and sisters who have passed in the previous months. That is what A&M has been, is, and will always be about. (Sophomore, Hispanic or Latino of any Race, Not First Generation, General Studies, Top 10%, Male)

Attending Texas A&M football games. That is the only time people would settle their differences and actually be "the Aggie family." (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Business, Top 10%, Male)

Belonging

Respondents used words such as family, welcome, friendly, community, and the Aggie network to describe the atmosphere on campus. Students noted that people genuinely care about each other. Some saw being an Aggie as something larger than themselves.

Although this campus is so big and diverse, building connections with other students and faculty members was not as hard as I expected it to be. Everyone is so friendly here and I think I'll continue to make amazing memories with them furthering my educational and personal development. (Sophomore, Asian Only, First Generation, Science, Top 10%, Female)

Being at a university where everyone cares for each other and are willing to stand up for each other. Seeing the cohesiveness of the student body and how we can come together in times of need makes attending A&M one of my best decisions. (Senior, Asian Only, Not First Generation, Business, Not Top 10%, Male)

How much love and support can come from one university that is connected through a network and love of the campus and its people. I feel like A&M is my family and I can carry that with me forever wherever life takes me. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Business, Top 10%, Female)

Being at Texas A&M I have learned what it means to be part of a family. I now know that I can reach out to fellow Aggies for help. I have learned I should not be afraid to ask for help and create a network of people to keep in contact with. (Senior, Hispanic or Latino of any Race, First Generation, Education, Top 10%, Female)

I was fortunate enough to find an organization that I actually belong in. I was finally surrounded by engineers that looked like me. There were other organizations that I considered, but none of them providing the vibe I was looking for. I realized the impact NSBE would have on me and those around me when I was given the opportunity to have a leadership position. The Freshman Executive Board of my chapter gave me a purpose and a deeper reason to stay in the organization. Performing the few tasks needed by the CEB, allowed me to contribute more than the average member. The people that are dedicated to this organization, inspired me to step up and become a leader as well. NSBE has been a crucial component of my freshman year, and I couldn't imagine my life without it. (Junior, Black Only or Multi-racial with Black, Not First Generation, Engineering, Top 10%, Male)

Global

Respondents described significant learning experiences through travel to another country and/or engagement with students from other countries. Some experiences were curricular (e.g., study abroad), while others were through student organizations. Students travelled all over the globe, some for short periods of time, while others left for a semester.

After spending a month in Namibia on a study abroad, I returned to A&M and joined the African Student Association. After the election I did not return to any meetings because I was afraid of being disliked and looked down upon for my political beliefs. However, the meetings I attended before the election taught me how it was to feel like a minority, even if it was just for 5 minutes. I have white skin, red hair, and green eyes and I sat in a room of people with dark characteristics. I had never been in a situation as such in my life, but I will never forget the feeling of being different at this university where I would have "fit in" in almost any other circumstance. I will never truly know the feeling of living every day of my life that way, but having that experience opened my eyes for the first time of what it felt like to look different. This made more of an impact on me than I could have ever learned in a book and I am forever grateful for it. (Senior, White Only, First Generation, Agriculture, Not Top 10%, Female)

I helped lead a table group with the international fellowship's free english [sic] conversation class for international students. It helped me discover my passion for internationals and for teaching. (Senior, White Only, First Generation, Agriculture, Top 10%, Female)

By far the most meaningful experience I had at Texas A&M was participating in the selective Spring Leadership Exchange Program. Getting to interact with TAMU - College Station and TAMU - Qatar student leaders both in Texas and in Doha, Qatar during our respective spring breaks opened my eyes to what it means to be a leader in an international context. In the wake of the Trump election, Islamophobia is on the rise. Being close friends with 12 students from the Middle East allows me to formulate conversations with TAMU students and community members about our nation's irrational fear of ALL Muslims. Furthermore, understanding a different religion and culture in depth has allowed me to futher [sic] understand my own ideas and beliefs. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Liberal Arts, Not Top 10%, Male)

I had the opportunity to go with an organization to Nicaragua for a medical mission trip. This trip opened my eyes on how different cultures live and access healthcare. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Veterinary Medicine, Not Top 10%, Female)

Experiential Learning

Students who responded to this question described how they have been able to apply their learning to other situations, such as internships, co-op experiences, student teaching, and lab work. They received "real world" experience that also helped them in their career trajectory.

The most meaningful learning experiences I have had at TAMU has been the time I have spent in the field. TAMU has provided me with ample experience in the public schools in the BCS area. The time that I have been able to spend in classrooms with experienced teachers has allowed me to grow as a teacher. I have been able to see the ins and outs of what it takes to be a teacher. I have learned how to interact with a team of teachers, with various levels of students, with administration, and with parents. These experiences have prepared me to begin my career as a teacher and be confident in my ability to be successful. (Senior, White Only, First Generation, Education, Top 10%, Female)

The most meaningful learning experience I had at Texas A&M was in my journalism class. This is because we got to go outside the classroom and actually understand what it feels like to be a journalist. For example we got to interview inmates and the Warden. Making a good hands on experience for my peers and I. (Junior, Black only or Multi-racial with Black, Not First Generation, Liberal Arts, Not Top 10%, Female)

Helping to design and build the 2017 Texas A&M Formula SAE car has turned me into an a real engineer. The experience gained through that project has been tremendous and will be invaluable for the rest of my career. (Senior, White, Not First Generation, Engineering, Not Top 10%, Male)

The animal science major is very hands on. This is important for many students because agricultural jobs are all hands on and it's good to know how to do something before being hired. The most meaningful experience I have had is watching and assisting in the birth of horses and pigs. Watching it in person is so much different than a video and it really brings you down to earth that we are all the same. It made me feel like I contributed to something important, maybe not to the university as a whole, but for that animal and our professor. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Agriculture, Not Top 10%, Female)

Research

As undergraduates, students discussed the opportunities to work with faculty on research. These opportunities shaped decisions students made about further education and career paths.

The research work I have been able to participate in has been critical to my development as a student. It provided an opportunity to synthesize topics learned in class, expand my knowledge beyond what is taught in class, learn about graduate school, visit other universities, improve written and oral communication skills, and work closely with faculty. The engineering curriculum here is excellent, but research definitely took what I learned and helped develop and refine it even further. (Senior, Black only or Multi-racial with Black, Not First Generation, Engineering, Not Top 10%, Male)

Research-it has informed the course of my education and directed my career plans. My degree-and my time at Texas A&M-wouldn't be the same without it. (Senior, White Only, Unknown, Science, Top10%, Female)

I understand that Texas A&M is a research campus, however teaching should not be a "burden". I personally would've loved to help out professors with research but their lack of commitment to undergraduate education was subpart [sic]. I had professors show up late to class, others show up in shorts. Their only priority is their research and do not care for the undergraduates. Teaching ought to be on par with research or at least close the gap. Otherwise, undergraduate talent will take notice and go elsewhere. (Senior, Hispanic or Latino of any Race, First Generation, Agriculture, Not Top 10%, Male)

The university's emphasis on undergraduate research (in a non-STEM major, no less) has been incredible. There are many resources available to me that allow me to follow my research ambitions and academic goals. Specifically, for me, the chance to work with some of the top

English researchers in my field on projects that I felt made a significant impact has been very rewarding and allowed me to do my own research. The faculty and advisors in the English department are all incredibly helpful and want to see students reach their full potential to achieve. I have always been welcomed into office hours and helped by anybody I asked, giving me a plethora of opportunities I imagine will help me as I continue on to graduate studies and my career. (Junior, White Only, Not First Generation, Liberal Arts, Top 10%, Female)

Teamwork

Students addressed working in teams as a significant learning experience. This happened both in the classroom (group projects) and outside the classroom (student leadership and organizations).

As an engineering student, I am in classes full of people who were likely the top of their class in high school, as was I. It has been humbling to learn how to communicate with others through many group assignments and projects because communication is critical in the workplace. Through being placed in groups with people I didn't know, I learned how to collaborate effectively and the value of proper communication of expectations and ideas. I have been able to learn a lot from my teammates, especially those who are not from the same background as myself. Hearing about their experiences in college, whether good or bad, benefitted my understanding of them as a person. I learned how to empathize and work together, which I was not very good at before college. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Engineering, Top 10%, Female)

I actually love working in groups now and I'm not worried or afraid to do so now. (Sophomore, White Only, Not First Generation, Liberal Arts, Not Top 10%, Female)

I have what is called a vertical studio. In this class, I am grouped with upperclassman, and we all work together to achieve a group project. Working with upperclassmen has been absolutely the best way that I have learned more about animation techniques and skills. (Junior, White Only, Not First Generation, Architecture, Top 10%, Female)

I learned how to be a team leader in group projects. I also learned how to resolve issues within the group if they were present. Being a team leader also helped me learn to make big decisions that also determined our project. (Freshman, Asian Only, Not First Generation, Engineering, Not Top 10%, Male)

Transition

Students revealed some of the challenges of transitioning from high school to college, transferring into Texas A&M, and getting ready to graduate. For some, the transition was about academics, while for others it was more about relationships.

Going into freshman year, I opted to attend Venture: Base Camp instead of Fish Camp and it was the best decision I've ever made. I met my best friends there and have since returned to be mentor for the upcoming camp this summer. (Freshman, White Only, Not First Generation, Engineering, Top 10%, Female)

Growing up I was always financially unstable, we moved from apartment to apartment just trying to make ends. During 8th grade-12th grade I had three jobs and helped support my parents meet bills. So when coming into A&M with some scholarships, Texas A&M really helped me with some money and paying for my tuition. I do not believe I would be here today, sitting in class, enjoying learning, if it wasn't for the generous offer of scholarships. When I got accepted into TAMU, I got accepted in to Gateway. I thought that meant that I wasn't good enough or smart enough as all my other friends that just got accepted automatically into the school. But once I started Gateway, I realized that I wasn't the only one and that there were 500+ other people on the same boat as me that later became great friends of mine. I remember for months before knowing what gateway really was; I just felt like I was not going to feel welcome in TAMU and lesser. After the first meeting of Gateway, I met former students who were in Gateway that made it through to A&M, and Cooper Cox (a current Yell Leader) who was in Gateway and now was representing Texas A&M as one of our Yell Leaders. He really had an impact on my confidence into entering Gateway. Through Gateway I learned how to manage my time, my finances, and my classes. Yes, it was hard at times, but I just always believed if so many people, including Cooper Cox could do it, so could I. I love Texas A&M University & I wouldn't want to go anywhere else. (Sophomore, White Only, First Generation, General Studies, Not Top 10%, Female)

Like I said earlier, I have just learned a lot about myself and what I want to get out of my college experience. Freshman year is a big change, and a lot of development goes on throughout it. I've gotten plenty of time to reflect on who I am and what I want to pursue in life. I definitely am still figuring things out, but my time here as helped progress me quite a bit. (Freshman, White Only, Not First Generation, General Studies, Not Top 10%, Male)

How to be a good student, most people come from high school thinking that they know everything and that they are fantastic students. I was one of those people. Realizing that I am not as smart as I think I am is a large reason why I am doing well in my classes this semester. Last semester was a wake up call for me when I earned a 2.1 GPA. Now at midterm grades I have a 3.1 and am feeling much better about classes. It is important that you learn from a failing experience instead of becoming defeated and I am very happy that I have this chance to grow as a person and a student. (Sophomore, White Only, Not First Generation, General Studies. Top 10%, Female)

Volunteer

Respondents highlighted significant experiences around volunteering and serving the community and the world. These were through student organizations, community agencies, and course experiences. Some examples that the students named include The Big Event, Habitat for Humanity, MSC FLI (Freshmen Leaders International) Costa Rica trip, and Project Sunshine.

All of my most meaningful learning experiences since I began studying at A&M have come from the volunteer experiences I have participated in through student organizations and on my own. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Nursing, Top 10%, Female)

My most meaningful learning experience was being a part of a student organization that worked to give clean water to the 663 million people who lack access to it in the name of Jesus Christ. As a leader in the organization I learned much about leadership and teamwork and conflict resolution. I also learned the importance of service and the tremendous power we have to enact positive

change if we only have to courage to believe we can do it. I learned that giving my goals and aspirations to God means knitting my story in with a story much bigger than my own, giving my small actions more impact than I could ever achieve alone. In my time at Texas A&M, by the grace of God, I have been blessed to be a part of raising over \$100,000 for clean water wells to be drilled in one of the most water impoverished countries in the world, Rwanda. As an organization we have fully funded and drilled 2 clean water wells in rural El Salvador, giving access to clean, safe drinking water and the hope of Jesus to two different communities. Overall, that experience enriched my life and college experience beyond measure. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Science, Top 10%, Female)

The most meaningful learning experience that I had was joining the organization Veterinarians Without Borders. It was through this organization that I was able to go on a volunteer experience abroad, I gained leadership experience and I gained lifelong friends who I could go to for anything. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Veterinary Medicine, Top 10%, Male)

Being involved with my organization/sorority has required me to fulfill over 100 hours of community service. This service has opened up my eyes to the variety of living conditions people experience everyday. It makes me appreciate what I have and who I have in my life, and it inspires me to continue serving my community even when it is not a requirement. (Junior, Hispanic or Latino of any Race, First Generation, Agriculture, Not Top 10%, Female)

Pedagogy

Undergraduate students described how some faculty used meaningful teaching tactics to engage students in their learning. This could include discussion, debates, small class size that encouraged interaction, bringing in experts in the field, and providing hands-on experience. Faculty were passionate about their subject and student learning.

During my first semester I took an intro to Sociology class where a graduate student was teaching. He said from the beginning [sic] that the class would be taught in both directions. Meaning that he would teach us and likewise he would learn from us. I really appreciated this (and even more now since there hasn't been a teacher with his style) because it made my learning experience far more richer than if I were to not engaged with him and my class-mates. (Junior, Hispanic or Latino of any Race, First Generation, Liberal Arts, Top 10%, Female)

I learned a lot through my Aero-thermodynamics class. The class was set up in a way that stimulated growth and learning, as opposed to just memorizing concepts for a grade and forgetting them afterwards. I feel as if I actually understand the material because of the way Dr. Karpets pushed us and challenged us as individuals. He didn't care about what we made on his tests or what we wanted in the class; he only cared that we learned the material and that we grew to be as passionate about it as he is. I learned to love engineering and aerospace through Dr. Karpets' 212 class, something that I hadn't before. Because of this class, I am determined to succeed in this major and learn for understanding, rather than learn for a grade. (Sophomore, White Only, Not First Generation, Engineering, Top 10%, Male)

Taking Dr. Dunning's HIST 210, Russian civilization class changed my life. I love Dr. Dunning. He is an incredible teacher and person. He is so knowledgeable and also really cares about whether or

not his students learn. I am now in my 3rd semester with Dr. Dunning and no other teacher in college has taught me more about how to read, how to take notes, how to write, and how to research more than Dr. Dunning. Not only have I learned about Russian history, and now about Western Civilization from him, but I have also learned how to be a student. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Liberal Arts, Not Top 10%, Female)

Class Project

Undergraduates shared their experiences working on class projects that were meaningful to their learning. Not only was it about working with others, it was also about learning more about the subject and creating a quality product.

Group projects have been the most meaningful learning experience I have had here. It makes you work with people from different backgrounds and ideas and forces the team to work together to create the finished product. Overall, it has improved my leadership and communication skills which will help me in the future. (Junior, White Only, Not First Generation, Architecture, Top 10%, Male)

I have had many learning experiences here at Texas A&M, I believe one of the most important was last semester for my capstone classes where we had semester-long projects to complete. Working with the people I worked with and having wonderful professors shaped me into the person I am becoming. I grew closer to my team members and consider them long lasting friends. I admire professors more than ever now, they helped and encouraged me to become great. (Senior, Hispanic or Latino of any Race, First Generation, Education, Top 10%, Female)

Employment

Many undergraduate students are employed. For some students, this experience is particularly meaningful for their own learning and development, as well as their academic engagement. Some students were teaching assistants, Resident Advisors, lab assistants, and in other areas around campus.

My involvement as an RA has been my most educational experience at TAMU. It has allowed me to work with and care for a variety of individuals with opinions and backgrounds differing from my own. It has opened my eyes to many different issues and has improved my skills in conflict management, event planning, leadership, and working as a team. This is an experience I feel I can also present when looking for employment and can speak highly of. Aside from my degree, it is my most valuable experience at A&M. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Agriculture, Not Top 10%, Male)

Being a TA for biomedical anatomy is one of the best things I have done in college. I got to help other students learn the material for the first time, while I was solidifying the material I had previously learned myself. Getting to do so much hands on stuff was fantastic, and teaching was even more fun than I thought it would be. It was a great experience, which I hope to continue doing as a graduate student. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Veterinary Medicine, Not Top 10%, Female)

Integration

Several students articulated how they applied, synthesized, and analyzed their learning experiences between classes, and/or between classes and student organizations.

My experience serving with The Big Event as an Outreach Executive allowed me to combine information I learned in my classes at Mays, and put it into action. I faced decisions that I will not be making again for another 10 or 15 years. Overall, this was the most meaningful contribution to my education. (Senior, White Only, Not First Generation, Business, Not Top 10%, Female)

Having the ability to work on campus with a variety of faculty members including those outside of my major. Being able to freely express views on campus is also important for developing ones educational and social skills. The variety of classes offered at Texas A&M have the highest impact on my learning experience as I was able to take interesting electives outside my major and was able to connect that class to my major and increase my overall knowledge of many subjects at the same time. (Senior, Hispanic or Latino of any Race, Not First Generation, Education, Not Top 10%, Male)

Appendix 1: Demographics of Respondents: The majority tended to be White, Not First Generation, Senior, Engineering majors.

Demographic	Percent of Respondents
Campus	
College Station	95%
Galveston	5%
Academic College	
Engineering	22%
Liberal Arts	19%
Agriculture	12%
Education	11%
Business	9%
Science	5%
Galveston	5%
Architecture	5%
Veterinary Medicine	4%
General Studies	4%
Public Health	1%
Nursing	1%
Dentistry	<1%
Classification	
Senior	39%
Junior	26%
Sophomore	24%
Freshman	11%
Gender	
Female	62%
Male	38%
Ethnic Origin	
White Only	64%
Hispanic/Latino of Any Race	22%
Asian Only	7%
Black Only or Multi-Racial with Black	4%
Multi-Racial Excluding Black	2%
International	1%
American Indian Only	<1%
Unknown or Not Reported	<1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Only	<1%
First Generation Status	
Not First Generation	72%
First Generation	26%
Unknown	3%
Top 10% Status	
Not Top 10%	53%
Top 10%	47%

Conclusions

Undergraduate students who completed the SERU communicated about their most meaningful learning experiences at Texas A&M. Students relayed experiences from the curricular and co-curricular, as well as personal reflections on their own development. The comments can be useful in developing programs and services to support students through their time in college.

The information in this report could be shared with the university community. Within the Division of Student Affairs, many departments and committees may be interested in this information regarding student organizations, the co-curricular, employment, diversity, self-discovery, and belonging. In addition, the Faculty Senate, the Dean of Faculties, University Advisors and Counselors, the Vice President for Diversity, and others may find the curricular topics of interest.