

# Memorial Student Center

## Student Conference on National Affairs 69

### Spring 2024

#### **Purpose of Assessment**

Each spring the Memorial Student Center (MSC) Student Conference on National Affairs (SCONA) hosts a conference to provide “programs for students across Texas, the nation, and the world to exchange ideas and discuss the role of the United States in the global community.” The theme for SCONA 69 was “American Grand Strategy: Winning the Decisive Decade,” and was held on February 15-17, 2024. SCONA 69 utilized speakers and team facilitators with first-hand experiences in the topics to guide delegates in the creation of a policy paper. MSC SCONA has worked with Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research to assess various aspects of the conference most years since 2008.

#### **Key Findings with Recommendations**

Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research (SAPAR) identified several key findings and developed actionable recommendations the organization may take based on the results. However, the MSC SCONA committee may identify other findings using their knowledge and understanding of the conference and participants. MSC SCONA is strongly encouraged to read all the comments to gain a deeper understanding of the conference attendees’ experiences.

- Delegates were very positive regarding their experience with MSC SCONA 69 in general. The roundtable sessions and the roster of speakers continue to be highlights of the conference. Most delegates also found the roundtable sessions useful, and they learned new information and insights from the sessions.
  - Delegates suggested incorporating more diverse topics and possibly incorporating more diverse speakers. MSC SCONA is encouraged to consider this feedback when identifying potential speakers for MSC SCONA 70.
  - Additionally, delegates expressed that the nature of the current voting process during the roundtables and the voting criteria needed to be reevaluated. Delegates indicate the need to incorporate clearer, structured voting criteria and processes, and to make certain that the voting process is not biased towards only delegates’ input. MSC SCONA may want to explore the voting and how to improve the process based on feedback from delegates this year.
  - Many of the qualitative comments revealed the participants desired more food options and coffee to be available during the conference; this is also consistent with the previous years.
- The response rate decreased in the last couple of years, with a notable decrease this year going from 79% last year to 31% this year.
  - MSC SCONA is strongly encouraged to consider how and when the paper surveys are distributed. Build this into a time when all delegates are together and have a specific process to collect completed evaluation forms.

#### **Method and Sample**

The survey was produced using Papersurvey.io®, a software program that creates scannable paper surveys and databases. Of the 16 questions on the survey, 11 were quantitative and five were qualitative. Data were analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel®. The paper survey was distributed to conference delegates at the conclusion of the conference. Of the 139 delegates who received the survey, 44 completed some parts of the survey, yielding a 31% response rate. This response rate is quite a bit lower than last year’s 79% response rate.

## Results

Results are 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%. The tables are in descending mean or frequency order for 2024. Summary themes are contained in this report; the entire list can be found in a separate document. Comparison data to previous years will be provided where appropriate.

Delegates were asked a series of questions specifically about their roundtable experiences during the conference. Table 1 demonstrates that most delegates agreed or strongly agreed that the roundtable facilitators provided useful insight, the roundtable host successfully managed the session, that delegates practiced valuable communication skills from the roundtable discussions and policy-making process, and overall found value in the policy presentations. The means for the roundtable experiences during the conference all improved in comparison to the previous year, especially for delegates finding value within roundtable policy presentations.

Statement	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2024 Mean (sd) [n]	2023 Mean (sd) [n]	2022 Mean (sd) [n]	2020 Mean (sd) [n]
My roundtable facilitators provided useful insight during the roundtable discussions.	84%	16%	0%	0%	3.84 (.37) [44]	3.82 (.41) [95]	3.84 (.37) [77]	3.63 (.63) [122]
My round table host successfully managed our round table sessions by keeping our discussions on track.	77%	18%	5%	0%	3.73 (.54) [44]	3.67 (.54) [94]	3.56 (.62) [77]	*
I practiced valuable communication skills from the roundtable discussions and policy-making process.	75%	23%	2%	0%	3.73 (.50) [44]	3.69 (.49) [95]	3.76 (.43) [78]	3.72 (.50) [122]
I found value in the roundtable policy presentations.	75%	23%	0%	2%	3.70 (.59) [44]	3.61 (.61) [94]	3.74 (.44) [76]	3.75 (.53) [114]

Table 1: Roundtable Discussion

\*Question not asked

Respondents were asked what they think should stay the same, and what should change about the roundtable discussions, to improve the conference experience. Of the 37 responses about what delegates recommended keeping the same, many shared general positive comments about the experience. Others shared that the speakers were great and that the facilitators worked well. Additionally, many shared that the pace and format of the event ran smoothly. Of the 37 responses about what delegates would change next year, many mentioned wanting a different voting system that could be more structured and non-biased towards delegates. Additionally, delegates believed that there should be more variety of speakers in attendance, and the organization of the event needs to be reformatted. Others shared that there should be more food and non-stop coffee provided throughout the conference.

Three new questions were asked of conference delegates this year regarding their experience with the concentrations, which was something new added to SCONA 69. Table 2, on the next page, illustrates that most of the delegates agreed or strongly agreed that the concentrations added value to the learning and experiences at SCONA 69.

Statement	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2024 Mean (sd) [n]
The concentrations added value to my learning at SCONA 69.	59%	34%	7%	0%	3.52 (.63) [44]
The concentrations added value to my experiences at SCONA 69.	57%	32%	9%	2%	3.43 (.76) [44]

Table 2: Concentrations

When asked to provide any feedback regarding the concentrations, 26 conference delegates provided a comment. The majority of delegates responded with positive comments about the concentration, mainly highlighting the great flow of conversation, the interesting topics discussed, and the allotted time for this event. Others shared that the concentrations should be reorganized to fit the theme of the discussions and to encompass more particular themes, such as national security. Additionally, delegates mention reformatting the current voting process.

SCONA 69 included three speakers: Dr. James Peery, Lt. General Dimitri Henry, and Larry Smith. Respondents were asked to share their feedback about the speakers at SCONA 69. Out of the 31 respondents, some suggested having a more diverse set of speakers and a more diverse set of topics to discuss at the conference. Overall, there was a high level of satisfaction regarding the quality of the speakers, and many respondents commented and shared appreciation for the speakers.

Delegates were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with their overall conference experience. Table 3 indicates that all respondents thought SCONA 69 provided an environment that freely explored ideas/perspectives that are different than their own and all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they increased their knowledge of how the United States is addressing current challenges.

Statement	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2024 Mean (sd) [n]	2023 Mean (sd) [n]	2022 Mean (sd) [n]	2020 Mean (sd) [n]
I increased my knowledge of how the United States is addressing current challenges by participating in conference activities.	83%	18%	0%	0%	3.83 (.39) [40]	3.76 (.50) [91]	3.77 (.45) [82]	*
SCONA 69 provided an environment that freely explores ideas/perspectives that are different than my own.	80%	20%	0%	0%	3.80 (.41) [40]	3.77 (.43) [86]	3.69 (.56) [81]	3.73 (.52) [121]

Table 3: Overall Conference Experience

\*Question not asked

Delegates were asked to rate their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the communication from the organizers prior to and during the conference. Table 4, on the next page, shows that most respondents were satisfied with the communication during the conference but not as satisfied with the communication prior to the conference. The mean for the satisfaction with quality of communication prior to the conference remained similar to the previous year. Additionally, satisfaction with the quality of communication during the conference has decreased from the previous year; however, not as low as compared to 2022.

Please indicate your level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the following comments of SCONA 69:	Very Satisfied (4)	Satisfied (3)	Dissatisfied (2)	Very Dissatisfied (1)	2024 Mean (sd) [n]	2023 Mean (sd) [n]	2022 Mean (sd) [n]	2020 Mean (sd) [n]
The quality of communication <u>during</u> the conference.	64%	33%	3%	0%	3.62 (.54) [39]	3.70 (.46) [91]	3.34 (.72) [82]	*
The quality of communication <u>prior</u> to the conference.	43%	45%	10%	3%	3.28 (.76) [40]	3.29 (.68) [89]	2.98 (.89) [81]	3.16 (.86) [119]

Table 4: Conference Communication  
\*Question not asked

Delegates were asked how they heard about MSC SCONA using a select all that apply format. Table 5 reveals that professors and word of mouth continue to be the main communication channels through which delegates learn about MSC SCONA. However, in comparison to previous years, the percentage of how many people heard about MSC SCONA from word of mouth decreased by more than half, as those who heard about MSC SCONA from professors almost doubled compared to last year. Delegates selecting the “other” response option were provided the opportunity to write how they learned about MSC SCONA. Responses included emails from the Corps of Cadets, University Honors program, previous MSC SCONA involvement, and specific names of individuals who told them about the conference.

How did you hear about MSC SCONA? (Select all that apply)	2024 Percent [n=40]	2023 Percent [n=83]	2022 Percent [n=82]	2020 Percent [n=154]
Professor or Institution	46%	31%	45%	47%
Word of Mouth	21%	48%	44%	36%
Email	12%	29%	22%	24%
Other	11%	27%	15%	14%
Posters	7%	7%	4%	*
Social Media	4%	18%	6%	4%
Tables within the MSC	0%	8%	6%	*

Table 5: Marketing  
\*Option not provided

Lastly, respondents were asked to suggest improvements for future conferences. The 24 responses varied but included requesting the reformatting of the voting process and criteria throughout the conference, providing more food and coffee, more icebreaker activities, and possibly targeting speakers that could discuss more about their topics without the restrictions of their classification.

### **Organization Background**

The Memorial Student Center (MSC) Student Conference on National Affairs (SCONA) was founded in 1955. According to its website (<https://scona.tamu.edu/about/>), “student leaders at Texas A&M University have worked to plan thought-provoking conferences addressing different topics of national importance. These conferences bring delegates from around the nation and world to engage in conversation with the nation’s highest academic scholars, government officials, and well-known public figures.”

## **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 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, anyone 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/>.

Report Prepared for: Rockney Reid, MSC SCONA  
Report Prepared by: Sophia Arora and Kelly Cox Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research  
Report Prepared on: April 11, 2024  
Survey Created by: Avanish Shah, Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research  
Analysis Prepared by: Dennis Trukawka, Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research