

Fish Camp

Non-Participant Evaluation

2023-2024

Purpose of the Assessment

Fish Camp, an optional extended orientation camp, provides a transition from high school to college for approximately 6,000 incoming freshmen. Fish Camp has assessed different aspects of the program since 2000. Fish Camp wanted to assess the freshmen who did not attend Fish Camp to understand their first semester at Texas A&M and find out if there are things Fish Camp can do in their marketing and programming for more students to attend. This is the seventh time Fish Camp has specifically sought feedback from non-participants. The last time non-participants were assessed was in 2021.

Key Findings with Recommendations

Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research identified a few findings and developed actionable recommendations Fish Camp may take based on the results from the survey administered to freshmen who did not attend this extended orientation camp. However, Fish Camp may identify other findings using their knowledge and understanding of the program and the students they serve. The organization is strongly encouraged to read all the results and qualitative comments to gain a fuller understanding of students' experiences.

- Approximately one-third of the students who did not attend Fish Camp shared that they did not feel it would have been beneficial, which is slightly lower than in 2021 when 37% of the students felt it was not beneficial, and lower than in 2018 when 45% of the students did not feel it was beneficial. Additionally, 30% of students reported they would attend Fish Camp if they could go back and change their decision, which is a 1% increase from 2021 and an 11% increase from 2018. Furthermore, non-participants report that they learned about Fish Camp much later than Fish Camp participants.
 - Fish Camp could look at its marketing and ways to change that and get that information to students earlier. Specifically, Fish Camp could describe what students gain or learn from attending Fish Camp, which are many of the same things that students who did not attend Fish Camp say they would want from an extended orientation program.
 - Fish Camp might find it beneficial to include quotes from students who attended Fish Camp, as well as those who did not attend Fish Camp, but wished they had, in their marketing materials.
 - Fish Camp could also provide information about the differences between Fish Camp and attending Howdy Week or Freshmen Orientation Week, and the value of attending both rather than selecting one over the other.
- The cost of Fish Camp was a concern for 40% of the students who did not attend, and 26% of the students said they could not afford Fish Camp, which was a reason they did not attend. Additionally, of those who expressed the cost being a concern, 72% were not aware scholarships were available. Furthermore, 55% of these students indicated that they would have attended Fish Camp if they had received a scholarship, which is 14% higher than in 2021.
 - Fish Camp is encouraged to look at how scholarships are marketed to students and when that information is getting to students.
 - This information could also be valuable to share with potential donors and during fundraising activities to seek additional scholarship money to be able to offer more scholarships.

Method and Sample

The 28-question survey was developed in Qualtrics®, a software program that creates web-based surveys; 24 questions were quantitative, three were qualitative, and one was demographic. Due to branching technology, not all respondents saw all questions. Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research evaluated the results using SPSS®, a statistical software program, Tableau, a data visualization software, and Microsoft Word®.

Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research sent the electronic survey link through email on November 6, 2023, to 7,574 first-year students who did not attend Fish Camp in August 2023. Three email messages were not delivered due to invalid email addresses. Non-respondents received up to six reminders before the survey closed on December 11, 2023. The initial deadline was extended due to a low response rate. Of the 7,571 students who received the survey, 465 freshmen responded to at least part of it, yielding a 6% response rate, which is one percentage point less than response rates in 2021 and 2018.

Results

Results are reported as means, standard deviations (sd), and frequency percentages for the number of people (n) who responded to the questions. For ease of reading, the percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%. The summary themes for the qualitative questions are contained in this report, while the full listing is in a separate document. Tables are listed in decreasing order of the 2023 means or frequencies unless otherwise noted. Comparisons to previous years will be made where applicable.

Students were initially asked about their thoughts or views about Fish Camp. Within the 51 responses many students acknowledged not attending Fish Camp, some expressed they wished they would have attended if circumstances permitted them, while others were happy with their decision to not attend. Some non-participants described Fish Camp as a beneficial experience and a way to make connections that could be meaningful and helpful over the semesters. Some also expressed that they felt Fish Camp would have allowed them to get involved with the traditions of Texas A&M and learn about the campus and resources available to them. Similar to the previous year's comments, some mentioned that Fish Camp was too expensive and felt excluded, because they could not attend with that overarching circumstance.

When asked if they attended Fish Camp, 96% of the 437 students said no and 4% reported they did attend Fish Camp. Those who indicated they attended Fish Camp were sent to the end of the survey.

Using a select all that apply question, students were asked about the reasons they decided not to attend Fish Camp. Table 1, on the following page, shows that almost half of the respondents who did not attend Fish Camp had other commitments during that time. In comparison to previous years, there was a slight decrease in those who did not feel it would be beneficial, were unable to travel to College Station, or were concerned about the length of Fish Camp. Alternatively, more students reported having conflicts, not being able to afford Fish Camp, and that they did not know about Fish Camp compared to the previous year. Those who selected the "other" option were provided the opportunity to write a response. Common responses from the 20 students included being a Gateway student, not enjoying camps or outdoors, and having some health issues.

What were reasons you decided to not attend Fish Camp? (Select all that apply)	2023 Frequency Percentage [n=368]	2021 Frequency Percentage [n=266]	2018 Frequency Percentage [n=202]	2016 Frequency Percentage [n=348]
Had other commitments during that time	49%	44%	49%	47%
Did not think that it would be beneficial	34%	37%	45%	39%
Could not afford to attend Fish Camp	26%	20%	33%	28%
Unable to travel to College Station	17%	18%	19%	‡
Did not know about it	16%	14%	4%	6%
Heard negative things about Fish Camp	12%	12%	18%	13%
Already knew what Fish Camp taught	11%	11%	16%	16%
Length of Fish Camp	8%	10%	16%	10%
Other	6%	18%	9%	12%
Confusion/miscommunication from Fish Camp staff	1%	2%	2%	1%

Table 1: Reason for Not Attending Fish Camp
‡ Question not asked

Students were provided the opportunity to further explain their reason for not attending Fish Camp, and 128 wrote a response. Several students talked about the extra cost of Fish Camp and not being able to afford it. Many students also talked about living far away and that it is difficult to travel to College Station and then come back a few weeks later for the start of the semester. Some students also commented on different conflicts such as working and being on vacation. A few students made plans to attend different camps or were involved with the Gateway program. Some students did not know about Fish Camp, or they had heard negative comments about the experience.

As seen in Table 2, approximately one-third of students would change their mind about attending Fish Camp if they could go back and attend Fish Camp. Over the years, there has been a slight increase in students reporting they would change their minds and would attend Fish Camp if they could.

If you could go back and change your decision, would you attend Fish Camp?	2023 Frequency Percentage [n=368]	2021 Frequency Percentage [n=259]	2018 Frequency Percentage [n=204]
No	39%	41%	52%
Unsure	31%	31%	30%
Yes	30%	29%	19%

Table 2: Decide to Attend Fish Camp

Two questions were developed for non-participants and asked in this survey. These two questions were also asked of students who attended Fish Camp in August 2023 on the Fish Camp participant survey. These questions were designed to better understand students' thoughts on Fish Camp's availability and cost, and how much that impacted their decision in attending or not attending Fish Camp. Table 3, on the following page in descending order by the 2023 non-participant mean score, demonstrates there were fewer sessions available to fit their schedule and the cost of Fish Camp was more a concern for non-participants than it was for Fish Camp participants. Finding a session to fit their schedule was more of a concern for first-generation students, Asian students, and Hispanic students. Additionally, the cost of Fish Camp was more of a concern for first-generation students, Black students, and Hispanic students. Additional disaggregated results can be found in a separate document.

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2023 Mean (sd) [n]	2021 Mean (sd) [n]	2018 Mean (sd) [n]	2016 Mean (sd) [n]
There were Fish Camp sessions that were available to fit my schedule. (non-participants)	13%	26%	39%	16%	6%	3.23 (1.06) [321]	3.14 (.98) [226]	3.37 (1.19) [197]	3.29 (1.18) [340]
There were Fish Camp sessions that were available to fit my schedule. (participants)	56%	41%	3%	<1%	<1%	4.52 (.59) [591]	4.41 (.67) [874]	4.56 (.61) [1,520]	4.54 (.61) [1,881]
The cost of Fish Camp was a concern for me. (non-participants)	18%	22%	28%	22%	9%	3.18 (1.23) [348]	3.05 (1.20) [251]	3.11 (1.29) [197]	3.31 (1.34) [342]
The cost of Fish Camp was a concern for me. (participants)	5%	15%	25%	40%	15%	2.56 (1.08) [592]	2.44 (1.09) [847]	2.71 (1.14) [1,478]	2.70 (1.10) [1,838]

Table 3: Availability and Cost Factors of Fish Camp

Fish Camp non-participants who indicated the cost of Fish Camp was a concern for them (n=139) were asked two follow-up questions. They were first asked if they were aware that scholarships were available at the time of Fish Camp registration. Of the 135 students responding, 72% reported they were not aware of available scholarships and 28% said they were aware. More students knew about scholarships compared to 2021 when 21% indicated knowing about scholarship opportunities; however, this is still lower than the 46% of respondents who reported knowing about available scholarships in 2018. There were no notable differences between first-generation students and those who are not first-generation students or different ethnic populations in being aware of scholarship opportunities. Additional disaggregated results can be found in a separate document.

When asked if they would have received a scholarship and if that would have changed their decision to attend Fish Camp, 55% of the 136 students who responded said yes it would have changed their decision, 27% were unsure, and 18% said no, it would not have changed their decision. More students reported receiving a scholarship would have changed their decision to attend Fish Camp compared to 2021 when 41% of respondents said yes it would have changed their decision, 23% said it would have changed their decision, and 36% were unsure. There was an increase in first-generation students and Hispanic students reporting that receiving a scholarship would have changed their decision to attend Fish Camp. Additional disaggregated results can be found in a separate document.

Students who indicated being aware of available scholarships at the time of Fish Camp registration (n=38) were asked how they found out about Fish Camp offering scholarships using a select all that apply formatted question. Table 4, on the following page, reveals that almost half of the respondents said that learned about available scholarships from the Fish Camp website. Anyone selecting the Prospective Student Center could write the location for the center. One student wrote Pharr, Texas. Additionally, those selecting the "other" response option could write how they heard about the scholarships. One student indicated learning about available scholarships from their high school counselor. This was a new question and there is no comparable data to previous years.

How did you find out about Fish Camp offering scholarships? (Select all that apply)	2023 Frequency Percentage [n=37]
Fish Camp website	46%
New Student Conferences	32%
Family/Friends	24%
Social Media	14%
Aggies Mom's Club or Local Alumni Group	3%
Prospective Student Center	3%
Other	3%

Table 4: Marketing Fish Camp Scholarships

Students who did not attend Fish Camp were asked if they knew about Fish Camp before they were admitted to Texas A&M. This question was also asked of students who attended Fish Camp on the Fish Camp Participant survey; however, the question was asked slightly differently between the two populations. Table 5 demonstrates that almost half of the non-participant respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they knew about Fish Camp prior to being admitted to Texas A&M. This increased compared to 2021 when 39% of students who did not attend Fish Camp agreed or strongly agreed that they were familiar with Fish Camp before they had been admitted to Texas A&M. For the students who attended Fish Camp, this question was asked when they first heard about Fish Camp. Almost half of the participants (47%) heard about Fish Camp before even applying to Texas A&M. First-generation students were less likely to know about Fish Camp before they were admitted compared to those students who are not first-generation. Furthermore, Black students, Hispanic students, and Asian students were less likely to know about Fish Camp before they were admitted to Texas A&M compared to their White counterparts. Additional disaggregated results can be found in a separate document.

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2023 Mean (sd) [n]	2021 Mean (sd) [n]	2018 Mean (sd) [n]	2016 Mean (sd) [n]
I knew about Fish Camp before I was admitted to Texas A&M. *	22%	26%	7%	23%	21%	3.06 (1.50) [339]	2.91 (1.27) [236]	3.15 (1.32) [197]	3.06 (1.29) [342]

Table 5: Knowledge of Fish Camp Prior to Being Admitted to Texas A&M

(* "I knew about Fish Camp before I was admitted to Texas A&M" was stated as "I was familiar with Fish Camp before I was admitted to Texas A&M", in 2021, 2018, and 2016)

Freshmen were asked about their attendance at any other extended orientation type of program. As seen in Table 6 on the next page, over half of the students (57%) reported attending Howdy Week; however, this decreased compared to previous years. Almost one-third of all respondents reported not attending any extended orientation type of program, which is the highest percentage since 2016. The ten students who wrote a response for the "other" option indicated they attended Connect, New Student Conference, Brown-Smith UK Leadership trip, Sea Camp, Student-Athlete Orientation, Camp ARCH with the School of Architecture, and the Engineering Summer Bridge Program.

Which of the following other extended orientation type of programs, if any, did you attend? (Select all that apply)	2023 Frequency Percentage [n=305]	2021 Frequency Percentage [n=215]	2018 Frequency Percentage [n=186]	2016 Frequency Percentage [n=331]
Howdy Week*	57%	70%	68%	69%
None	30%	19%	21%	18%
Freshmen Orientation Week - Corps of Cadets	12%	9%	10%	14%
Impact	8%	9%	11%	11%
Other	4%	5%	4%	5%
ExCEL	2%	1%	1%	2%
Venture Camps	--	1%	1%	<1%
Transfer Camp	--	1%	--	<1%

Table 6: Attendance at Other Extended Orientation Programs
(* Howdy Week was known as Gig Em' Week in 2018 and 2016)

Students who did not attend Fish Camp were asked two questions about what they would like if they were to attend an extended orientation program. Respondents were first asked what they would hope to learn and/or gain from an extended orientation program. Almost half of the 59 comments were about making friends or building a community. Other things students would like to learn more about transitioning to college included campus resources, student organizations, and campus culture or traditions.

Second, respondents were asked about the type of activities they would like to see included in an extended orientation experience, using a select all that apply question. Table 7 illustrates that outdoor activities and traditions continue to be the most popular responses with both increasing compared to 2021. Four students wrote a response for the "other" option. One said gaming, one said sports, and one said something to simulate a school day or week. The final student said nothing.

What types of activities would you like to see in an extended orientation experience? (Select all that apply)	2023 Frequency Percentage [n=254]	2021 Frequency Percentage [n=187]	2018 Frequency Percentage [n=161]	2016 Frequency Percentage [n=283]
Outdoor/Adventure (rope course, hiking, kayaking, etc.)	60%	49%	59%	65%
Tradition (education on the history of your university, traditions, etc.)	54%	52%	56%	55%
Peer Mentoring	37%	41%	42%	33%
Leadership Development	35%	38%	48%	41%
Service (service project in the community)	33%	29%	45%	35%
Arts and Culture	28%	33%	35%	30%
International Travel	24%	23%	26%	40%
Other	3%	5%	3%	4%

Table 7: Desired Activities in Extended Orientation Programs

When asked if they attended the MSC Open House to learn about student organizations, 69% of the 310 responses reported that they attended, 23% indicated they knew about it but did not attend, and 8% shared that they did not know about it. More students attended MSC Open House compared to previous years when 55% said they attended MSC Open House and 68% said they attended in 2018.

Furthermore, students were asked if they joined any Texas A&M student organizations, and 68% said that they had joined an organization and 32% stated that they had not. More students joined student organizations compared to the previous year: 59% reported joining an organization in 2021 and 67% in 2018. 59% said they had joined an organization and 41% stated they had not; an 8% decrease compared to 2018 when 67% reported they had joined an organization. Students who indicated that they had joined a student organization (n=201) were asked how many organizations they had joined. Over one-third of the 198 respondents (38%) joined one organization, 36% joined two, 18% reported joining three organizations, 5% joined four student organizations, and 3% joined five organizations. In 2021, 43% joined one organization, 33% joined two, 16% reported joining three organizations, and 8% indicated joining four or more groups.

Freshmen were asked a series of questions about their level of agreement or disagreement related to their experience at Texas A&M. Table 8, on the following page, indicates that freshmen felt they knew the Core Values of Texas A&M, had developed friendships with other freshmen and felt welcomed at Texas A&M. Students were least in agreement that they had an upperclassman mentor. All but one statement increased compared to 2021. First-generation students and Asian students were less likely to agree that they knew the traditions or Core Values of Texas A&M compared to non-first-generation students and White students. First-generation students and Hispanic students were less in agreement that they were prepared to manage the transition from high school to college compared to non-first-generation students and White students. Furthermore, Asian students were less likely to feel that they belong at Texas A&M, that they have a support system, or that they developed friendships with other freshmen than White students. Asian and Hispanic students were less likely to feel welcomed and accepted at Texas A&M than White students. Additional disaggregated results can be found in a separate document.

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2023 Mean (sd) [n]	2021 Mean (sd) [n]	2018 Mean (sd) [n]
I know the Core Values of Texas A&M.	39%	46%	10%	4%	1%	4.19 (.84) [306]	‡	‡
I have developed friendships with other freshmen.	38%	41%	11%	8%	2%	4.05 (.99) [307]	3.81 (1.08) [217]	4.04 (1.12) [181]
I feel welcome and accepted at Texas A&M.	31%	47%	17%	4%	2%	4.01 (.89) [306]	3.90 (1.03) [217]	4.14 (.97) [181]
I belong at Texas A&M.	33%	33%	25%	6%	3%	3.87 (1.03) [308]	‡	‡
I feel comfortable using campus resources.	22%	51%	19%	7%	1%	3.85 (.89) [304]	3.65 (1.02) [217]	3.91 (.94) [181]
I have a support system at Texas A&M.	22%	43%	22%	11%	3%	3.70 (1.02) [307]	3.40 (1.08) [217]	3.78 (1.02) [181]
I know the traditions of Texas A&M.	21%	46%	19%	10%	4%	3.69 (1.05) [306]	3.39 (1.01) [217]	3.57 (1.10) [181]
I felt prepared to be successful academically at Texas A&M at the start of the semester. *	21%	44%	17%	12%	5%	3.65 (1.09) [306]	3.78 (1.01) [217]	4.01 (1.02) [181]
I was prepared to manage the transition from high school to college.	22%	31%	26%	14%	7%	3.47 (1.18) [306]	3.40 (1.17) [215]	3.81 (1.17) [181]
I have an upperclassman mentor this semester.	21%	30%	16%	22%	10%	3.31 (1.30) [305]	3.20 (1.36) [214]	3.05 (1.43) [181]

Table 8: Freshmen's Fall Semester Experience

‡ Question not asked

(* "I feel prepared to be successful academically at Texas A&M at the start of the semester" was stated as "I feel prepared to be successful academically at Texas A&M" in 2021 and 2018.)

A majority of the respondents (90%) self-reported that they planned to return to Texas A&M in spring 2024 and the next academic year, 8% were unsure, 1% reported they would report that they would return in spring 2024 but not the next academic year, and 1% stated they would not return in the spring. These were similar results found in 2021.

The final question asked students to select which best described their current living arrangements. Almost half of the 303 respondents (48%) indicated living on-campus in the residence halls, 41% reported living off-campus in an apartment or house with friends or on their own, 6% stated they lived on-campus in the Corps of Cadets, and 5% said they off-campus with family members.

Additional demographics of the students were obtained through the student information system. Table 9, in descending order by survey respondents for each category, displays the results of the survey population and the survey respondents. Most students were not first-generation, female, freshmen (based on credit hours), not Top 10%, White, and in the College of Arts & Sciences. Several demographic categories were consistent between the survey population and survey respondents. However, the gender was flipped between the survey population and the respondents.

Demographic Statements	Survey Respondents [n=465]	Survey Population [n=7,574]
College		
Arts and Sciences	35%	32%
Engineering	31%	37%
Agriculture and Life Sciences	14%	11%
Mays Business School	8%	8%
Education and Human Resource Development	3%	4%
Public Health	2%	2%
Architecture	2%	2%
Bush School of Government and Public Service	2%	2%
Other	2%	1%
Performance, Visualization, and Fine Arts	1%	1%
Ethnicity		
White	41%	40%
Hispanic or Latino	26%	27%
Asian	22%	23%
Black/Multi-Racial including Black	5%	4%
Multi-Racial excluding Black	3%	3%
International	3%	2%
Unknown	1%	<1%
American Indian	<1%	<1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	--	<1%
First-generation Student		
Not First-generation	72%	73%
First-generation	27%	26%
Unknown	1%	1%
Gender		
Female	58%	47%
Male	42%	53%
Classification		
Freshman	84%	83%
Sophomore	12%	12%
Junior	4%	5%
Senior	--	<1%
Top 10 Percent		
Not Top 10%	51%	54%
Top 10%	49%	46%

Table 9: Demographics

Organization Background

According to its website (<https://fishcamp.tamu.edu/mission/>), Fish Camp “strives to welcome freshmen into the Aggie Family by sharing the traditions and values of Texas A&M University and building long-term relationships that embody the Aggie spirit.” To do this, freshmen participate in various programs to learn about campus life, Aggie traditions, and a variety of services and resources to help students succeed. Additionally, freshmen are divided into smaller Discussion Groups (DGs) to meet other students and have the opportunity to ask questions in a smaller environment.

Project Details

Some caution should be taken when using the results due to the low response rate.

The Department of Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research 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 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 can be found at <https://sapar.tamu.edu/results/>. Additionally, division staff and students can follow Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research on Facebook.

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

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