

Southwestern Black Student Leadership Conference
The Purpose Pursuit: SBSLC 2019
January 17-19, 2019

Purpose of Assessment

In January 2019, the Southwestern Black Student Leadership Conference (SBSLC) held its 31st annual conference on the campus of Texas A&M University. A series of surveys were developed to assess the approximately 515 student participants' experience attending the conference overall, the organizations at the Career and Graduate School fair, 24 participants' experience at the Charles E. Williams II Advanced Leadership Institute (ALI), and the 59 attending advisors' experience.

Key findings with Recommendations

Student Life Studies identified key findings and actionable recommendations SBSLC may consider based on results from the surveys administered to participants of the conference. However, SBSLC staff may identify other findings using their knowledge and understanding of the conference and its attendees. SBSLC staff is strongly encouraged to read all the results and qualitative comments to gain a fuller understanding of participants' experience with the conference.

- Most participants agreed or strongly agreed that the overall conference provided them opportunities to network with students from other colleges and universities, and found the Showcase a good addition to the conference (89% and 90% respectively). Because of attending, they plan on coordinating events with multiple organizations and use what they learned at SBSLC to increase involvement of African-American students on their own campuses.
- Slightly more than one-third of students agreed or strongly agreed that the Career and Graduate School Fair helped them connect with employers, internships or graduate school programs. Nearly two-thirds were neutral, disagreed or strongly disagreed that the Fair helped them connect with employers, internships or graduate schools. Many suggested there needed to be more diversity of industries and fields of study represented by the employers' and graduate schools. Future SBSLC conferences may be enhanced by increasing the employer and graduate school representation, both in total number and more diverse representation of industry and fields.
- When asked about conference improvements, many participants indicated the quality of food, the diversity of food offerings (lack of vegetarian options) and the organization of the lunches needed improvement. SBSLC staff should consider these suggestions and dietary needs as they plan, select and work with next year's venue and caterer.
- Participants indicated a desire for more activity based workshop sessions and more opportunities to get to know students from other schools in attendance at the conference. SBSLC staff may want to convey to potential session facilitators the need to include more activities involving participants interacting with one another.
- The ALI participants generally were not as positive about the institute as last year. As well, advisors found fewer program offerings specifically developed for advisors and expressed the desire for more. SBSLC staff responsible for these portions of the conference should review the assessment results to help identify improvements that can be incorporated into next year's programming based on the respondents' feedback.

Method and Sample

Four 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 describes each survey. Please note that the advisors' survey was successfully sent to 47 advisors, as the survey was not deliverable to 12 of the 59 provided email addresses.

Survey	Quantitative Questions	Qualitative Questions	Type	2019 Response Rate	2018 Response Rate	2017 Response Rate
ALI	7	2	Web	54%	*59%	*0%
Advisor	11	2	Web	64%	62%	56%
Career Fair	5	2	Paper	0%	90%	63%
Overall	5	3	Web	†	*33%	*49%

Table 1—Description of Each Survey
*Paper Type Survey

† The overall conference survey invitation with unique links was sent to 515 student attendees, of which 49 emails bounced and did not reach the intended students. Specifically, 40 students from the University of Louisiana at La Fayette did not receive surveys. As SLS and SBSLC believed their institution's systems blocked survey database distributed emails from reaching these students, the SBSLC co-chair emailed an anonymous link to these 40 students, which were successfully distributed. As access to the survey was then available through both email address specific invitation links and through an anonymous link, a response rate cannot be determined. However, 176 responses were recorded (24 responses were recorded from an anonymous link, 152 recorded through email address specific links), so approximately 34% of the 515 participants may have responded to the 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 2018 responses will be included where appropriate.

This report is divided into three sections: The Charles E. Williams II Advanced Leadership Institute (ALI), Advisor, and Overall Conference. As no Career and Graduate School Fair surveys were returned to Student Life Studies for analysis, those results are not presented.

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

SBSLC established several program outcomes for the institute. Table 2, on the next page, shows that participants reported positively on all outcomes, although less so than 2018 participants. Participants were most positive about being able to apply what they learned toward their involvement in organizations on their campus.

As a result of participating in the Advanced Leadership Institute, I...	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2019 Mean (sd) [13]	2018 Mean (sd) [13]
Can apply what I learned to my involvement in organizations on my campus	62%	39%	--	--	3.62 (.51)	3.92 (.28)
Feel part of a cohesive group	54%	46%	--	--	3.54 (.52)	3.92 (.28)
Understand leadership in a cultural context	54%	46%	--	--	3.54 (.52)	3.92 (.28)
Gained a more in-depth understanding of leadership	62%	31%	8%	--	3.46 (.88)	3.92 (.28)
Gained a more in-depth understanding of my personal leadership style	39%	54%	8%	--	3.23 (.83)	3.77 (.44)

Table 2—Advanced Leadership Institute Outcomes

Participants of ALI were asked whether they have an action plan for their organization and 92% of the 13 respondents said yes. They were also asked if they gained useful knowledge from the Graduate School session and of the 13 respondents, 62% said no and 39% said yes.

Participants were asked what they found interesting about the current year's discussion topics. About one third of those who commented mentioned they learned from and appreciated the open discussion regarding African- American and African identities. Please see the attached qualitative responses for full detail.

When asked for ideas for improvements, 11 participants responded. Recommendations included having the schedule in advance, especially to help students to prepare for the oratory contest. Other suggestions included an ALI alumni lunch, and an alternative session, such as mock interviews or resume review, instead of the graduate school session.

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, 96% of those advisors who responded (n = 28) said their institution would attend.

Table 3, on the next page, indicates responding advisors' agreement with several statements regarding the conference. Advisors had positive responses overall, although were less positive regarding the SBSLC Advisor workshop series than in 2018. They appreciated how professional and accommodating the staff was during the conference, and were more positive than last year regarding the manageability of the registration process.

Statement	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2019 Mean (sd) [n]	2018 Mean (sd) [n]
The SBSLC staff was professional during the conference	73%	27%	--	--	3.73 (.45) [30]	3.79 (.42) [29]
The SBSLC staff was accommodating during the conference	73%	27%	--	--	3.73 (.45) [30]	3.76 (.43) [29]
SBSLC met my expectations for my students' learning	63%	37%	--	--	3.63 (.49) [30]	3.45 (.63) [29]
The registration process was manageable	55%	41%	3%	--	3.52 (.57) [29]	2.79 (.99) [28]
Communication with SBSLC staff before the conference was professional	46%	50%	4%	--	3.43 (.57) [28]	3.31 (.60) [29]
I will be able to apply what I learned in the SBSLC Advisor workshop series	28%	48%	12%	12%	2.92 (.95) [25]	3.58 (.50) [26]
The SBSLC Advisor Workshop series contributed to my professional development	25%	50%	14%	11%	2.89 (.92) [28]	3.54 (.51) [28]
The SBSLC Advisor workshop series helped me better understand my role as an advisor	16%	56%	16%	12%	2.76 (.88) [25]	3.38 (.50) [26]

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 Advisors' Digest emails was most popular, selected by 79% of the responders, followed by the website selected by 69% of the responders. The bi-weekly e-newsletter was chosen by 38% and social media by 21% of the responders. One advisor who selected the website and social media specified that they use the website as their first source for information, followed by direct email.

When asked about the most positive experiences at SBSLC, many of the 28 responders said they enjoyed networking and sharing their experiences with the other advisors. Others noted they enjoyed watching their students interact with students from other institutions and engage in leadership development. Some specifically noted that they found the advisor orientation useful and appreciated it. Advisors were then asked how the conference could be improved for them; 27 offered opinions. Most of the suggestions recommended having more sessions focused on advisors, or roundtable discussions for them as only two advisor workshops were noted in the Guidebook. One-third indicated no changes or improvements were needed. 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. The choice “other” was selected by 55% of the respondents, followed by the Hilton and Hampton Inn both representing 21% of the responses. The Hyatt Place was selected by 3% of respondents. Thirteen advisors who selected “other” specified the Texas A&M Conference Center Hotel.

Overall Evaluation

Table 4 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 having the opportunity to network with other participants from other colleges and universities. However, they were in least agreement about making connections with future graduate programs, and future employers or internship opportunities at the Career Fair. Comparisons to 2018 cannot be provided as the scale changed from a four-point scale to a five-point scale.

As a result of participating in SBSLC, I was able to...	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2019 Mean (sd) [n]
Network with other participants from other colleges and universities	56%	33%	8%	2%	1%	4.42 (.78) [174]
I thought the Showcase, which was new to SBSLC this year, was a good addition to the conference.	52%	38%	9%	1%	1%	4.38 (.77) [163]
I was able to make connections I intend to maintain.	42%	36%	17%	4%	1%	4.13 (.92) [173]
Connect with future employers or internship opportunities at the Career Fair	19%	19%	23%	21%	18%	3.02 (1.38) [160]
Connect with future graduate programs at the Career Fair	22%	16%	17%	28%	17%	2.97 (1.42) [159]

Table 4—SBSLC Outcomes

Students were asked how effectively they felt the keynote speaker’s message corresponded with the conference theme “The Purpose Pursuit”. Of the 176 who responded, 47% selected effectively, 25% selected somewhat effectively, 14% selected somewhat ineffectively and 15% selected ineffectively (Mean=3.03/4.0, sd=1.10)

Students were also requested to provide feedback regarding any changes or new programs they plan to implement on their campus as a result of attending SBSLC. Many of the 118 who commented talked about coordinating larger events with multiple organizations on campus, specifically connecting Black student groups on campus. Others spoke on using what they learned at SBSLC to increase involvement of African-American students on their campuses along with facilitating critical conversations and discussions about racial climate on campus. Because of attending SBSLC, students also indicated planning specific programs

such as debates, hackathons and bringing in speakers they heard at SBSLC to educate their black community on various topics.

The next series of questions asked the respondents about their participation in the Showcase, a new feature of SBSLC this year. They were asked if they performed in the Showcase, and 96% of the 160 respondents said no. The 4% who said they performed in the Showcase were then asked if they enjoyed it and 100% said yes (n=8). Those students were also asked if the SBSLC staff were professional during the showcase and all eight said yes. Finally, when asked if they would perform again at the next SBSLC if given the opportunity, 75% of the eight respondents said yes and 25% said no.

Both the students who indicated they would perform in the Showcase again and those who indicated they would not perform were asked to share why they would or would not perform again at SBSLC. Those who said they would perform again said they would do so because it was enjoyable, fun and gave them an opportunity to get a message across through testimony. No one who answered no to performing again chose to write a response when asked why they would not. All students were asked how could the SBSLC Showcase be improved, and responses included adding more Greek performers, allowing longer than five minutes for performance and giving more information beforehand.

Respondents were asked for ideas to improve future conferences. Many of the 123 comments provided suggestions to improve the food at the conference, recommending more options for vegetarians and pescatarians. Others found the lines long, especially at lunch. Respondents also indicated the Career Fair was lacking diversity, and should offer more employer and graduate school recruiting options beyond engineering and education. Respondents said that they would like to see workshops with topics that are more diverse, experienced speakers and speakers sticking to the session time allotted. Quite a few suggested having activities that promote the networking and co-mingling of students from different schools and generally, more workshops that incorporate activities for participants instead of lecture type presentations. The students also noted that the keynote speaker went long and did not seem to focus on the theme of the conference. A few respondents indicated that some SBSLC student staff behaved rudely, were unprofessional and not knowledgeable about logistics of the conference.

Background

The SBSLC website (<http://dms.tamu.edu/engagement/sbslc/>) describes its 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, The Purpose Pursuit, focused on encouraging young professionals to be leaders in three core areas: economic empowerment, civic engagement and political involvement. Below and on the next page are the program and learning outcomes for those that participate in the 2019 SBSLC.

- 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.

Project Details

SBSLC has worked with Student Life Studies since 2001 on the assessment of various components of the conference. This year, surveys were developed to assess participants about their overall conference experience, organizations (vendors) at the Career and Graduate School fair, participants at the Charles E. Williams II Advanced Leadership Institute (ALI), and advisors. SBSLC staff developed surveys without Student Life Studies assistance for each of the workshops delivered through the conference app Guidebook. However, the surveys to assess the organizations at the Career and Graduate School Fair were not distributed or not collected, thus were not returned to Student Life Studies for analysis.

The format for the overall conference survey also changed in 2019, from the paper format in previous years distributed during the closing banquet, to an electronic survey sent via email to SBSLC student participants after the conference. The list of participating students and their email addresses (contact list) provided by SBSLC for the survey distribution did not include all participants as some schools register all their students who attend SBSLC under one common email address (seemingly an advisor). In addition, as already detailed, 49 email addresses bounced back, thus some of those students received the survey through an anonymous link emailed through an SBSLC staff member. These challenges in providing access to the survey for all student attendees need consideration when developing future assessments for SBSLC.

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 and students 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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