



Spring Cookout

2019 Event Assessment

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Marketing and Analytics Committee

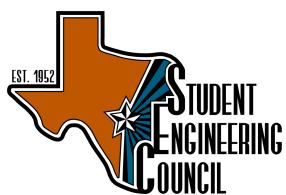


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Foreword

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 engaged in 1-2 planning meetings before the event and attended the event to collect feedback from all parties involved. A post-event audit meeting was conducted with the primary MALs to identify areas for improvement.

This report was compiled from several data streams. A [sign-in form](#) was stationed at the front table and collected general information and demographics about attendees. 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 was 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](#) and attendee interviews.



Overview

This section highlights key facts about the event and is designed to inform new MALs, who lack previous experience with this event.

This event is a cookout held on the EER Lawn, where students can come by to get food and participate in various activities and games. It is spearheaded by SEC with the help of many partner orgs. Each collaborating student org is in charge of running a different food station. This is the second year the event has been held. This year, the partner orgs include ASME, ASCE, BOLT, TxTPEG, Pi Tau Sigma, Theta Tau, EChO, SASE, SWE, HKN, and WBME. The activities available were Gaga ball, cornhole, and giant Jenga.

The goal of Spring Cookout is to encourage interaction and relationship building between different orgs and engineering students by facilitating a relaxing, social, and fun event.

Key Contacts

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Key Findings

Things Done Well:

Planning Process

- Motivation among the participating orgs was high, encouraging for future collab events
- Planning window was about right, allowed enough time for deliberations on logistics

Marketing and Publicity

- Large and diverse audience reached through word of mouth
- 55% of attendees not in any engineering orgs, exceeded Facebook reach

Logistics and Day-Of

- Strong coordination with Green Events, other student orgs

Financials

- Went over-budget but not by much
- Very low cost per attendance of the event

Areas For Improvement:

Planning Process

- Shared communication channel such as GroupMe or Slack
- Crowdsourcing what food options to have and what activities to put on through Publicity

Marketing and Publicity

- Social media reach was poor (Facebook)

Logistics and Day-Of

- Increase available volunteer spots for set-up
- Explore hosting at different times of day to avoid the heat

Financials

- Better gauge of the scope of the event and assign a budget accordingly
- Consider asking orgs to contribute to the budget



Analysis

Planning Process

Student Org Coordination

One of the stand-out aspects of this year's Spring Cookout was that it involved a coordinated effort between SEC and several member organizations, including ASME, ASCE, BOLT, TxTPEG, PTS, SASE, and more. This reflects the sort of large-scale coordination that SEC, as the umbrella organization for a large portion of the undergraduate engineering student body, can and very often should be responsible for leading. As the structure of SEC continues to evolve in relation to the relatively recent introduction of the Cockrell Relations Chair positions, it is important to look for ways to replicate the effort put into planning this multi-organization event through other committees as well as the Cockrell School Cares organization if possible.

On this point it should be noted that there were some coordination-related hiccups identified during the planning and execution of Spring Cookout that should be addressed to greatly improve the event. The first of these was an apparent lack of a centralized group messaging system such as a GroupMe or Slack channel specifically for Spring Cookout coordination. While this was supplanted during the planning process by email communication between EA and partner organizations as well as by in-person direction by the members of EA during the execution of the event, it appeared to be the case that many day-of issues took longer than expected to resolve due to a lack of instant communication methods. That is to say, as Texas TPEG mentioned in their feedback, they seemed to be unable to find an extension cord for their station for some time because they had no way of seeking help other than locating an EA member directly and flagging them down for assistance. This issue was also reflected in a shared opinion of the EA MAL's that the event would have benefited from more people having a fully realized understanding of where everything was supposed to be set up and how volunteers were expected to fulfill their responsibilities. Ideally, this problem could be addressed by having a shared communication channel wherein all responsible parties from all participating organizations are given the same detailed instructions and are witness to the same questions and any clarifications given by EA.

It was also noted from feedback provided by collaborating organizations as well as some of the EA MAL's that many of the participating volunteers (including the EA MAL's themselves) lacked clear instructions for the intended process of setting up the various booths and games. There was also generally confusion during periods of transition as volunteers were



trading off responsibilities upon the completion of their shifts. This essentially echoes the original opinion that Spring Cookout would benefit from more people other than primarily the EA Directors -ideally as many people as possible- having a fully realized idea of what the event is supposed to look like, where everything needs to go, when volunteer shifts begin and end, etc. An alternative method to the shared communication channel would be a whole-team planning meeting within a few days of the event. This meeting could be a one-time event including representatives from all participating organizations as well as members of the EA committee that essentially runs through important details to help build a shared vision of the event. Naturally, this meeting would involve questions from the participating organizations that dig into the details of 'who brings what, where do we go when we arrive, etc.' that EA members could then answer or work with the full planning team to iron out before Spring Cookout begins. This method could also be combined with the shared communication channel to provide ample time for organizations to ask questions and clarify responsibilities as ironing all of those details in one meeting would probably take way too long.

Crowdsourcing

Given that some of the most central considerations relevant to Spring Cookout are the food that is available for participants to eat and the games that are available for them to play, it seems reasonable that an easy way to improve the event for participants is to give them say on what food and games are available. From the responses provided by individuals questioned during Spring Cookout, it definitely seems as though student participants saw opportunity to expand the variety of food available, such as by providing lemonade or popsicles. It was also indicated by EA MAL's that one of the principal successes of the event was that almost all of the food provided the day of was consumed, so there is clearly an expectation of an increased food budget for next year's event. As such, it is recommended to create some sort of method like a poll -likely in conjunction with the Publicity team responsible for next year's Spring Cookout- to gauge what the student body would like to eat. Ideally this would incentivize more students to attend as they would have an expectation that their particular food of choice would be on the menu when they arrive.

This notion of crowdsourcing extends to the games and activities EA intends to make available for Spring Cookout. Many of the student organizations involved had suggestions for games that could be made available for Spring Cookout, and given that most of the partner orgs had experience hosting an activity from this year's E-Week it likely would have been easy for them to adapt some of their materials from their E-Week activity to a Spring Cookout purpose. Furthermore, many of the participating organizations likely have setups or equipment for various



games that they typically play at their own socials, so making them available for the cookout likewise should not be too challenging. Of course, more to the point, having some sort of public forum where possible participants in Spring Cookout can suggest what games they would like to see at the cookout (including reprises of games that were put on during E-Week) would hopefully increase public investment in the outcome of Spring Cookout. Activities like raffles or tournaments with some sort of cash or tech-based prize are usually well-backed incentives for people to stay, so including ‘What should the prize for our Gaga Ball tournament be?’ for example would make people more excited to play Gaga Ball as they would know in advance of the day of Spring Cookout for what prize they would be playing.

Marketing and Publicity



Spring Cookout Poster by the Publicity Committee





Figure 1: Publicity Outlet Breakdown

The publicity outlets used for Spring Cookout included an EERC poster, Facebook event page, advertisement in the Cockrell newsletter, and word of mouth. Above is the breakdown of publicity outlets through which attendees heard about this event. Collectively, 55.1% of attendees heard about the event through word of mouth while only 7.8% heard about the event through Facebook. Of the 19 people that heard about the event through Facebook, 12 were a part of SEC or SEC's member organizations. The facebook event page reached 307 people, 69 marked "Interested", 75 marked "Going", and 205 others were invited. The large majority of the people that marked going were SEC members.

This again shows the power of engagement based marketing over a Facebook page which mainly only circulates in people that are already in the community of SEC or related member organizations. However, the publicity effort for the Facebook page and cover photo was low so no time was really wasted. The Cockrell newsletter and poster advertising seem to be a pretty consistent outlet as they reached 25% of our attendees. The event's location right outside EER was also helpful in bringing in 10.7% of attendees from just walking by.



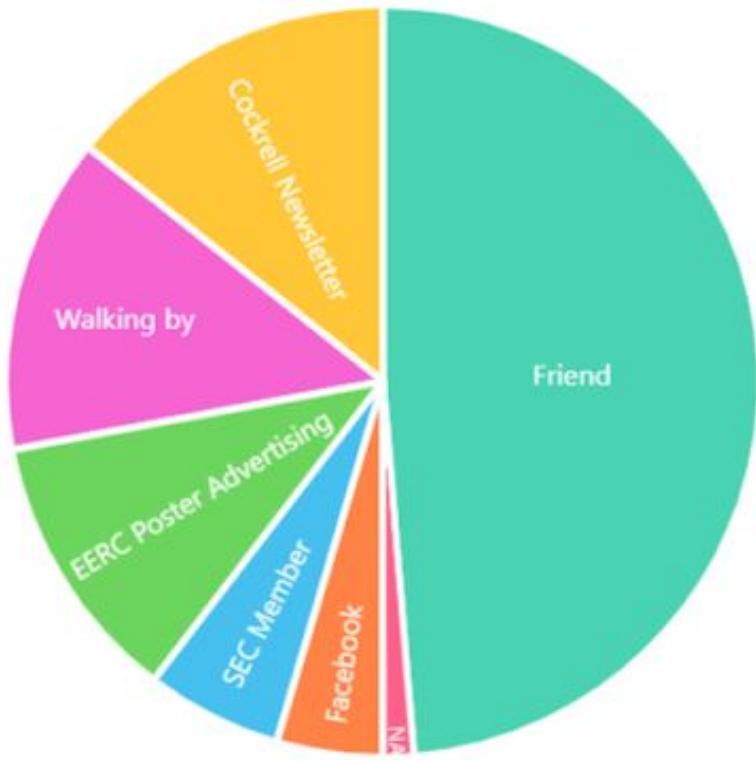


Figure 2: Publicity Outlet Breakdown (Non-Engineering Org. Attendees)

We can also look at our publicity effectiveness in a different light. 55% of attendees were not a part of any engineering organization which is really great in terms of this event reaching beyond just people under SEC's umbrella. Above is the breakdown of publicity outlets for attendees not in an engineering organization. It shows a similar trend with 48.7% of people hearing about Spring Cookout through a friend, 25% hearing through the newsletter or poster, and only 4.5% hearing about it through Facebook.

Overall, this event exceeded expectations in bringing in more than 200 attendees. Because Spring Cookout is partnered with engineering organizations, a lot of the publicity effort was helped by orgs advertising to their members. This most likely led to this event's wide reach and engagement through word of mouth. Publicity should focus on engagement through external organizations or groups to reach more people through word of mouth and rely less on a facebook event page.



Logistics

The event logically went very smoothly and was one of the largest and most cost-effective event of the entire spring semester. EA had a logistics committee that, this year, primarily focused on organization of student org contributions to the event. They created a Google Sheet a few weeks before the event which contained information like what kind and how much food every student organization was bringing, their fundraising goals, and what people would be responsible for while manning their respective booth. The Logistics team also tackled the need to operate grills to create freshly cooked food. This involved paying another organization for how much propane they used along with obtaining used grills instead of shelling out money to buy a new one. There were two grills to separate meat and veggie cooking. They brought out 6 tents and canopies along with 5 tables and a few extra tents to make sure there was enough shade and seating across the EER lawn. Logistics also contacted Green Events which allowed them to get composting, recycling, and trash containers to minimize waste throughout the event. In terms of logistic performance throughout the event, there were tons of positives but definitely areas of improvement for next year.

To begin with the food, the burgers made were “magnificent” and were pretty much wiped clean throughout the event; the watermelons purchased were gone in under 30 minutes, so that was definitely worth the “hassle”. In terms of areas of improvement, there was significant struggle getting the food up to the EER, so definitely for next year there should be an increase in available volunteer spots for set-up. There was also not a lot of fridge space to store burgers so that definitely could affect freshness near the end of the event. They also ran out of veggie burgers, buns for the veggie burgers, drinks and ice cream very quickly so bulk ordering those materials would be beneficial for next year. Finally, the line for the beef burgers really backed up since it takes a lot longer to cook that.

Now, in terms of games and activities, people really enjoyed the variety and substance of the games, definitely keeping them engaged when they weren’t eating. The organizing team went with Gaga-ball, giant jenga, and cornhole which were cheap and involved no hassle in getting them. In terms of improvement, the only complaint recorded from the audit was that Gaga-ball was incredibly difficult to set-up so that needs to be planned way in advance for next year. Finally, in terms of miscellaneous logistics, there was an adequate amount of shade and seating for the amount of people that showed up. However, if you shift to the volunteers, there was a lack of accountability in terms of getting everyone at the event to sign-in. That data is extremely important for not only EA but also for MAC so that we can create detailed reports like this.



Finally, the temperature during this event for the past two years has been extremely high, so maybe having it earlier/later in the day would be a smart idea.

Financials

This event had a budget of \$700, and \$819.76 was spent. Of this, the vast majority (\$756.27, or 92.3%) was spent on food and supplies. An additional \$32 (or 3.9%) was spent on grill propane purchased from TBP/ASME, and \$31.49 was spent on posters for advertisement. Last year's Spring Cookout had a budget of \$1000, of which only \$688.17 was spent, leading to a decreased budget this year. For comparison, \$630.71 or 91.7% of last year's budget was spent on food, roughly equivalent to this year, as well as \$57.46 spent on propane.

With an attendance of 215 people, this event only cost \$3.81 per person. This event is one of the largest and cheapest events SEC puts on, making it a very important one to continue holding. This event is made cost-effective because SEC is able to borrow all of the supplies like tents, tables, grills, coolers, and deep fryers from various orgs.

As is the difficulty with food-driven events, it is difficult to determine how much food to buy. All of the food ran out by the end (the watermelon and ketchup ran out very early on, the veggie burgers pretty early on), though there was a problem with students going back for second helpings and with the helpers eating the watermelon during set-up. It is likely that if more money had been spent buying more food, that food would have been eaten. However, having more food at the event may not necessarily increase the attendance of the event. People who show up to attend, only to find the food has run out, may likely still hang out and talk with their friends for a bit. In terms of repeated attendance year-over-year, coming one year to find the food has run out will probably not deter someone from coming the next year, but may just encourage them to attend earlier.

The budget of this event should scale directly with the scope. One idea is that if excess food is purchased and not used, SEC should find orgs (such as Theta Tau or Tau Beta Pi, who both sell burgers frequently) who would be willing to purchase the extra burgers/buns.

Engagement and Impact

This event had a dual-nature to it: while it existed to provide the students of Cockrell and beyond with an engaging outdoor experience with food, friends, and games, Spring Cookout also served as a strengthening factor between SEC and its constituent member organizations.



Participant Impact

The outdoor spin to the event was definitely a strong driver in creating the total attendance population of ~230 people. Interestingly, because of the centralized location, a large subset of this population was drawn to the event from simply walking by. Spring Cookout also attracted 21 graduate and non-students - a value much larger relative to SECs mean of 8.5 (calculated with the sign-ins collected from six prior events on Airtable). This, as well as the fact that Engineering Activities was too conservative with their initial participant estimate, suggests that the event was definitely a magnet for many of the students who passed through the area. In fact, from the data collected via Airtable, 13% of total sign-ins were a direct result of students walking by the event. In this manner, impact on the student-side was certainly present and the event achieved its purpose. However, some of the member organizations mentioned in the post-event survey that they thought advertising should have been a little stronger in order to draw in members from outside SEC's organization network.

Participant Engagement

In terms of engagement, the day-of interviews were testimonials to the attractiveness of outdoor events, especially during the late springtime/early summer period. Every student interviewed agreed that "they preferred outdoor events to indoor ones" and that they wanted to see more of the same type of event in the future. When asked about possible improvements to the event, every student's response was limited to the low supply of food (which Engineering Activities was well-aware of). This is a good sign and suggests that are no areas other than food that warrant serious inspection. However, one of the problems cited in the event audit by many of the MALs on Engineering Activities was that attendees were simply taking food and leaving without interacting with the rest of the event. It is important to note that ~40% of the attendees that came to Spring Cookout were a member of one or more engineering organizations under SEC. Because of this, it is difficult to assess participant engagement on perception alone. In other words, most of the participants may have only stayed in the vicinity of the event because their organizations were providing social points as an incentive. It is quite likely that a significant proportion of the 60% outside of those involved in member organizations simply drifted through the event for the food. In order to measure this more effectively, sign-out/post-event feedback forms may be beneficial to track true engagement.

Member Organization Impact

Spring Cookout certainly brought many member organizations together under one cause and was definitely conducive to mixing between them. Impact-wise, Spring Cookout partnered with 11 member organizations and certainly kept them engaged.



Member Organization Engagement

The day-of interviews once again demonstrated that the introduction of food, games, and an outdoor environment in wonderful weather maximized engagement. Those who were members of our partner organizations participated in the pleasantries of the event as well and were not, by any means, confined to their tents. The post-event survey sent to the organizations themselves confirmed this as the three respondents (TxTPEG, SASE, and SWE) rated event engagement as an average of 4.67 of 5.

Overall, in terms of engagement/impact there is very little that Spring Cookout was lacking in. Half of the picture, the member organizations themselves, were very satisfied with the event and indicated that they were extremely likely to work with SEC for events like these in the future. Spring Cookout succeeded in impacting the individuals of Cockrell and beyond (the demographic distribution of the event is a testament to this), but, as noted earlier, it is nearly impossible to measure the engagement of those who were not involved directly with a member organization. Even so, it is important to note that three of the seven day-of interview respondents did not belong to an organization and still had positive remarks about the event. Essentially, while it may be necessary to collect more specific data on the subject, it is fairly obvious that the students of Cockrell and the broader UT population prefer outdoor activities over indoor ones and are more engaged during events like Spring Cookout because of it.

Conclusion

Planning Process

Overall, the planning process was strong in that it encouraged a high level of motivation on the part of SEC's member organizations (according to post-event responses) and began early enough to provide an ample amount of time for deliberations regarding logistical decisions. Areas of improvement include having a unified method of communication (GroupMe, Slack, etc.) and crowdsourcing ideas to the public and to the member organizations to get a better feel for what students want in terms of games, food, etc.

Marketing and Publicity

Spring Cookout in particular benefits from a strong word-of-mouth marketing because of its uniqueness as an event. The outdoor setting greatly impacted the number of participants (according to the day-of interviews) and should be a detail that is marketed more heavily for this event in the future. Spring Cookout also beat Engineering Activities' participant estimates by about 20-30 people and was greater than the reach of the Facebook event. To better the publicity outlets, it may be beneficial to pursue other face-to-face avenues.



Logistics and Day-Of

The day-of performance was strong and definitely worked well with Green Events. In the future, however, it may be necessary to increase the number of volunteering spots for set-up. From the day-of interviews, it was also suggested the Engineering Activities committee consider other times during the day to hold the event. Lastly, it seems that the communication between SEC and the member organizations was near flawless and coordination was maintained throughout the duration of the event.

Financials

The event ran over budget by about \$119, which is marginal but still relevant. It is also important to note that the food and resources provided at the event ran out, indicating that a larger budget is needed to ensure that every participant receives the full array of food options. Engineering Activities should also consider asking the member organizations to help ease the budget, although this would be unnecessary if the budget was indeed expanded. It is also important to note that the average cost per person was exceedingly low even though participants' marginal utility was kept high - this is a great sign that Spring Cookout is a highly sustainable event.

Overall Assessment

	Planning	Publicity	Logistics	Financials	Impact
Rating	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Yellow

Suggested Future Targets

- Decrease cost per attendance to \$3.50
- Increase share of Facebook publicity reach to 10%
- Participant satisfaction rating of at least 4 out of 5 (if check-out form is available)

