First-Year Case Competition

2018 Event Assessment

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Directed by Yash Bora and Amila Lulo
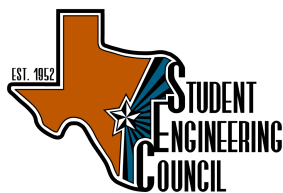*Marketing and Analytics Committee*

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Foreword

The Marketing and Analytics Committee (MAC) was created to centralize and standardize data collection about SEC events in order to ensure the fulfillment of SEC's mission. By compiling both quantitative and qualitative information about specific events and comparing this with past iterations of the event, we seek to provide useful context and advice to improve events in the future. Additionally, these reports can be used as a means to more effectively target future attendees of our events and ensure we are maximizing our impact on the Cockrell student body.

MAC's process is designed to be intimately connected with the planning and implementation of the event in order to ensure our analytics has proper context. We engage in 3-4 planning meetings before the event and attend the event to collect feedback and field notes from all parties involved. A post-event audit meeting is conducted with the primary MALs to identify areas for improvement.

Summary of Data Sources

This report was compiled from several data streams. A sign-in form collected general information and demographics about attendees. A post-event survey collected feedback on specific parts of the event. An MAL audit form was also used to gather qualitative feedback on operations. Quantitative information from our surveys was analyzed through our database for processing and to identify trends among the data. Our advice is also informed from feedback compiled from past and current event audits, notes about the event planning process taken during committee meetings, and day-of field notes.

Overview

Summary of Event

The First-Year Case Competition is an annual event hosted by SEC that serves to provide first-year students with an introduction to case competitions and establish an open environment for them to learn. Many of the participants have never been exposed to solving business and engineering challenges and the First-Year Case Competition seeks to fill this need. Teams of 4 first-year students propose solutions to a case written by the Academic Affairs Committee and present on their research and ideas. Participants currently have about a week to prepare between the kick-off and the final presentation. On the presentation day, teams compete in a preliminary round. The best team in each room is selected to progress to the final round, in which they are judged by representatives from corporate sponsors and partner organizations.

The 2018 First-Year Case Competition partnered with Phillips 66 this year. In the past, we have partnered with Accenture. The competition took place in the SEA building on Saturday, November 10 from 9am to 3pm.

Relevant Parties

This year's FCC event was planned and run by the Academic Affairs committee led by directors Viren Joopelli and Christine Lin. Among the Engineering Activities Members-At-Large involved in planning Makeathon were Ashish Chakraborty, Alicia Kong, Cedric Bernier, and Jacob Stokes.

Key Contacts

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Alyson Bodner	Engineering Student Life Director	alysonbodner@austin.utexas.edu
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Christine Lin	Academic Affairs Committee Director	academic.affairs@sec.engr.utexas.edu
Viren Joopelli	Academic Affairs Committee Director	academic.affairs@sec.engr.utexas.edu

Key Findings

MAC has identified the following areas for growth: were needed:

1. **Planning:**
   a. **Unclear Prompt**: Prompt was not specific enough and there was unclarity on the scope of what was given in the question.
   b. **Insufficient Preparation Time:** Move the information session and workshop earlier to enable more prep time.
   c. **Judges Training:** Judges should know what they are doing exactly in order for this to be a fair process and take out any discontinuities in the scoring process.
2. **Operations**
   a. **Lacking Resources:**
      i. There should be resources for participants to get a "kickstart" to start their solution.
      ii. Provide follow up sessions to help them build their case before the competition as this is for first-year students and they do not have experience in working cases.
      iii. Teach tangible skills (i.e. cost analysis or deck preparation) in the workshop to actually get teams understanding the workflow.
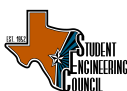3. **Financials**
4. **Marketing**
   a. **Start Early:**
      i. Publicity should start several weeks before and incentivize teams to sign up early.
      ii. It should be decided whether the event is going to be open to just engineering or all first-years way in advance and market accordingly.
5. **Impact**

Planning	Operations	Financials	Marketing	Impact

<u>Analysis</u>

Planning Process

      The implementation timeline of this event was heavily shifted towards the final presentation date. This event should be treated as a week long event, as opposed to a single day, so major logistics should be established prior to the kick-off date. It was observed throughout committee meetings and the event audits that directors guided most of the high level planning items and delegated tasks to MALs. Because this is most MALs' first event, this was effective at guiding the discussion. However, it was found that too much emphasis was placed on replicating past iterations of the event as opposed to allowing MALs to innovate on new logistical ideas.
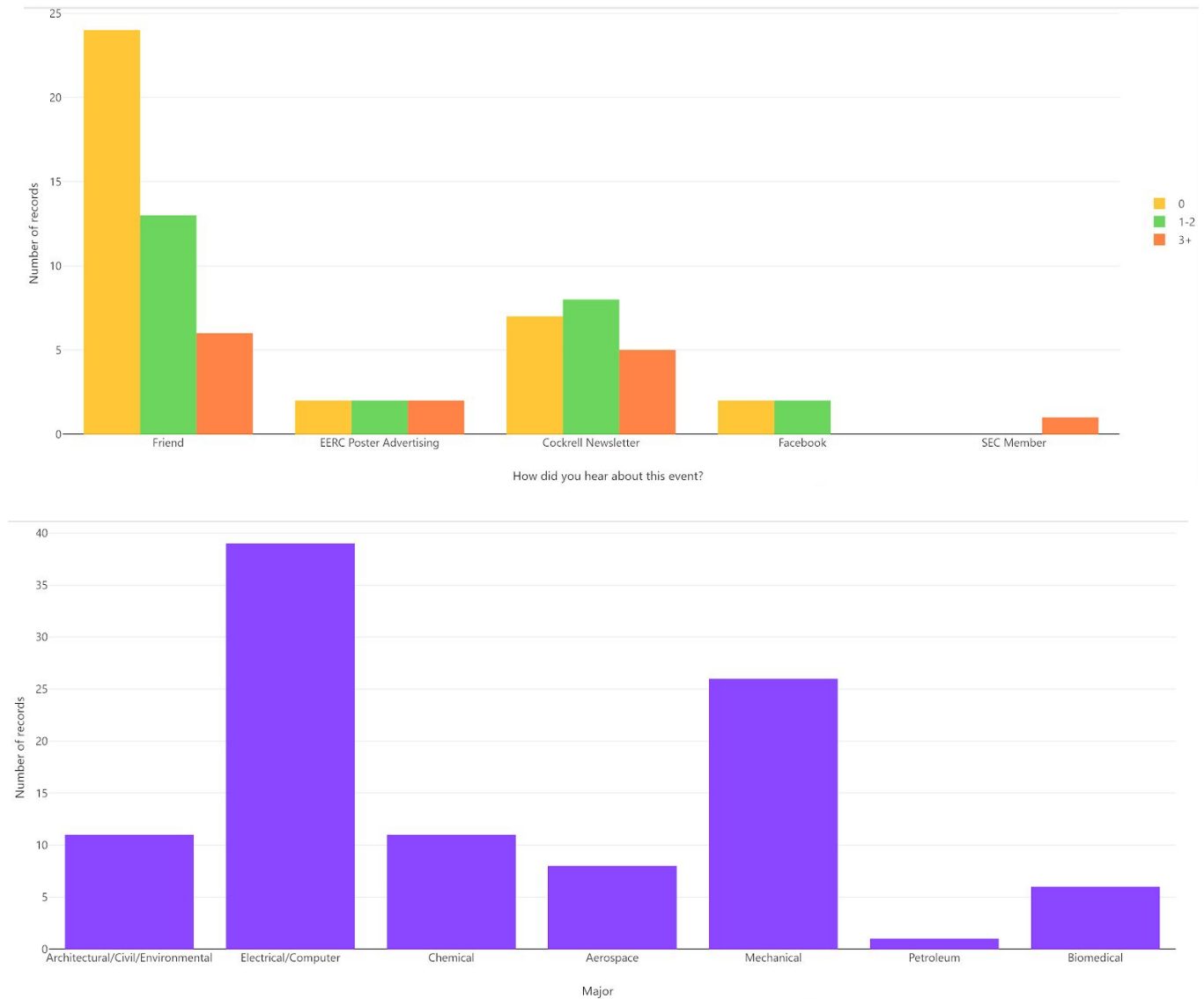
      Despite holding several planning meetings, it appears that the committee still was scrambling towards the end of the planning process to increase turnout and organize last minute details, such as food. Additionally, outreach to judges internal and external to SEC needs to take place two weeks prior to kick-off so judges can be available to work with teams in the week leading up to the presentation day. Many interviewed participants expressed interest in working with mentors and judges prior to the event for proactive feedback. In 2015, judges worked with teams during the workshop and it enabled better retention and experiential learning by the participants.

      There appears to be a disconnect with the quality of the case prompt. MALs were satisfied that the case was broad enough for teams to consider a wide array of solutions. However, many participants thought the prompt could be improved by increasing its specificity. Most case competitions have a slightly more targeted problem (on a business issue, with some specific data to analyze). While general prompts do not bias the competition to certain majors, the trend towards "public response" cases in recent years misrepresents a classic case competition. Outlining specific areas to consider and sub-questions to be addressed will provide a more formal structure for first-years. It may be beneficial for directors to brainstorm the general idea before MALs begin formal planning/case writing.

First-Year Case Competition Poster by the Publicity Committee

There has been a trend since 2016 of delayed and unstructured outreach for this event. In every event audit, MALs have discussed how publicity needs to begin earlier. It is proposed that a more structured approach be taken in the future to target certain high conversion groups on campus. In 2015, presentations to introductory first-year classes of each discipline recruited a diverse set of participants. This year, we saw a heavy slant towards electrical engineering students and an overrepresentation of architectural engineering students. This is likely due to the key areas publicized informally.

Chart: Number of records by "How did you hear about this event?" grouped by 0, 1-2, 3+

Chart: Number of records by Major

BME students were still represented well for the competition despite the BMES case competition happening in close proximity to this date. However, BME is traditionally a very well represented group and this demonstrates a possible timing improvement for future years. Recruiting participants was particularly challenging this year because the Target and the BMES case competitions were during the same general time frame. It is advised to move the competition earlier in the semester by a week to avoid this scheduling conflict of possible participants.
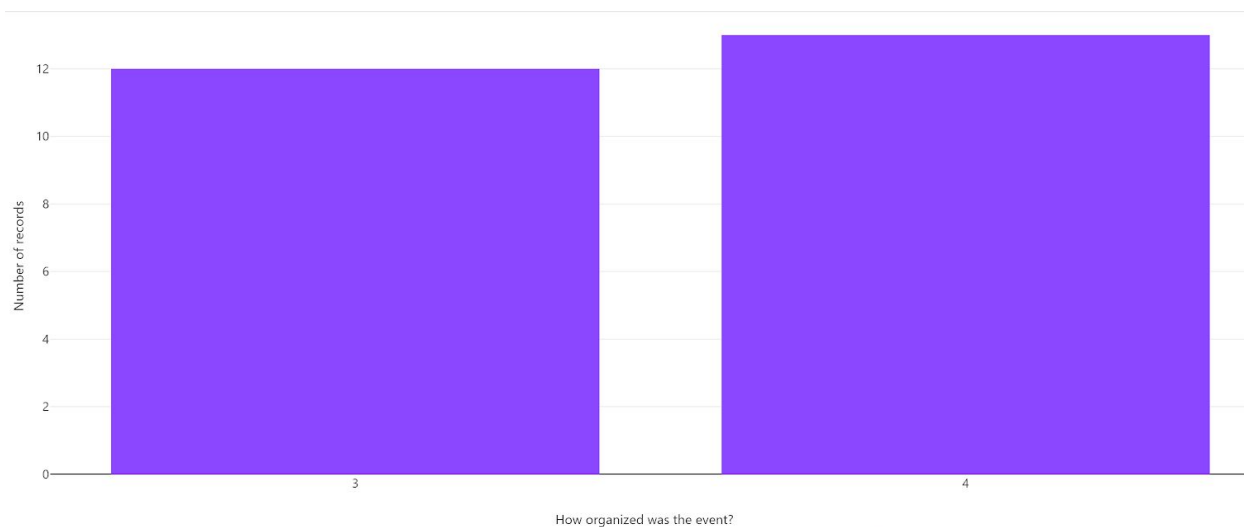
According to survey results, social media outreach is not a significant driver for attendees. Usually, first-year participants are engaged with neither SEC nor its MALs on social media prior to the competition. Therefore, ACA should invest its outreach in more formal

communication methods to first-year students. With the newsletter pulling over 25% of the participants, other listservs and communication channels through Cockrell should be investigated to reach more students. Possible options include engineering honors email lists, FIGs, and even the UT events page. Outlining the various organizations, classes, and channels well in advance can enable better coordination between the MALs and publicity. Since publicity tends to be very busy during this time, earlier requests can be submitted since the basic concept of the event does not change year to year.

In terms of the Facebook event itself, FCC reached about 660 people, but was only engaged with by 13 people. The conversion rate for this event was extremely low at 7.27%. These statistics reiterate the necessity for external marketing methods outside of social media (especially Facebook).

Logistics

Overall the event ran fairly smoothly. Some problems were encountered with late judges. A few extra judges should be recruited as a buffer for absences and late volunteers. Volunteer shifts can be started earlier to ensure everyone is present for the start of their responsibilities. However, participants generally felt that the event was coordinated well.
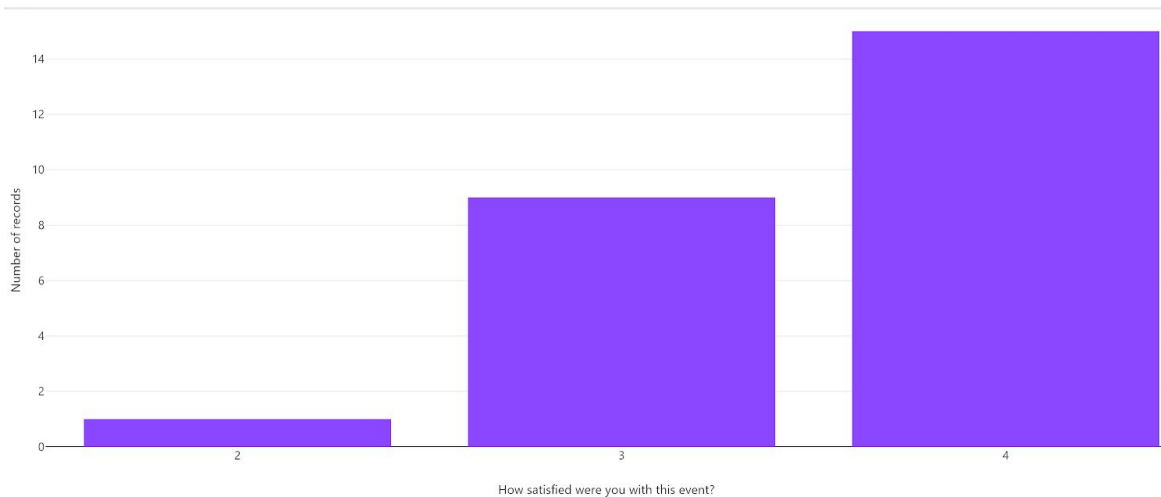

Focus should be given in the future on legitimizing the corporate sponsorship and recruiting additional help that goes beyond financials. In the past, Accenture donated financially but was unable to provide expertise that would be valuable to such a competition. This year, Phillips 66 was also minimally involved outside of monetary donations. If a main selling point is to connect with company representatives, corporate partnerships need to be sourced earlier in the summer and conversations should begin immediately after the event to discuss how the relationship can grow.
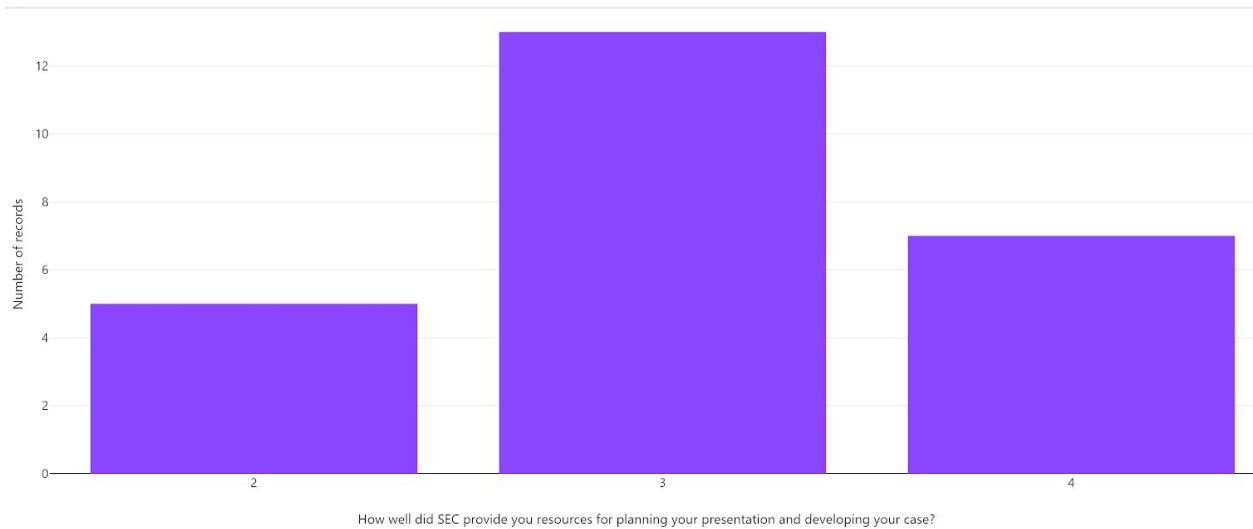
Financials

With $2,100 from Phillips 66, this event only cost SEC an additional $97 to put on. This means we spent about $2 per participant, which is very low for a small event. In past evaluations of larger events, such as Cockrell Kick-off and Engineering Tailgate, an average of $5-6 was spent per attendee so this is well on target. However, shirts accounted for roughly ⅓ of the all-in cost of the event, with minimal return. Printing shirts of different colors increased this price significantly. The value of printing shirts at this event is debatable. Since first-year students likely will not wear their shirt after their first year, we would like to pose the hypothetical question if shirts are even necessary at all. This could enable increased flexibility in food vendors as well as more prize money to be offered to students.

Engagement and Impact

Despite some grievances with the prompt and the preparation, participants remained positive on the event overall. With a 96% approval rating at the conclusion of the event, FCC demonstrated value to the students. However, many participants voiced concern over the amount of time they were given to prepare for their presentations as well as the amount of help provided by SEC in crafting their proposals. Since this is the first case competition these students will ever be doing, the workshops require more structure and guidance. MALs running the event believed this would significantly improve participant experiences. Past iterations of this event had judges working directly with teams prior to the presentation date. However, it has been repeatedly documented that SEC needs to do a better job of preparing teams for cost analysis and financials.
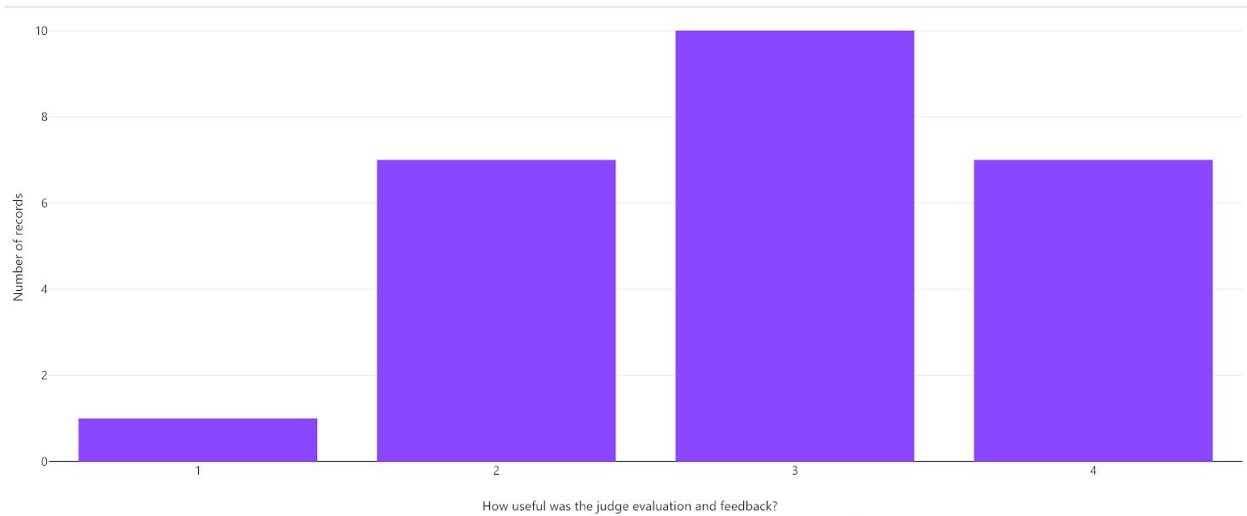

This is an area specifically highlighted by surveyed teams as an area of improvement and aligns closely with thoughts expressed in previous audits. Judge feedback also highlights a significant need for teams to focus on the cost feasibility of their solutions.

How well did SEC provide you resources for planning your presentation and developing your case?

In order to improve, SEC should have more touch points with teams to increase the mentorship involved. In addition to more clarity and teaching "hard skills" during the workshops, SEC should focus its attention on communication tactics leading up to the event. MALs noted a severe disconnect in expectations for judges and volunteers. Several judges and volunteers were confused on the presentation day and were late to their shifts. It was recommended that a consolidated, standardized information sheet be created for reference by all helpers (judges, timers, coordinators, etc.).

Some teams felt communication was lacking on their end as well. Ideas from past event audits include identifying a lead for each team that serves as the point of contact for key details, logistics, and information leading up to the presentation day. Teams appeared to be confused on basic instructions and where to submit their presentations. Additionally, it was felt that more preparation time was needed. Judges agreed that many of the presentations needed additional work to be fully fleshed out.

Lastly, it is advised that judges be trained prior to engaging with students. Many judges lacked significant experience in the area and it was reflected in the opinions of participants. As demonstrated below, many were not thrilled with the feedback received from judges. If personal meetings are possible with teams after the results are released, this may allow judges to give a more personal reflection on how teams could improve.

Number of records

How useful was the judge evaluation and feedback?

Conclusion

Overall Assessment

Concerted effort is needed to organize the planning process and outreach strategy prior to the week of the event. Targeting channels specifically for first-year students is of utmost importance. Additional effort should be focused on further developing the mentorship and resources available for participants. Judges and teams should be well informed of their responsibilities prior to the event. Overall, the day-of logistics ran smoothly and cost targets were met within reason.

Future Targets
- 30 team sign-ups with 75% of them >1 week out
- 90% satisfaction with judge feedback and SEC resources