

MSC Abbott Family Leadership Conference San Antonio and Houston Trips Spring 2019

Purpose

Memorial Student Center (MSC) Abbott Family Leadership Conference (AFLC) sponsored two separate conferences, one in San Antonio (January 23-27, 2019) and one in Houston (March 20-25, 2018). MSC AFLC also sponsored additional pre-conference events that included all delegates. Different students attended each conference. MSC AFLC addresses four “pillars” in their pre-conference events and at both conferences: ethics, importance of family, service, and values. Evaluations of each conference and surrounding pre-conference events also included assessing delegates’ awareness, knowledge and application of the four pillars as a result of the delegates’ participation.

Method and Sample

The survey evaluations were created using Teleform®, a survey development software that creates scannable paper surveys and databases. The evaluation distributed during both conferences contained the same 15 questions; 10 questions were quantitative and five were qualitative. The data were analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package and Microsoft Excel®.

Thirty-five student delegates participated in the San Antonio conference; all received and completed a survey for a 100% response rate. Forty student delegates attended the Houston conference and all completed the evaluation, also yielding a 100% response rate.

Key Findings with Recommendations

Student Life Studies identified several key findings and developed actionable recommendations the department may take based on the results. However, MSC AFLC staff may identify other findings using their knowledge and understanding of the community. Staff members and student leaders are strongly encouraged to read all the results and qualitative comments to gain a fuller understanding of students’ experiences.

- Overall, the students who attended the conferences greatly appreciated the genuineness of the host families and the ability to learn from their stories. Students also learned from the speakers’ perspectives. MSC AFLC should continue to recruit high quality speakers and families to address the four pillars.
- Because the schedule was very full, some delegates did not feel they had enough time for reflection and/or rejuvenation. The MSC AFLC staff may want to decrease the number of speakers to allow for more reflection and break time.
- Numerous students recognized that the speakers, families, and delegates were not particularly diverse in beliefs. MSC AFLC staff may want to recruit families and speakers who are non-Christian or have a non-traditional family structure.

Results

Results include frequency percentages, means, and standard deviations (sd) for the number of people (n) who responded to the question. For ease of reading, frequency percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%. Comparisons to responses from previous conferences are provided as applicable. The scale used for most questions was 4=Strongly Agree, 3=Agree, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree, and 0=Not Applicable. The Not Applicable responses were removed from the analysis. All tables are listed in descending mean order for 2019.

Summary themes are contained within this report, while the full qualitative responses can be found in a separate document. The report contains two sections: San Antonio Conference and Houston Conference.

SAN ANTONIO CONFERENCE

Delegates were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with several statements regarding their MSC Abbott experience prior to and during the conference. Table 1 shows delegates reported mostly agreeing about the conference activities and reported the conference challenged them to further develop their own view on family and their own values. This year's delegates reported less agreement with the time for reflection and that speakers represented diversity of thought.

Statements about Conference Activities – San Antonio	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2019 Mean (sd) [n]	2018 Mean (sd) [n]	2017 Mean (sd) [n]
The conference challenged me to further develop my own view on family throughout the activities.	94%	6%	--	--	3.94 (.24) [35]	3.87 (.34) [39]	3.89 (.32) [36]
The conference challenged me to further develop my own view on values throughout the activities.	86%	14%	--	--	3.86 (.36) [35]	3.82 (.39) [38]	3.77 (.43) [35]
My perspective was valued on conference.	86%	14%	--	--	3.86 (.36) [35]	‡	‡
The director staff made a sincere and calculated effort to interact with and be available for delegates.	86%	11%	3%	--	3.83 (.45) [35]	‡	‡
Because of the pre-conference time spent with my delegate family, I felt more comfortable with other delegates during the conference.	80%	17%	3%	--	3.77 (.49) [35]	3.06 (.86) [36]	2.97 (.57) [35]
The conference challenged me to further develop my own view on service throughout the activities.	71%	26%	3%	--	3.69 (.53) [35]	3.56 (.55) [39]	3.69 (.47) [36]
I heard something during the family roundtables that I did not hear during other parts of conference.	69%	31%	--	--	3.69 (.47) [35]	3.87 (.34) [39]	3.67 (.48) [36]
The conference challenged me to further develop my own view on ethics throughout the activities.	63%	31%	6%	--	3.57 (.61) [35]	3.77 (.43) [39]	3.72 (.45) [36]
There was adequate time for reflective activities throughout the conference.	14%	57%	23%	6%	2.80 (.76) [35]	2.51 (.82) [39]	2.69 (.89) [36]
The conference speakers represented comprehensive diversity of thought.	14%	49%	34%	3%	2.74 (.74) [35]	‡	‡

Table 1 – MSC Abbott Experiences – San Antonio Conference
‡ Question not asked

Delegates were asked to expand on any “disagree” or “strongly disagree” responses from the previous questions. Many of the 25 comments focused on the lack of diversity, both religious and socio-economic, of the speakers, which inhibited diversity of thought and discussion. Delegates also felt rushed, so they did not have time in between speakers to reflect on the content.

Delegates were asked to explain what part of the conference significantly impacted them (e.g., local families, speakers, directors, pre-conference activities, etc.). The 34 comments mostly described the ability to have conversations with the local families where students could engage in relaxed, small group discussions.

When asked if there was a speaker that did not align with or promote the conference mission, 29 delegates responded. Some students thought all of the speakers reflected the Abbott Family Leadership Conference values. The most mentioned person was Terri Liebler, who received mix reviews about whether she aligned with the mission and/or provided a different perspective. In addition, two students named the Ammermans; they were transparent but may not have embodied the MSC AFLC mission.

Delegates also described their experiences with their host families. Students appreciated the openness, wisdom, and genuineness that the host families exhibited. Delegates could see the similarities and differences between the host families.

The final question asked delegates for suggestions to improve the overall MSC Abbott experience. Many recommended allowing more time for reflection and breaks between the speakers (or fewer speakers). The schedule seemed to be very full without opportunity to process until the evening. Many delegates would like more diversity in the speakers and their beliefs.

HOUSTON CONFERENCE

Delegates were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with several statements regarding their MSC Abbott experience prior to and during the conference. Table 2 shows delegates reported being very positive about developing views on family and values. Delegates would have liked more diversity in the speakers and more time for reflection throughout the conference.

Statements about Conference Activities – Houston	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2019 Mean (sd) [n]	2018 Mean (sd) [n]	2017 Mean (sd) [n]
The conference challenged me to further develop my own view on family throughout the activities.	87%	13%	--	--	3.87 (.34) [34]	3.76 (.43) [38]	3.89 (.32) [36]
The conference challenged me to further develop my own view on values throughout the activities.	85%	15%	--	--	3.85 (.36) [40]	3.70 (.52) [37]	3.77 (.43) [35]
My perspective was valued on conference.	70%	28%	3%	--	3.68 (.53) [40]	3.68 (.64) [34]	‡
Because of the pre-conference time spent with my delegate family, I felt more comfortable with other delegates during the conference.	70%	28%	3%	--	3.68 (.53) [40]	3.28 (.63) [32]	3.18 (.72) [34]
I heard something during the family roundtables that I did not hear during other parts of conference.	65%	33%	3%	--	3.63 (.82) [40]	‡	3.82 (.39) [38]
The conference challenged me to further develop my own view on ethics throughout the activities.	55%	45%	--	--	3.55 (.50) [40]	3.68 (.53) [38]	3.72 (.45) [36]
The conference challenged me to further develop my own view on service throughout the activities.	60%	33%	8%	--	3.53 (.64) [40]	3.57 (.60) [37]	3.69 (.47) [36]
The conference director staff made a sincere and calculated effort to interact with and be available for delegates.	67%	18%	13%	3%	3.49 (.82) [39]	3.65 (.49) [34]	‡
The conference speakers represented comprehensive diversity of thought.	30%	53%	13%	5%	3.08 (.80) [40]	‡	‡
There was adequate time for reflective activities throughout the conference.	25%	53%	18%	5%	2.98 (.80) [40]	3.26 (.57) [34]	2.55 (.89) [38]

Table 2 – MSC Abbott Experiences – Houston Conference
‡ Question not asked.

Delegates were asked to expand on any “disagree” or “strongly disagree” responses from the previous questions. Two themes clearly emerged from the 26 comments: students wanted more time for reflection, and the

speakers did not necessarily represent a diversity of thought (i.e., they come from a Christian perspective). A few people mentioned that their director staff did not make an effort to interact with delegates.

Delegates were asked to explain what part of the conference significantly impacted them (e.g., local families, speakers, directors, pre-conference activities, etc.). Many of the 39 comments included the local families and family roundtables because of their hospitality and engagement. Several people also mentioned the Young Professionals Panel and the tour of the Third Ward.

When asked if there was a speaker that did not align with or promote the conference mission, 30 delegates responded. Several students mentioned Warren Barhorst, because he did not focus on the family values. A couple of students mentioned the Diaz family, primarily because they did not connect with the students. Several students indicated that all the speakers were good.

Delegates also described their experiences with their host families. They described them as welcoming, sweet, and honest. A couple of people mentioned their host not directly answering the delegates' questions, but that was not a consistent theme for any particular family.

The final question asked delegates for suggestions to improve the overall MSC Abbott experience. Several of the 39 students who responded suggested decreasing the number of speakers to increase the amount of time for reflection or local family time. In addition, a few students addressed diversity in demographics and perspective.

Organization Background

According to the website (<http://abbott.tamu.edu/>), students attending the Memorial Student Center (MSC) Abbott Family Leadership Conference (AFLC) are encouraged "to study and reflect on their individual ethics, morals and values, establishing a personal value system and apply it to their lives as student leaders at Texas A&M and in future business, community and family relationships." The five-day event introduces sophomore and junior student delegates to former students of Texas A&M University and leaders in industry who share experiences of incorporating values and ethics into their professional and personal lives. The AFLC staff selects an equal number of males and females. Student Life Studies has worked with MSC AFLC to assess the conferences since 2002.

Project Details

The Department of Student Life Studies provides quality assessment services, resources and assessment training for departments in the Texas A&M University Division of Student Affairs and student organizations. Services by Student Life Studies are funded, in part, by the Texas A&M University Advancement Fee. Results of this project and other assessment projects done through Student Life Studies can be found at <https://studentlifestudies.tamu.edu/results/>. Additionally, division staff can follow Student Life Studies on Facebook.

To work with Student Life Studies for future assessment projects, please fill out the Assessment Questionnaire at <https://slsform.dsaapps.tamu.edu/>.

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