

Memorial Student Center Conway-Fitzhugh Summer Study Abroad Trip 2023

Purpose of Assessment

The Memorial Student Center (MSC) Conway-Fitzhugh coordinates a summer study abroad trip to Italy for incoming freshmen who qualify as National Merit Scholars. This year, the three-week-long trip was in July 2023. Trip participants were assessed through an electronic survey after returning from the trip at the beginning of their first semester at Texas A&M University in an effort to gauge how well the outcomes were met and the overall impact of this experience on these students. This is the first time Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research (SAPAR) worked with the MSC to assess the Conway-Fitzhugh experience.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research (SAPAR) identified several key findings and developed actionable recommendations the trip planners may take based on the results. However, MSC staff may identify other findings using their knowledge and understanding of the experience. MSC staff members are strongly encouraged to read all the results and qualitative comments to gain a fuller understanding of students' experiences.

- A substantial majority of students (84%) expressed interest in promoting the Conway-Fitzhugh Seminar as a study abroad program for high school students.
- Students described the seminar as a unique opportunity to forge meaningful connections and friendships. The camaraderie among participants was a common highlight, with students emphasizing the comfort of familiar faces and the bonds formed during the program.
- Almost all the students felt that Student City Presentations, Cultural Exercise - Barnga, Managing Relationships, and Personal Health & Well-Being sessions were the least relevant based on how much they learned in preparation for their college success and success during the trip. When asked which of the sessions should be eliminated, many of the students who thought that a session should be eliminated felt that the Student City Presentations, Cultural Exercise - Barnga, and Personal Health & Well Being sessions should be eliminated. More than half of the students thought that no session should be eliminated.
- A portion of students expressed preferences for eliminating specific day trips during the program. The "Roma - Colosseum, Forum" trip garnered the most attention, with students suggesting potential optimizations to the experience. Additionally, "Arrezo" and "Deruta and Perugia" were highlighted as less memorable, leading to the willingness of some students to eliminate these particular day trips.
- SAPAR recommends some questions be eliminated to make the survey shorter. For example, questions that asked students to rank sessions had similar results to questions that asked to eliminate sessions. MSC staff may also want to consider the above highlighted student input when making changes to this study abroad trip next year.

Method and Sample

The trip assessment was produced and created using Qualtrics®, a software program for creating web-based surveys. The trip assessment had 37 questions: 24 quantitative, and 13 qualitative. The trip assessment was distributed to 35 participants. The survey was initially sent out on August 24th and 2 more reminders were

sent out in the following weeks. Out of the 35 surveys sent out, there were 34 respondents which achieved a response rate of 97%. Data were analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, Microsoft Word, and Microsoft Excel®. Qualitative analysis was in part completed through ChatGPT(<https://chat.openai.com/>).

Results

Results are reported as 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%. Tables are listed in descending order unless otherwise stated. In addition, summary themes for the qualitative questions are contained in this report; the full list of responses can be found in a separate document.

Participants were asked to rate their experience with different aspects of the camp. As shown in Table 1, out of the 34 respondents, “Overall programming for the seminar” and “Housing arrangements at the Hotel Park” were the aspects that received the most positive responses. While still positive, Housing arrangements in Assisi” and “Meals at Assisi” had the least positive responses.

Rank your experience with...	Most Satisfactory (5)	Quite Satisfactory (4)	Satisfactory (3)	Less than Satisfactory (2)	Not at all Satisfactory (1)	2023 Mean (sd) [n]
Overall programming for the seminar	65%	32%	3%	--	--	4.62 (.55) [34]
Housing arrangements at the Hotel Park	70%	21%	9%	--	--	4.61 (.66) [33]
Meals in Venice	62%	27%	12%	--	--	4.50 (.71) [34]
Travel arrangements	56%	38%	3%	3%	--	4.47 (.71) [34]
Housing arrangements in Venice	50%	35%	15%	--	--	4.35 (.73) [34]
Meals at the Hotel Park	50%	35%	9%	6%	--	4.29 (.87) [34]
Communication and information prior to departure	38%	44%	15%	3%	--	4.18 (.80) [34]
Housing arrangements in Assisi	38%	29%	29%	3%	--	4.03 (.90) [34]
Meals at Assisi	38%	29%	27%	6%	--	4.00 (.95) [34]

Table 1: Ranking Different Aspects of the Camp

Next, students were asked to rank sessions based on their preference on how much they learned (relevance to your preparation for college success, and necessity for success during the trip). As displayed in Figure 1 these are ranked in descending order with the first (1) being the most relevant.

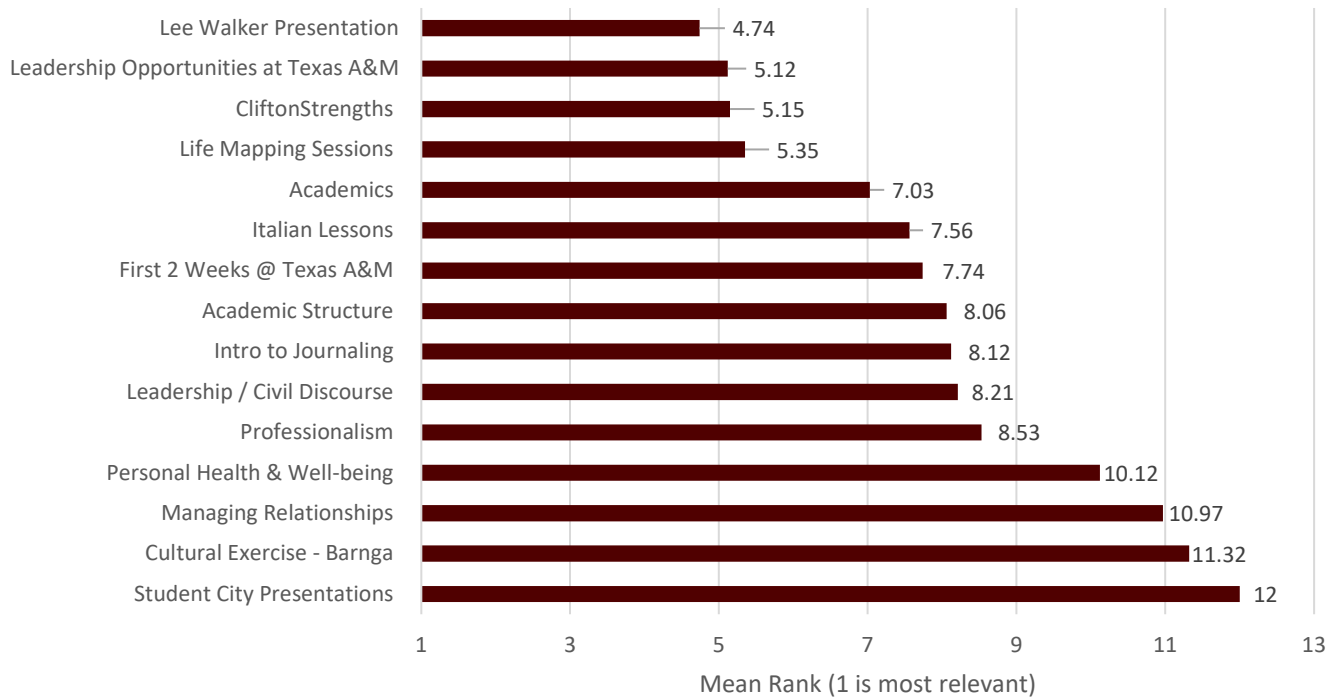


Figure 1: Sessions Ranked (n=34)

Students were asked which educational session they would eliminate. Out of the 34 respondents, as shown in Table 2, more than half of the students (56%) said that they would not eliminate any sessions.

If you had to eliminate one session which one would it be?	
Wouldn't eliminate any	56%
Personal Health & Well-being	9%
Student City Presentations	9%
Professionalism	6%
Barnga	6%
Managing Relationships	3%
Academic Structure	3%
Leadership / Civil Discourse	3%
Lee Walker Presentation	3%
Intro to Journaling	3%
Italian Lessons	--
First 2 Weeks	--
Academics	--
Leadership Opportunities at Texas A&M	--
Clifton Strengths	--
Life Mapping	--

Table 2: Eliminating Sessions (n=34)

Next, students were asked why they would like to eliminate a session. The respondent who selected Academic Structure cited a lack of differentiation from other presentations and its apparent redundancy. The respondent who wanted to eliminate the Intro to Journaling session said, "I liked journaling my day better than writing the prompts we were assigned". The student who chose to eliminate the Lee Walker Presentation said that they were not interested in the presentation to begin with. The Managing Relationships session was criticized for being unproductive, obvious, and a waste of time. Regarding the Personal Health & Well-being session, some felt the information was repetitive, with graphic content being presented too vividly. The students who wanted to eliminate the Professionalism session said that it seemed irrelevant to many students who already possessed this knowledge. Student City Presentations were viewed as less helpful for planning and recommendations. The respondent who wished to eliminate the Leadership / Civil Discourse session thought it was very long and repetitive while not being very useful. The students who did not wish to eliminate any sessions emphasized the overall benefits of all the educational sessions but also suggested that improvements could be made, such as combining activities or restructuring certain presentations. In conclusion, students had diverse opinions on the educational sessions, with some seeing potential for refinement in the program.

Next, students were asked to rank the field trips/cultural experiences based on their preference, enjoyment, and how much it enriched their cultural experience and their trip. As displayed in Figure 2, these are ranked in descending order with the first (1) being the most preferred.

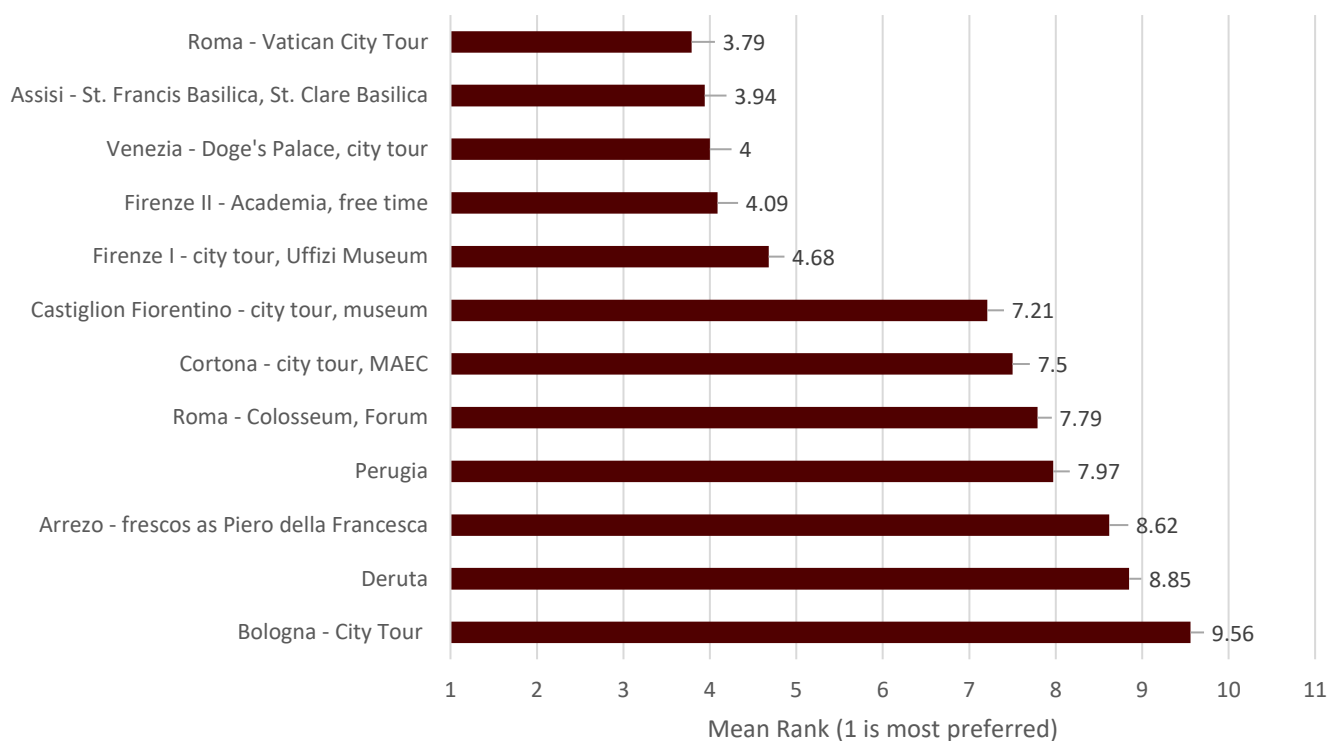


Figure 2: Field Trips/Cultural Experiences Ranked (n=34)

Students were asked which day trip they would eliminate. Out of the 34 respondents, as shown in Table 3, on the next page, 41% said that they would not eliminate any sessions.

If you had to eliminate one session which one would it be?	
Wouldn't eliminate any	41%
Roma - Colosseum, Forum	21%
Arrezo	18%
Deruta and Perugia	15%
Cortona	6%
Roma - Vatican Museum	--
Firenze I - Uffizi Museum	--
Firenze II - Accademia Museum	--

Table 3: Eliminating Day Trip

Next, students were asked why they would like to eliminate a session. Out of the respondents who selected Cortona, one expressed that everyone was exhausted by this point, and another said that they found the museum odd and deserted. One of the students who selected Deruta and Perugia said that they would have preferred to spend that time elsewhere like another day in Venice or Rome. One student felt that even though the pottery trip was interesting, it did not warrant an entire day. Students who selected Arrezo to eliminate felt that it was the least memorable and significant of all the visits. Students felt that it was very similar to other cities and was not worth a whole day. Respondents who wanted to eliminate Roma - Colosseum, Forum said that instead of completely eliminating, they could have skipped the Forum and gone directly to the Colosseum. Another student said that the Forum and Vatican days could have been merged, four students complained about the heat, and other students suggested that the tour would have been better if it was shortened and had a different guide. The students who would not eliminate any trip appreciated the diversity of places visited, the practical skills gained through train travel, and the cultural insights they gained throughout the journey. These students emphasized their enjoyment of the various day trips and the valuable experiences they provided in understanding Italian culture.

Students were asked to share their expectations for the trip. Most participants anticipated an opportunity to learn about leadership and an introduction to college life, with some expressing the desire to explore Italian culture and meet new people who would become friends at Texas A&M. Many students had open minds about the experience, not knowing exactly what to expect but hoping to enjoy their time in Italy. Some were pleasantly surprised that the trip exceeded their expectations, offering a rich blend of social connections, educational seminars, and cultural immersion. Overall, students had diverse expectations but were generally excited to make friends and experience Italy's culture and history while preparing for their college journey at Texas A&M. When the students were asked if the seminar met their expectations, 94% said yes and 6% said no.

When asked what they would do if they could change or rearrange the components of the program, students offered various suggestions. Some expressed a desire for more flexibility and less structured educational elements, advocating for learning on location and shorter periods for presentations. Many students highlighted the importance of free time and self-guided exploration, emphasizing the value of wandering and discovering unique places. Some wished for a longer stay in Venice to fully explore its islands. Others recommended altering the arrangement of city and museum walking tours, suggesting that some tours felt lengthy and redundant. Roommate changes at each hotel were proposed to encourage students to meet more people. Students also recommended adjustments to the timing and structure of Italian lessons, with shorter, more frequent sessions. There was a consensus on wanting more options for self-guided museum tours. Additionally, some students suggested changing the order of the Rome visit, combining the Vatican and Colosseum days. More time in Venice, Rome, and nearby cities was a common desire, with the idea of cutting back on days composed entirely of lessons and reducing the number of guided tours. Finally, concerns were raised about a video on consent and calls for more communication about the trip leading up to departure.

When asked about the most satisfying parts of the program, students expressed various sentiments. For many, the highlight was the opportunity to build friendships and connect with their fellow travelers, citing the camaraderie and the comforting presence of familiar faces after coming back to campus. Several students cherished their extended stays in places like Assisi and Venice, which allowed them to feel deeply immersed in these cities and explore at their own pace. Gelato was a universally adored treat, and free time for independent exploration received high praise. Students appreciated the chance to explore cities with friends, bond over dinners, and aimlessly wander through the streets, discovering unique aspects of each place. The life mapping sessions were seen as a valuable self-reflective experience, and the quality of tour guides greatly enhanced their perception of the visited places. Staying in one location for multiple nights made the 20-day trip more manageable. The blend of students on the trip was considered ideal for building friendships, while the balance of guided and free time was also well-received. Venice was a standout destination for its picturesque beauty and the opportunity for island hopping. The Lee Walker talk and museum visits left a lasting impact, providing a unique perspective and enjoyable experiences.

Next, students were asked which parts of the program they found to be challenging or frustrating and why. In response to this, several students shared their experiences and concerns. Some found that the days dedicated solely to art museums were frustrating, as they preferred exploring cities over art appreciation. A common frustration was the requirement to stay in groups of four, which sometimes limited their freedom and independence, and they suggested smaller groups as a possible solution. Guided tours, particularly those that were lengthy or uninteresting, were a recurring source of frustration for some students, who wished for more freedom to explore at their own pace. The heat during the trip was challenging for a few, and a few also mentioned difficulties with water availability. On the positive side, many students enjoyed the program, and some even expressed that they had no significant frustrations. Overall, while there were challenges, the experience was mostly enjoyable for the participants.

Students were asked if there were any additional sites, other topics, etc. that they would like to see added to the program. Some students were interested in visiting places like the Amalfi Coast, Portofino, Milan, and the southern regions of Italy, such as Naples and Sicily. The absence of Pisa from the itinerary surprised some, leading to suggestions to include it. Others wished for more in-depth exploration of cities like Venice and Florence or additional Italian lessons and local speaker sessions. The desire for more time in Rome, specifically to see the Colosseum, the Pantheon, and Trevi Fountain, was a recurring theme. Students also proposed more discussions on topics like Freshmen Leadership Organizations (FLOs), volunteer opportunities, and bonding activities to better prepare future college students for college life.

Next, students were asked what the most important thing they learned about themselves by participating in this experience. Many discovered newfound communication and social skills, realizing they could be more confident and outgoing than they initially thought. The approachability of the leadership team fostered a comfortable environment for asking questions and connecting with fellow travelers. Some learned about their ability to handle the challenges of coordinating with a large group, while others gained confidence in their extroverted nature, relishing the opportunity to connect with people. The trip encouraged them to explore their love for traveling and social interaction, revealing hidden strengths and desires. Others found that they could step out of their comfort zones and adapt to new situations, such as walking for extended periods. For some, it emphasized the importance of building multiple relationships rather than focusing on just one and highlighted their interest in specific academic and personal areas. Additionally, the trip served as a reminder that they are stronger and more prepared for university life than they might have initially believed. Lastly, language and leadership skills were also points of self-discovery, with many recognizing their strengths and the importance of emphasizing these strengths rather than conforming to traditional leadership norms. Overall, the journey provided numerous opportunities for self-reflection and growth, unveiling hidden potentials and personal qualities that may have otherwise remained undiscovered.

Students were asked what was the most important thing they learned about others by participating in this experience. They described how this experience allowed them to break free from their comfort zones and interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds and school experiences. Many noted the kindness and helpfulness of their peers. Building on this, the respondents emphasized the importance of forging relationships with each person in an organization, acknowledging that people may have dramatically different perspectives and interests. This newfound insight fueled their enthusiasm for starting college and reinforced their belief that, despite disparities, common ground can always be found. Some even discovered that preconceptions and qualifications should not cloud one's judgment. Overall, the participants learned the value of embracing differences and seeking commonality, making the trip a catalyst for lifelong friendships and personal growth.

Students were asked four questions about how their participation in this program affected their decision about participating in other programs. This is displayed in Table 4, in descending order by the "It made me feel that I made the correct decision to participate in the given event".

	It made me feel that I made the correct decision to participate in the given event.	It made me decide to participate in the given event when I was not planning to or previously was not sure.	It made me decide that I no longer wanted to participate in the given program.	It did not impact my decision to participate in the given program, in any way.
How, if at all, did your selection for or participation in this program impact your decision to seek a student leadership position on campus?	53%	43%	--	13%
How, if at all, did your selection for or participation in this program impact your decision to participate in a study abroad program at a future date?	47%	31%	3%	19%
How, if at all, did your selection for or participation in this program impact your decision to participate in undergraduate research at Texas A&M?	44%	13%	--	44%
How, if at all, did your selection for or participation in this program impact your decision to participate in an honors program?	66%	3%	--	31%

Table 4: Participation in Other Programs (n=32)

Students were asked if they were planning to participate in certain programs upon acceptance to Texas A&M, and if they are planning to participate in those programs now. As shown in Table 5, the percentage of students planning to participate in a program went up after attending Conway-Fitzhugh for all the programs.

	Yes	No	Unsure
Upon acceptance to Texas A&M, did you plan to participate in an honors program?	81%	13%	6%
Are you now planning to or are participating in an honors program at Texas A&M?	88%	9%	3%
Upon acceptance to Texas A&M, did you plan to participate in undergraduate research?	66%	28%	6%
Are you now planning to participate in undergraduate research at Texas A&M?	66%	9%	25%
Upon acceptance to Texas A&M, did you plan to participate in a study abroad program at a future date?	53%	13%	34%
Are you now planning to participate in a study abroad program at some future date?	66%	6%	28%
Upon acceptance to Texas A&M, did you plan to seek a student leadership position on campus?	59%	19%	22%
Are you now planning to seek a student leadership position on campus?	81%	3%	16%

Table 5: Program Participation (n=32)

Students were then asked which areas they planned to pursue a leadership position in. As seen in Table 6, more than three-fourths of the respondents wanted to pursue a leadership position in an Academic/Major specific position (81%), and more than half in the Memorial Student Center (61%). The areas with the lowest percentage of students wanting to pursue leadership positions in them were Residence Halls (7%) and Fraternity/Sorority Life (3%).

In what area(s) do you plan to pursue a leadership position? (Please select all that apply.)	
Academic/Major specific	81%
MSC (Memorial Student Center)	61%
LAUNCH/Honors	26%
Other	19%
Student Government	13%
Residence Halls	7%
Fraternity/Sorority Life	3%

Table 6: Interest in Leadership Positions (n=31)

Next, students were asked which committees/organizations in the Memorial Student Center (MSC) interested them. As seen in Table 7, the highest interest was shown to MSC Aggie Leaders Of Tomorrow (ALOT) and MSC Fall Leadership Conference, and the least interest was shown to the MSC Woodson Black Awareness Committee, International Student Association, and MSC CAMAC.

Which committees/organizations in the Memorial Student Center (MSC) interest you? (Please select all that apply.)	
MSC Aggie Leaders Of Tomorrow (ALOT)	65%
MSC Fall Leadership Conference	42%
MSC Freshmen In Service and Hosting (FISH)	29%
I'm not sure yet.	23%
MSC Hospitality	23%
MSC Student Conference On National Affairs	23%
MSC Wiley Lecture Series	23%
MSC Spencer Leadership Conference	23%
MSC Freshman Leadership International (FLI)	19%
MSC Resource Teams (Assessment, Development, Finance, Human Resources, Marketing)	19%
MSC Abbott Family Leadership Conference	16%
MSC Town Hall	16%
MSC Student Conference On Latinx Affairs	13%
MSC Aggie Cinema	13%
MSC OPAS Student Committee	10%
MSC Visual Arts Committee	7%
MSC L.T. Jordan Institute	7%
MSC Woodson Black Awareness Committee	3%
International Student Association	3%
MSC CAMAC	3%

Table 7: Interest in MSC committees/organizations

Next, students were asked how, if at all, their acceptance into the MSC Conway-Fitzhugh International Honors Leadership Seminar impacted their decision to attend Texas A&M. Out of 32 respondents, 66% said that it did not impact their decision at all and they were planning to go to Texas A&M University regardless, 22% said that they were already planning to attend Texas A&M, but acceptance into this program helped them make their final commitment to Texas A&M, and 13% said that they were not planning to attend Texas A&M but their acceptance into this program made them reconsider.

Students were asked if their experience and activities during the MSC Conway-Fitzhugh International Honors Leadership Seminar helped them gain an appreciation of a culture other than their own, and all of the 32 respondents said yes.

Students who said yes to the previous question were asked to expand upon how their appreciation was enhanced. Many expressed the transformative power of immersing themselves in a different culture, emphasizing the importance of firsthand experiences in understanding communities and the sense of shared humanity. They found interactions with locals, from playing soccer to attempting to order food in Italian, to be eye-opening and heartwarming, revealing that Italian culture is still alive amid globalization. Living by Italian

rules and learning about the country's history deepened their understanding of the culture and life in another country. The trip also made them appreciate the relaxed pace of life in Italy compared to the "go, go, go" culture in America. Furthermore, learning the language, experiencing art and architecture, and engaging with passionate tour guides enriched their appreciation for the rich Italian culture. Overall, the trip broadened their horizons, fostered cultural empathy, and shed light on the diversity and uniqueness of the Italian way of life.

Students were asked how they would explain the program to someone from their high school if they were thinking of applying to it. Students described it as a 2.5-week adventure filled with cultural immersion, exploring beautiful architecture and landscapes, and gaining a deeper appreciation for Italian art. They emphasized the opportunity to make lifelong friends and prepare for their journey at Texas A&M. The program was seen as a unique blend of study abroad and a chance to meet like-minded peers, with a strong focus on leadership development and cultural experiences. It was noted as an exceptional opportunity to kickstart friendships and get to know A&M before the first semester, providing valuable insights and connections. Students highlighted the diverse experiences, from historical artifacts to enjoying Italian cuisine, and the supportive environment that helps with the transition to college life. Overall, it was described as an enriching and transformative experience.

Next, students were asked if they would be interested in promoting the Conway-Fitzhugh Seminar as a study abroad program to high school students. Out of the 32 respondents, 84% of the students said yes and 16% said no.

Lastly, students were asked what they would like to share about anything that was not asked or if they would like to expand on their previous responses. In response to this question, participants expressed a range of sentiments regarding their experiences on the summer trip. One student shared their gratitude for the incredible experience and the people who made it possible, while another student expressed concern about feeling vulnerable and alienated, especially as a person of color. Some mentioned the positive impact of the leadership seminar and how it helped them forge lasting friendships. Others commended specific individuals, like Lee Walker, for their inspiring stories and the value of compassion. Overall, the majority of participants voiced their appreciation for the program and its impact on their lives, making it clear that the trip was a significant and transformative experience for them.

Project Details

Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research (SAPAR) 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 Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research (SAPAR) are funded, in part, by the Texas A&M University Advancement Fee. Results of this project and other assessment projects done through Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research (SAPAR) can be found at <https://sapar.tamu.edu/results/>. Additionally, anyone can follow Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research on Facebook.

To work with SAPAR for future assessment projects, please fill out the Assessment Questionnaire at <https://sapar.tamu.edu/aqform/>.

Report Prepared for: Rick Greig, MSC
Report Prepared by: Avanish Shah, SAPAR
Report Prepared on: November 15, 2023
Analysis Prepared by: Dennis Trukawka, SAPAR
Surveys Created by: Susan Fox-Forrester and Avanish Shah, SAPAR