

Analysis of The Big Event 2016

Center for Leadership and Service | Research, Planning and Assessment
Division of Student Affairs | University of North Texas

Introduction

The Big Event is UNT’s largest day of community service, where students participate in local community service projects at nonprofit organizations in Denton and the surrounding areas as individuals and as members of student organizations. Students register for The Big Event through an online survey instrument and are then assigned to a specific project site depending on need and interest. The Big Event occurred on Saturday, April 2, 2016 from 8 AM until 2 PM. The day of Big Event participants were able to pick up a t-shirt to wear the day of the event. Participants received breakfast, attended a brief kick-off, and adjourned for their community service projects. Students were invited to return to campus at noon for a post-service celebration with food and live music provided by the University Program Council. Community service projects varied in scope and type of work. Students participated in large environmental restoration projects to sorting merchandise at thrift stores. The variety in type of project allows for the best utilization of resources for students and for community partners. Staff wanted to insure that each student has a positive experience with the overall program, The Big Event, despite differences in actual service performed.

A week prior the Big Event board dropped off surveys to Community which were handed out after the service event. 2,500 students participated in The Big Event and total of 216 surveys were completed. Of the respondents, 15 participated as an individual and 199 participated identified themselves as participating as a member of a student or community organization, and 2 respondents did not answer this question. It should be noted that space was provided for participants to, in an open-ended format, share any additional comments or concerns with staff. Those comments will be compiled and analyzed separately.

Results

Staff was interested in the reason and motivation of the students who participated in The Big Event. For this question the student was able to check all that apply. Responses and Frequencies are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Motivations for Participating in The Big Event 2016

Motivation	Number of Participants	Percentage
I wanted a chance to apply my leadership skills.	62	28.7%
I wanted to learn more about issues affecting our community.	62	28.7%
I wanted to deepen my connection to my community.	105	48.6%
Wanted to make a difference.	174	80.6%
Faculty/Staff recommendation.	34	15.7%
Heard good things from past attendees.	39	18.1%
Wanted to make new friends.	38	17.6%

Staff was also interested in respondents' thoughts about UNT and how The Big Event contributed to their overall campus and community experiences. As a result of attending The Big Event, respondents answered questions related to their experience and thoughts about UNT, community and volunteering. All questions were scaled on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 indicating respondents strongly disagreed and 5 indicating they strongly agreed with the statement presented.

Table 3: UNT perceptions as a result of attending The Big Event 2016

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
I feel that I understand and can articulate the value of service	4.39	0.74
Because of my contributions today, I feel like a leader in the community	4.01	0.87
As a result of my project I learned about a community need, issue, or resource	4.35	0.74
I feel that I developed relationships with the community being served	4.12	0.91
I feel that I made a positive impact in the UNT/Denton County Community	4.44	0.72
I now feel more empowered to engage in service	4.33	0.74

Additionally, respondents were asked about their thoughts and experience with The Big Event on a programmatic level. All questions were scaled on a 5-point Likert scale with a 1 indicating respondents strongly disagreed and 5 indicating they strongly agreed with the statement presented.

Table 4: Perceptions of The Big Event 2016

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
The overall ease of the registration process was efficient	4.32	0.73
My community partner provided a meaningful experience	4.45	0.63
My service project was valuable to the community	4.49	0.62
I would recommend the Big Event to other UNT students, faculty/staff, and alumni	4.64	0.59

Discussion

With a n=216, the results of this survey offers a snapshot of the effectiveness of The Big Event program. Students who participated in The Big Event cited their highest motivation for participation as wanting to make a difference (80.6%). Students also indicated that they wanted to deepen their connection to the community as the second highest motivating factor for participation at 48.6%. Our high importance outcome of this signature program is to see if students participating in our large day of service will feel more likely to continue volunteering. The participants reported prior to Big Event 55% volunteered at least 1 hour per month with 17 % reporting 6+ hours per month. Of the 216 students who completed the survey, 62.5% reported they would like to continue reporting at least 1 hour per month with 27% reporting 6+ hours per month. Additionally, the data from this survey suggests that students who participated in The Big Event overall enjoyed the program and would strongly recommend it to other students (Mean = 4.64). Of students surveyed indicated that they made a positive impact in their community (Mean = 4.44) and strongly agreed that they feel more empowered to engage in service (Mean = 4.33). The Big Event strives to give students the opportunity to make a difference in their community in an easy and accessible way, which was confirmed by the results of the survey.

This past year we decided to ask different questions in order to gain more insight into Big Event participants. Our low indicator from the analysis is how the participants felt like leaders through their contributions (Mean = 4.01). In its design, The Big Event is a program where any student can participate, without prior involvement with the Center for Leadership and Service or with other organizations. This program is designed to appeal to a diverse population of students who are interested in community service and civic engagement, and hopes to spark further and deeper interest in those areas through continued community service, civic engagement, and involvement with the Center for Leadership and Service. These students might not see themselves as leaders or equate service to their community as being a leader in their community. To ensure this grows stronger and we are more effective the Big Event during their student organization orientations can speak on impact and how service and leadership are collaborative.

Students did, however, report strongly in regard to feeling empowered to engage in service (Mean=4.33) and 89.9% feeling more likely to continue volunteering. These indications align with the programmatic goals of The Big Event, and will be instrumental in recruiting volunteers for future service events and for The Big Event 2017. Overall, students who participated in The Big Event reported high levels of satisfaction with the program, their service projects, and their community partners they worked with. The lowest satisfaction indicator was related to the efficiency of registration. Which we strive to improve each year and we will look to improve for Big Event 2017 through a shorter registration process and the removal of rosters.

Overall, the results of the surveys from The Big Event indicate a positive experience for students who participated both as an individual and with an organization. In planning The Big Event 2017, the Center for Leadership and Service will be careful in the consideration of the selection of project sites. As well as continue doing orientations, but gearing them towards the impact students are making in their communities, rather than solely day of logistics.

For More Information:

For more information on the programmatic elements of The Big Event 2016, please contact Stephanie Knight, Director, of the Center for Leadership and Service at Stephanie.Knight@unt.edu

Appendix

From the data analysis and program evaluation of The Big Event 2016, it can be concluded that:

- Students indicated that they participated in this event because they wanted to make a difference and feel a deeper connection to the community, and reported that felt they made a positive impact through their participation in The Big Event.
- Students who participated in this event reported higher mean scores related to what they learned through their service projects and their understanding of the value of service, relative to if they saw themselves as leaders after serving their community.
- A large majority of students who participated in The Big Event strongly indicated that they feel empowered to engage in service (Mean=4.33) and indicated that they feel like they made a positive difference in their community (Mean=4.44).