

Memorial Student Center (MSC) Spencer Leadership Conference Evaluation Spring 2021

Purpose of Assessment

The MSC Spencer Leadership Conference focuses on leadership development through the exploration of three pillars: Self-Aware Leadership, Innovative Leadership, and Selfless Leadership. Approximately 27 student delegates participated in preconference programs, primarily virtual, and attended the conference in-person held in College Station in early March. The conference includes programs and small group discussions featuring leaders in business, industry, education and public service. Delegates were surveyed to assess their experiences and learning during the conference as well as during preconference events.

Key Findings with Recommendations

Student Life Studies identified several key findings and developed actionable recommendations the department may take based on the results. However, MSC Spencer staff may identify other findings using their knowledge and understanding of the conference and delegates. Staff members are strongly encouraged to read all the results and qualitative comments to gain a fuller understanding of students' experiences.

- The delegates were positive about their overall MSC Spencer Leadership Conference experience. Nearly all delegates indicated valuable preconference events, understanding more about the meaning of the three pillars (self-authorship, innovative leadership and selfless service) through those events. They agreed at a higher rate than in 2020 that preconference events provided opportunities to know other delegates, but agreed at a slightly lesser rate that they were provided ample time for reflection.
- Similar to previous years (without COVID restrictions) delegates indicated that they would have liked more opportunities to get to know the other delegates during preconference events, although they were positive about the effectiveness of their small group leaders in facilitating preconference small group activities. Still, about one-fifth of the delegates did not feel they were able to build relationships with others in their small group preconference, primarily due to lack of time and in-person interaction.
 - As delegates desired to get to know other delegates better prior to the conference, even though the small group activities enabled an increase of that over previous years, more in-person preconference activities, which allow delegates to meet and interact with others outside their small group may meet help meet these greater expectations. Delegates would also like more chances to interact with one another during the conference, which may also improve their networking with others in their chosen professional fields at the conference.
- Most delegates found that the small group leaders facilitated discussions within the small groups effectively during the conference and those conference discussions enhanced delegates' understanding of the three pillars. Delegates primarily agreed the conference speakers were diverse and broadened delegates' understanding of leadership, but they also indicated getting unclear or contrary messages about the pillars through the speakers' presentations. As well, delegates noted that the virtual presentations sometimes posed barriers to remaining engaged.
 - To enhance invited speakers' familiarity with the three pillars, MSC Spencer Leadership Conference organizers may want to prompt future speakers about the concept of each and provide references used by delegates during preconference discussions. Or small group leaders could encourage delegates to reflect on contrasts between the pillars and the information shared by the speakers during their discussions, further enhancing delegate's meaning making and critical thinking skills. Including more in-person speakers as possible during the conference may also enhance delegates' engagement, along with providing both discussion and reflection time between speakers.

- Other improvements that MSC Spencer staff may want to review include clearer and more detailed communication of conference activities prior to the conference.

Method and Sample

The preconference experience survey was developed using Qualtrics®, a software program that creates web-based surveys and databases. The survey included 13 questions, of which nine were quantitative and four were qualitative. The open link survey was provided through a QR code to respondents as they attended their last preconference event on February 25th, although a few responded as late as March 17th. As the survey was available through a QR code, a response rate cannot be determined; however, 27 responded to at least one question. The data were analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel®.

The conference survey was developed using Teleform®, a survey development software that creates scannable paper-based surveys and databases. Data were analyzed using SPSS® and Microsoft Excel®. The 17-question survey contained 11 quantitative and six qualitative questions. The survey was distributed to delegates on the final day of the conference. Of the 26 students who received the survey, 26 completed it, yielding a 100% response rate, which was equal to the 2020 response rate.

Results

Results include frequency percentages, means, and standard deviations (sd) for the number of people (n) who responded to the question. For ease of reading, percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%. Tables are listed in descending mean order for 2021 results unless otherwise noted. Summary themes for the qualitative questions are contained in this report; the full qualitative responses can be found in a separate document. Comparisons to previous years' results are included where applicable. The results are reported in two sections; Preconference Experience and Conference Experience.

Preconference Experience

The survey began by asking delegates about their understanding of MSC Spencer's leadership perspectives after attending the preconference events. Table 1 reveals that delegates' agreed or strongly agreed the preconference events lead to a greater understanding of self-authorship and the meaning of innovative leadership and selfless service, although at a slightly lower level than indicated by last year's delegates.

As a result of attending MSC Spencer Leadership Preconference events...	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2021 Mean (sd) [n=27]	2020 Mean (sd) [n=34]
I have a greater understanding of self-authorship	48%	48%	4%	--	3.44 (.58)	3.50 (.66)
I understand more clearly the meaning of innovative leadership	41%	56%	4%	--	3.37 (.57)	3.56 (.56)
I learned more about selfless service	19%	78%	4%	--	3.15 (.46)	3.65 (.49)

Table 1: Understanding of Leadership Styles Preconference

Students were asked to provide an explanation of how they learned one of the three pillars during the preconference events and were asked to begin by including the name of their chosen pillar. Of the 22 who responded, 36% wrote generically about the pillars and did not identify one within their explanation. However, 32% indicated self-authorship, 23% innovative leadership and 9% selfless service as the pillar they learned about during preconference events. Delegates who noted selfless service indicated learning more about it through the

preconference slide shows and the discussion regarding Mattress Mack. Delegates noting self-authorship learned about themselves during the Shark Tank activity, conference activity number two and having to write a pitch about themselves quickly. Delegates mentioning innovative leadership noted that primarily how they learned about that pillar was through the quick adaptations that MSC Spencer leaders made to the preconference activities due to COVID 19, as well as through puzzles and gaming activities.

Delegates were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with several statements regarding preconference activities and opportunities. Table 2 shows they were most agreeable that the preconference events were valuable. While still rated positively and more so than last year, delegates were least agreeable that they were provided opportunities to get to know other delegates.

MSC Spencer...	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2021 Mean (sd) [n=26]	2020 Mean (sd) [n=34]
Provided valuable preconference events	73%	23%	4%	--	3.69 (.55)	3.56 (.50)
Provided adequate communication about the preconference activities prior to the pre-conference events	69%	23%	8%	--	3.62 (.64)	3.59 (.61)
Provided ample time to reflect during the preconference	58%	35%	8%	--	3.50 (.65)	3.59 (.50)
Provided opportunities to get to know other delegates	46%	50%	4%	--	3.42 (.58)	3.12 (.73)

Table 2: Overall Preconference Experience

When asked about the effectiveness of the small group leader in facilitating preconference activities, most participants found the group leader was effective, as noted in Table 3.

	Effective (4)	Somewhat Effective (3)	Somewhat Ineffective (2)	Ineffective (1)	Mean (sd) [n]
Please rate how effective or ineffective was your small group leaders were in facilitating preconference activities.	96%	4%	--	--	3.96 (.20) [26]

Table 3: Small Group Leader Ratings

When asked if they felt they were able to build relationships with others within their small groups, 81% of the 26 respondents indicated yes, and 19% indicated no. Those who selected no were asked to explain. The four respondents noted they did not spend enough time with others to feel like they built relationships, with half noting it was due to the lack of in-person interaction. When asked to provide feedback regarding their small group experience, all of the 24 who commented were positive about the experience. Many said they loved it, found their leaders and others kind, interactive, fun and the experience positive and professional. Some indicated they learned about the pillars from their fellow small group members and formed connections, but noted they would have liked more interactions with their small groups.

Delegates were asked to provide any suggestions to improve the preconference events and 21 respondents shared their ideas. About one-third wrote n/a or nothing needed to be different. Others suggested more activities or events and more in-person events so they could connect with one another.

Conference Experience

Delegates were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement whether their conference attendance fostered their understanding of the three pillars of leadership. Table 4, on the next page, reveals that delegates agreed or strongly agreed they understood the meaning of innovative leadership and selfless service. However, although most of the delegates also strongly agreed or agreed they had a greater understanding of self-authorship, 4% disagreed. All the statement means for the pillars increased over 2020 and 2019.

As a result of attending the MSC Spencer Leadership Conference...	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2021 Mean (sd) [n]	2020 Mean (sd) [n=40]	2019 Mean (sd) [n=32]
I understand more clearly the meaning of innovative leadership	92%	8%	--	--	3.92 (.28) [25]	3.87 (.34)	3.81 (.40)
I have a greater understanding of self-authorship	92%	4%	4%	--	3.88 (.43) [26]	3.78 (.42)	3.50 (.62)
I learned more about selfless service	85%	15%	--	--	3.85 (.37) [26]	3.70 (.52)	3.72 (.46)

Table 4: Understanding of Leadership Styles after Conference Attendance

Delegates were asked to select one of the leadership pillars and explain what the chosen pillar meant to them. Of the 25 respondents, 36% selected self-authorship, 36% selfless service and 28% of delegates chose innovative leadership. Participants were asked to explain their chosen pillar. Those who selected innovative leadership indicated this pillar meant finding new, “out of the box” solutions and boldly applying them and encouraging those they lead to do the same. Delegates, who chose self-authorship, explained that they learned to write their own story, create their own narrative, identify their values and express them as they lead others. Finally, selfless service, to those delegates who selected it, indicated it meant intentionally caring for others, putting others on your team before yourself, and leading them in their best interest.

Delegates were also asked out of the three pillars, which they still had difficulty understanding and why. Slightly more than half of the 25 respondents indicated self-authorship as the pillar they still had difficulty understanding, and those who shared reasons noted it was challenging to understand because it required reflection, was constantly changing, unique to each person and it was difficult to relate to leading. About one-fifth of the respondents indicated innovative leadership as the pillar they still had difficulty understanding, noting the speakers seemed to have varying definitions of it, or that they understood it but how to apply it practically while leading was not clear. Lastly, some of the respondents indicated no difficulty in understanding any of the pillars, noting that the speakers were effective in explaining them all.

Delegates were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with several statements regarding conference activities and opportunities. Table 5, on the next page, shows delegates all agreed or strongly agreed that the diverse set of speakers broadened their understanding of leadership and that communication about conference requirements was adequate prior to the trip. Delegates were least agreeable regarding the communication about conference activities prior to the conference. Delegates were more agreeable regarding all statements than in 2020.

The MSC Spencer Leadership Conference...	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2021 Mean (sd) [n=26]	2020 Mean (sd) [n=40]
Provided adequate communication about conference requirements prior to the conference.*	85%	15%	--	--	3.85 (.34)	3.55 (.50)
Provided a diverse set of speakers to broaden my understanding of leadership	77%	23%	--	--	3.77 (.43)	3.74 (.44)
Provided ample time to reflect on things I learned during the conference.	77%	19%	4%	--	3.73 (.53)	3.21 (.70)
Enabled me to develop a professional network in a variety of fields	54%	42%	4%	--	3.50 (.58)	3.48 (.55)
Provided adequate communication about conference activities prior to the conference*	46%	42%	12%	--	3.35 (.69)	2.95 (.75)

Table 5: Overall Conference Experience

*2020 statement ended in "the trip"

When asked about the effectiveness of the small group leaders in the facilitation of discussion and activities, 88% of the 25 delegates who responded found them effective, 8% reported them as somewhat effective, and 4% reported that they were ineffective (Mean=3.80/4.00, sd=.65). No one chose somewhat ineffective. Delegates choosing somewhat ineffective or ineffective were asked for an explanation of their response. Comments included that small group leaders were effective in facilitating conversations, rather than leading, another felt delegates could have been better prepared and another indicated that they failed to have a substantial discussion about anything and it was a waste of time.

Respondents were asked to provide feedback about small group activities and times during the conference. Most of the 23 respondents were complementary of the small group time, enjoying the discussions which included the topics speakers spoke about as well as those which provided the opportunity for the group to get to know one another more deeply. A few suggested more time for the activities and discussions, although others thought there was ample time. Some noted there was too much downtime and one indicated that the activities were poorly coordinated.

When asked to rate their overall experience during the MSC Spencer Leadership Conference, 89% of the delegates rated their experiences excellent, 8% selected above average while 4% rated their experience below average. No one rated their conference experience as average or poor (Mean= 4.81/5.00, sd=.63, n=26). Last year 76% of the delegates rated their experiences excellent, 21% selected above average while 3% rated the conference experience as average (Mean= 4.74/5.00, sd=.50, n=38). Delegates were asked for suggestions to aid MSC Spencer in creating a closer community among its members, and five commented this question is not applicable and three shared they enjoyed the conference experience.

Delegates were asked to provide any suggestions to improve the conference and 23 respondents shared their ideas. Delegates primarily suggested that they would like more time (both structured and casual) to get to know other delegates prior to the conference, through more small group activities but also to meet and interact with others outside their small groups. During the conference, they would like more chances to interact with one

another, more in-person speakers, more engaging speakers and more time between speakers. However, some suggested a tighter schedule with less downtime and more activities to fill in that downtime on the conference.

Background

According to the organization's website, (<http://spencer.tamu.edu/>) MSC Spencer is a conference "that seeks to provide a unique opportunity to sophomores to enhance personal leadership skills in the pursuit of life long excellence in diverse environments." The MSC Spencer Leadership Conference was held in College Station March 3-5, 2021 and during the conference, delegates attended programs featuring presentations from leaders in business, industry, education, and public service, as well as participated in small group discussions regarding three pillars of leadership (selfless service, self-authorship and innovative leadership) during and prior to the conference. This is the 12th year that Student Life Studies has worked with MSC Spencer to assess this conference; the last time was in 2020.

Project Details

The Department of Student Life Studies 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 Life Studies are funded, in part, by the Texas A&M University Advancement Fee. Results of this project and other assessment projects done through Student Life Studies can be found at <https://studentlifestudies.tamu.edu/results/>. Additionally, division staff can follow Student Life Studies on Facebook.

To work with Student Life Studies for future assessment projects, please fill out the Assessment Questionnaire at <https://slsform.dsaapps.tamu.edu/>.

Report Prepared for: Benjamin Griffith, MSC Spencer Leadership Conference
Report Prepared by: Susan Fox-Forrester, Student Life Studies
Analysis Prepared by: Dr. Ligia Perez, Student Life Studies
Surveys Created by: Barbara Schumacher and Susan Fox-Forrester, Student Life Studies
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