Campus Climate 2008

Texas A&M – How’s it Working for You?

Produced by the Department of Student Life Studies in collaboration with the Department of Multicultural Services and the Office of Vice President and Associate Provost for Diversity

May, 2009
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction
In March, 2008, the web-based survey “Texas A&M – How’s it Working for You?” was administered to a stratified random sample of 5,045 full-time undergraduates: 1,006 students responded resulting in a 20% response rate. The purpose of the survey was to assess the similarities and differences of the Texas A&M experience among full-time undergraduate students at Texas A&M – College Station (TAMU).

Survey Development
The 2008 campus climate survey was developed through collaboration with the Department of Multicultural Services, the Office of the Vice President and Associate Provost for Diversity, and the Department of Student Life Studies (SLS). A pool of survey items was compiled from the following sources:

- SLS Campus Climate 2002-2004
- SLS Bias Related Incidents Survey 2003
- SLS Aggie Spirit Survey 2004
- Faculty Climate Survey 2006
- Staff Climate Survey 2006
- Regents Scholar Year-End Assessment 2005-2006
- Student Leader Learning Outcomes (SLLO) Diversity Rubric 2006
- Vision 2020 – A Culture of Excellence
- Task Force on Enhancing the Undergraduate Experience Report 2006
- New Student Conference (NSC) Assessment 2007

A content analysis was conducted to sort the pool of survey items into themes. The content analysis was conducted by Tonya Driver, Department of Multicultural Services; Dave McIntosh, Office of the Vice President and Associate Provost for Diversity; and Peggy Holzweiss and Jennifer Reyes from Student Life Studies.

Nine major themes were identified and used to structure the 2008 campus climate survey: Demographics, Friendships at Texas A&M, Academic Success, Involvement, Access to Resources and Services, Diversity at Texas A&M, Discrimination at Texas A&M, Your Experiences [Student], and Satisfaction with Texas A&M Experience

The nine themes were used as major section headings to for the 2008 campus climate survey. An explanation of the literature and/or Texas A&M goals and objectives underlying each theme follows.

Sample Design and Respondents
Sample participants were selected from the population of full-time undergraduate students enrolled in Spring 2008 as provided by Student Information and Management Systems (SIMS) data. In addition to the randomly selected participants, the Department of Disability Services provided a list of 492 students to include in the sample.
Table 1.01 provides the ethnicity of the TAMU full-time undergraduate population in Spring 2008 compared to sample participants and survey respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1,758</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>1,070</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>4,479</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Unknown</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>27,386</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>35,014</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ethnic groups were based on Spring 2008 Student Information Management System (SIMS) data. Because there were only 22 American Indian/Alaskan Native respondents and 17 Other/Unknown respondents, those two groups were excluded from the analysis by ethnicity.

The Texas A&M definition of first generation is “Neither parent or guardian graduated from a four year college.” Table 1.02 illustrates the percentage of students who are first generation college students compared to those who are not first generation college students. The first generation variable was obtained using Spring 2008 SIMS data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Generation</th>
<th>Not First Generation</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>Respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9,217</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>1,719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24,765</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>3,027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,032</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35,014</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because there were only 59 respondents whose first generation status is unknown, the “unknown” group was excluded from the analysis.

Table 1.03 provides the gender of the TAMU full-time undergraduate population in Spring 2008 compared to sample participants, and survey respondents. Gender was obtained using Spring 2008 SIMS data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16,764</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>2,349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18,250</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>2,696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35,014</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>5,045</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.04 provides the classification of the TAMU full-time undergraduate population in Spring 2008 compared to sample participants, and survey respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Population Count</th>
<th>Population Percent</th>
<th>Sample Count</th>
<th>Sample Percent</th>
<th>Respondents Count</th>
<th>Respondents Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U1/Freshmen</td>
<td>6,109</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>1,088</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U2/Sophomore</td>
<td>8,368</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>1,264</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U3/Junior</td>
<td>9,352</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>1,375</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U4/Senior</td>
<td>11,185</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>1,318</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35,014</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>5,045</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1,006</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Classification was obtained using Spring 2008 SIMS data. Generally speaking, U1 students are freshmen, U2 students are sophomores, U3 students are juniors, and, U4 students are seniors.

Data Analysis
The fixed-response survey items (i.e., Yes/No/Don’t know, strongly agree/agree/disagree, etc.) were analyzed by ethnicity, first generation, gender, and classification. Because the data was categorical, chi-square tests were used to determine statistically significant differences among or between groups; however, trends across groups were evident and more informative than the statistical significance tests.

Open-ended questions provided respondents the opportunity to explain their answers to the closed-ended questions. Results of the open-ended questions were analyzed using a formal content analysis to consolidate comments into themes.

The majority of comments used to illustrate the themes were selected because they were easy to understand and representative of the main ideas expressed by students in each theme. However, some comments were included because they provided recommendations or suggestions. Because of classification, gender, and ethnicity differences evident in the quantitative analyses, each comment is identified by the respondent’s class, ethnicity, and gender.

Results
Demographics. The Demographics section was comprised of two content areas. The first content area collected pre-college and demographic information about student employment, family experience with college, ethnicity, and the racial composition of the respondent’s high school and neighborhood. The second content area addressed willingness to live and/or work outside of Texas and abroad.

Thirty-eight percent of respondents indicated that they worked on or off campus. While there was no statistically significant difference between first generation and non-first generation students, there were statistically significant differences among ethnicities, gender, and classification. Fifty-five percent of Black respondents, 41% of female respondents, and 53% of U4/senior respondents worked on or off campus.
Overall, 28% of respondents indicated that the high school they last attended was completely/mostly non-White, 23% selected roughly half non-White, and 47% of respondents selected mostly or all White.

The 2008 campus climate results were similar to the Hurtado et al. (1998) results: 24% of the 1998 campus climate respondents indicated that their high school was completely/mostly non-White, 31% selected roughly half non-White, and 45% of respondents selected mostly or all White.

Overall, 23% of 2008 campus climate respondents indicated that the neighborhood they grew up in was completely/mostly non-White, 15% selected roughly half non-White, and 61% of respondents selected mostly or all White.

The 2008 campus climate results were very similar to the 1998 Hurtado results: 24% of the 1998 campus climate respondents indicated that the neighborhood they grew up in was completely/mostly non-White, 17% selected roughly half non-White, and 59% of respondents selected mostly or all White.

Respondents indicated that career-goals were the primary reasons they would move out of Texas or the United States. Many respondents revealed that family and relationships were strong influences on where they would be willing to live after graduating from college. There were no differences by ethnicity, first generation, gender, or classification when responding to the questions about where they would be willing to live and why they would be willing or unwilling to move.

Willingness to participate in study abroad seemed to depend on academic planning and sufficient funds. Students of color were more likely to respond that “insufficient funds” were a barrier to participating in study abroad. Some respondents disclosed that their willingness to participate in a formal study abroad program depended on their community/student organization involvement.

**Friendships at Texas A&M.** The questions on the Friendships at Texas A&M section were adapted from the Faculty Climate Survey 2006, Regents Scholars year-end assessments 2005-2006, and the Aggie R-r-ring Program Friendship Groups Survey (Holzweiss & Roberts, 2006). Astin (1993) explained peer groups were “the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years” and that “students’ values, beliefs, and aspirations tend to change in the direction of the dominant values, beliefs, and aspirations” of their peers (p. 398). Furthermore, Ishler (2004) explained when students struggle to find a peer or support group, they may feel isolated and disconnected from the institution.

Hurtado et al. (1998) found that on the Texas A&M campus “African Americans are likely to report mostly non-White friends on campus (53%) and White/Anglo students are most likely to report mostly or all White friends (88%). Overall, however, data indicate that students of color are likely to have more diverse friendship groups on campus than White/Anglo students.” (p. 18).
Consistent with the results from Hurtado et al. (1998), 54% of Black respondents reported that their friends were the same ethnicity as they were and White respondents reported 80% of their friends were the same ethnicity as they were. For the 2008 campus climate results, Asian and Hispanic respondents had more ethnically diverse friendship groups on campus than Black or White respondents.

Overall, respondents indicated that they have been successful at developing friendships, whether groups or individuals, while at Texas A&M. The majority of these friendships developed during their freshmen year. The respondents who have not developed peer support or friends did disclose feeling disconnected from the Texas A&M community.

Respondents indicated that friendship groups were fairly homogenous by classification, geography (i.e., from the US, same state), sexual orientation, and general religion (i.e., Christian, Jewish, Muslim, etc.).

Friendship groups were diverse by academic interests (i.e., college, major). However, Asian respondents more frequently indicated that their friends were from the same college than other ethnic groups.

Asian respondents and White respondents indicated more religious diversity in their friendship groups than did Black or Hispanic respondents.

Black and Hispanic respondents indicated that they discussed issues of race and ethnicity as it relates to Texas A&M more frequently than Asian or White respondents did. Male respondents indicated that their friends made stereotypical remarks about other races/ethnicities more than women did.

**Academic Success.** The questions asked in the Academic Success section were selected based on goals identified in *Vision 2020: A Culture of Excellence* (n.d.) and recommendations from the *Task Force on Enhancing the Undergraduate Experience* (2006). The Academic Success section collected information about intentions to graduate and attend professional/graduate school, whether respondents participated in learning communities and orientation camps, and whether respondents would refer Texas A&M to prospective students based on the academic opportunities. Furthermore, respondents were asked to assess their familiarity with faculty, teaching assistants, academic advisors, and staff. Finally, respondents were asked to evaluate the availability of academic and development opportunities resources at Texas A&M.

Ninety-seven percent of respondents indicated that they intended to complete their degrees at Texas A&M: There were no differences by first generation, gender, or classification. However, by ethnicity, 50% of Asian respondents, 45% of Black respondents, 62% of Hispanic respondents, and 71% of White respondents strongly agreed that they are glad they attended Texas A&M. Many respondents revealed they were glad they attended Texas A&M because of the quality of education, while others disclosed that other institutions might have been better for them because A&M lacked specific academic programs. Some respondents expressed they have always wanted to attend Texas A&M. And, again, others attributed their connection to Texas A&M to the friends they have made here.
Respondents were asked whether they recommended Texas A&M to prospective students because of the academic opportunities: 77% of Asian respondents indicated that they recommend Texas A&M because of the academic opportunities compared to 84% of Black respondents, 84% of Hispanic respondents, and 86% of White respondents. Respondents identified the following reasons for recommending Texas A&M because of the academic opportunities: quality faculty, preparation for the future, the reputation of specific programs, and choice of majors/departments. Additionally, respondents revealed that some may have issues adjusting/succeeding at a school the size of Texas A&M.

Overall, respondents were committed to graduating from Texas A&M, positive about their experiences with faculty and staff, positive about their access to academic resources and opportunities, and willing to recommend Texas A&M to prospective students based on their academic experiences.

However, several respondents expressed reservations and concerns about Texas A&M’s culture and environment in the context of diversity. Furthermore, some respondents expressed that dissatisfaction with the availability of cultural and arts events and courses available at Texas A&M and in the community.

Involvement. The purpose of the Involvement section was to assess respondent involvement in student organizations and participation in Texas A&M traditions. Eighty percent of respondents indicated that they were currently or had been involved with at least one student organization. Ninety-two percent of respondents indicated that they had participated in at least one Aggie tradition.

However, the respondents who were not in student organizations and/or did not participate in Aggie traditions provided explanations that reveal that Texas A&M’s environment may not be inclusive of all students. For example, some respondents disclosed that they did not want to interact with their peers and others revealed sentiments that there are cliques and students are “stuck up.” Some respondents disclosed in their comments that they were transfer students and many of the respondents who did not participate in Aggie traditions were International students.

Furthermore, some respondents perceive student organization involvement and participation in Aggie traditions to conflict with academic demands.

Access to Resources and Services. The Access to Resources and Services section of the 2008 campus climate survey was designed to explore student perceptions of access to the following resources and services: library, computing and information, dining, residential, counseling, health, and disability services.

Overall, the majority of respondents indicated that services and resources were available to them if they wanted to use them. While the purpose of this section was not to assess satisfaction, some respondents disclosed that the services were good while others provided complaints from experiences with services and suggestions for improving accessibility.
Diversity at Texas A&M. The Diversity at Texas A&M section was designed to assess respondents’ perceptions of TAMU’s commitment to diversity and the benefit of diversity to themselves and the institution. Three questions asked respondents if they think Texas A&M is committed to diversity, if they personally benefit from diversity, and if they think racial/ethnic diversity in the campus population benefits Texas A&M.

Overall, the majority of students of color did not express that Texas A&M was committed to diversity. Many respondents expressed Texas A&M limits diversity by dealing exclusively with race/ethnicity. Respondents expressed that other issues such as different cultures, sexual orientation, and religion should be addressed.

Respondents recognized that Texas A&M’s history and culture as politically conservative, historically male, and White institution may be detrimental to efforts to increase diversity at Texas A&M. On the other hand, some respondents expressed concern that increasing diversity at Texas A&M will compromise Texas A&M’s prestige and reputation.

Respondents identified the following benefits of diversity at Texas A&M: improving safety/sense of belonging for students of color, preparing all students to be successful in the workplace and/or in the “real world,” and exposing students to diversity of beliefs and thinking to enhance knowledge and understanding.

Discrimination at Texas A&M. The primary purpose of the Discrimination at Texas A&M section was to explore the extent to which Texas A&M has created “an environment that respects and nurtures all members of the student, faculty, and staff community” (Vision 2020: Creating a Culture of Excellence, p. 44).

The Discrimination section was designed to explore respondent perceptions of the prevalence of discrimination at TAMU and whether discrimination is perceived to be a problem at Texas A&M. “Discrimination” was defined in the survey questions as “as action against someone based on” a specific characteristic. The series of questions addressed discrimination based on race/ethnicity, gender sexual orientation, religion, citizenship, and disabilities.

Overall, the more time respondents attended Texas A&M, the more they perceived discrimination was a problem at Texas A&M. Some students of color, international students, women, and non-heterosexual respondents, indicated that daily or weekly they felt uncomfortable at Texas A&M because of someone’s reaction to them.

Your Experiences. The purpose of the Your Experiences section was to assess whether respondents’ personal experiences at Texas A&M were consistent with the Vision 2020 goal: “Create an environment that respects and nurtures all members of the student, faculty, and staff community. Reduce to zero the number of students, faculty, or staff who leave because of a perception of a less-than-welcoming environment” (p. 44). While in their comments to the open-ended questions, no respondents disclosed any intentions of leaving Texas A&M, for non-majority groups the environment at Texas A&M can be uncomfortable. Respondents repeatedly recognized that even if they were not uncomfortable, the environment at Texas A&M could be uncomfortable for their peers in the minority.
Satisfaction with Texas A&M Experience. Sixty-nine percent of Asian respondents indicated that they felt like they were part of the Aggie family compared to 62% of Black respondents, 72% of Hispanic respondents, and 82% of White respondents. Respondents did not always feel a part of the Aggie family because they were different, i.e., a particular race, religion, political preference, or they had a smaller network of close friends rather than larger ones. Many respondents felt that they were a part of the Aggie family because of their participation or identification with Aggie traditions and the campus culture. For these students, participation in the traditions helped them to feel closer to others in the Aggie family and to the school in general.

Overall, 82% of respondents indicated that they would recommend attending Texas A&M to prospective students because of the opportunities for out-of-class involvement: There were no differences by ethnicity, first generation, gender, or classification. Respondents felt there existed a wide variety of opportunities for out-of-class involvement. Some explained that their out-of-class involvement defined or helped to define their experience at Texas A&M. Some respondents indicated that though there are many student organizations and activities to become involved with, one really has to search in order to find the right organization for them. Some respondents were concerned about how exclusive some student organizations seemed.

Eighty-seven percent of respondents indicated that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their overall Texas A&M experience. By ethnicity, 81% of Asian respondents indicated they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their overall Texas A&M experience compared to 74% of Black respondents, 89% of Hispanic respondents, and 91% of White respondents.

Summary of Results
Based on respondent comments to the 2008 campus climate survey, undergraduate students were aware that Texas A&M’s history and reputation for being a conservative, White, male, military, Christian institution may be a factor in an environment that is not inclusive of students of color, women, homo/bisexual students, and international students. Some expressed Texas A&M’s history and reputation may be a deterrent to attracting historically under-represented students to Texas A&M, while others expressed concerns that increasing diversity in the Texas A&M community has compromised Texas A&M’s academic standards and reputation of being a conservative institution. However, several respondents expressed that increasing racial/ethnic diversity at Texas A&M would benefit the institution and current students because increased diversity would attract more diverse students creating a more welcoming environment for historically under-represented students.

The idea of a sense of belonging/fitting in at Texas A&M transcended any specific item or section on the campus climate 2008 survey. Many respondents disclosed that a specific group of friends or involvement in a student organization provided a supportive group of peers at Texas A&M. Other respondents talked about cliques, groups of people staying within their own ethnic groups, and not interacting with others on campus. Some female respondents and students of color disclosed that they have felt isolated in class when they perceive others are not willing to work with them on group projects or sit next to them because of their race or gender.
Respondents indicated that they were pleased with their in-class experiences and the academic opportunities available to them at Texas A&M. Respondents shared their experiences outside of the classroom and participating in traditions and the positive impact of these experiences had on their overall development. Respondents expressed that satisfaction with Texas A&M depended on individual effort: the notion of “what I put into it, I get out of it.” Respondents disclosed their personal circumstances regarding distance from friends and family, making new friends at Texas A&M, and the implications of these two issues regarding their satisfaction with Texas A&M.

The 2008 campus climate survey revealed that the majority of incidents of discrimination, stereotyping, and perpetuating a feeling of discomfort are perpetrated by students. Respondents disclosed that the Texas A&M culture may be friendly on the surface, but could be intolerant of different races, religions, political views, women, international students, and gay students. This finding replicates the work of Hurtado et al. (1998) and the Student Life Studies 2002-2004 campus climate research finding that the majority of discrimination at Texas A&M comes from the student body.

For more information about the results of the 2008 Campus Climate survey, please contact Student Life Studies (862-5624) or access the full report on the Student Life Studies webpage at http://studentlifestudies.tamu.edu/results/Campus_Climate_Full_Report_05-04-09.pdf. The full report provides all of the details of the content analysis, quotes from students, and comparisons by ethnicity, first generation, gender and classification.
REFERENCES


