Whoopin’ Weekend Conference Evaluation
Student Government Association
Spring 2004

Background
Each Spring the Aggie Recruitment Committee (ARC) within Student Government Association sponsors Whoopin’ Weekend, which provides high school students an opportunity to visit the Texas A&M campus. According to their website, the mission of ARC is to:

“…perpetuate the livelihood of Texas A&M University by striving for excellence in facilitating and coordinating recruiting efforts by Texas A&M students. ARC shall provide potential Aggies with first-rate recruiting conferences and presence in high schools across the state and nation while upholding the Aggie Code of Honor and maintaining a charismatic commitment to promoting a positive image of Texas A&M. ARC members shall embody the strength of character and integrity true of Texas Aggies, and shall seek to contribute to the greater good of Texas A&M through the premise of their dedication to recruiting future generations of Aggies. ARC shall always remain proud of the past, but committed to the future.”

More specifically, according to the ARC website, “Whoopin’ Weekend is a three day program in the spring semester where students get a first hand look of what Texas A&M University is all about.” High school sophomores through seniors and their parents are invited to attend sessions about college and participate in Texas A&M events.

Student Life Studies previously helped ARC evaluate SEAL, Seniors Experiencing Aggie Life, similar to Whoopin’ Weekend that takes place in the fall semester.

Method
The 43-question survey was developed using Teleform®, survey design software that creates scannable forms and databases. The data was analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package.

Of the 250 participants, 241 received an evaluation. Of the surveys distributed, all were returned, yielding a 92% response rate, which is generalizable to all of the attendees.

Results
Results will be reported as means 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 themes are reported here; the entire list can be found in a separate document. In addition, standard deviations, which describe the spread of the data, are found in the statistical tables in a separate document.

The scale for most of the questions was 5=Excellent, 4=Above Average, 3=Average, 2=Below Average, and 1=Poor. There was also a response “NA/Did not attend”: those responses were removed from the analysis, so the responses only reflect those participants who attended a program and answered the question. Table 1 on the following page illustrates the ratings of the conference activities in descending mean order.
Overall, participants seemed to be satisfied with the conference. As with last year, they were especially pleased with Bobby Tucker’s speech and the friendliness of the staff. This year, the baseball game was also very popular. The lowest rated activities were class and the mixer.

When asked if they had attended an ARC event in the past (SEAL, Whoopin’ Weekend, etc.), 94% said no.

Students were asked how the found out about the conference. Table 2, on the following page, indicates their responses. Most found out through a counselor and other methods, which included admissions recruiters (one recruiter was mentioned by name sixteen times) and parents. Several people mentioned that ARC visited their high school.
How did you find out about the conference? | Percent
---|---
Counselor | 32%
Other | 29%
Friend | 19%
Internet | 15%
Current Student | 13%
Mail out | 5%
Prospective Student Center | 5%

Table 2—How Participants Learned about Whoopin’ Weekend 2004 (n=241)

About 11% of the participants stayed with a Corps member during their visit (about the same as last year), and 28% of the participants were accompanied by their parents for at least part of the conference (down slightly from last year).

Participants were asked about their favorite part of the conference. Many participants mentioned the baseball game and other events. Some people mentioned specific speakers or individuals they met at the conference.

In addition, participants were asked for suggestions to improve the conference. Several ideas emerged: participants wanted to stay for the entire baseball game, they did not like the structure of the mixer, and they wanted more interesting and relevant class experiences. In addition, participants wanted more sleep time and time on the first day to go to their residence hall room. Several people indicated that they did not like the games. A few wanted a little more free time to go to the bookstore, see campus on their own, meet more people, or sleep.

The high school students were asked what their expectations were about the conference and what they wanted to learn. Many of the attendees had no expectations or did not know what to expect. Mostly, participants wanted to learn about Texas A&M and college life. Based on the comments, the conference met or exceeded their expectations.

The demographic questions indicated that the participants were 61% female, 41% seniors, 56% juniors, and 2% sophomores. In terms of ethnicity, 67% of the participants were Caucasian/White, 25% Hispanic, 3% African American/Black, 2% Asian American/Asian, 1% Native American/American Indian, Multiracial, and other. In addition 1% preferred not to answer.

The seniors were asked several questions about their plans to attend Texas A&M. About 60% of the respondents indicated they had been accepted to Texas A&M, and 95% were planning on attending. Ninety-eight percent (98%) of the people indicated that Whoopin’ Weekend had a positive impact on their decision to attend Texas A&M.

The sophomores and juniors were asked about their future plans. Ninety-nine percent (99%) of the respondents are planning to apply to Texas A&M, and 96% said that Whoopin’ Weekend had a positive impact on their decision to apply. About 88% said they were planning to attend an ARC event in the future.
Conclusions and Recommendations
The conference attendees seemed to be pleased with the conference, based on their survey responses and written comments. They really enjoyed the baseball game this year and got a touch of college life. At the same time, high school students seemed already interested in attending Texas A&M. Students appeared to enjoy the “fun” activities more than the academic ones.

Before developing the content for next year’s conference, the Whoopin’ Weekend staff may want to further define their mission and goals for the participants attending the conference. The current mission focuses more on the Whoopin’ Weekend staff rather than the high school students. Developing measurable learning outcomes may help guide the content and structure of the conference. In short, learning outcomes help answer the question, “What should students know or be able to do as a result of this experience?” It might be useful to follow up with students who actually enroll at Texas A&M to see what they took from the conference that helped them as high school or college students. Likewise, it may be useful to find out from people who did not apply to or enroll at Texas A&M their opinions and impressions. While only a few sophomores attended, they may be a target audience to attract in the future, so they will continue to be interested in Texas A&M.

Creating learning outcomes may also let participants know what to expect during the conference. Because many high school students did not have expectations, it is difficult to judge whether their expectations were actually met. Why are participants apparently coming without clear expectations or not knowing what to expect? Why would guidance counselors promote a program that has not articulated outcomes and expectations?

Rather than focusing so much on the activities of the conference, the staff may want to concentrate on the overall purpose of the conference. The evaluation could include questions about the Whoopin’ Weekend mission, participants’ understanding of the academic expectations of college, and the opportunities to get involved in campus life, rather than specific events such as the meals.

Whoopin’ Weekend staff should continue to seek feedback from both conference participants and committee members to improve the program. The staff may also want to examine similar programs to either benchmark the conference with other organizations or to see if there are collaborative opportunities that reach the same goal. It might also be beneficial to have focus groups with past participants or the planning committee to talk about future programs.