Contact Name: J. Amber Acosta
Department(s): Memorial Student Center
Email: amber@msc.tamu.edu

Name of HIP: Aggie Reaching Out — Student Directors and Subcommittee Member Experience
Approximate # of TAMU students involved in the HIP: 50

Please check the TAMU learning outcome(s) associated with this HIP:

Bachelor’s:  □ Master the depth of knowledge required of a degree  □ Demonstrate critical thinking  □ Communicate effectively  □ Practice personal and social responsibility  ☒ Demonstrate social, cultural, and global competence  □ Prepare to engage in lifelong learning  ☒ Work collaboratively

Master’s:  □ Master the degree program requirements  □ Apply subject matter knowledge  □ Communicate effectively  □ Use appropriate technologies  □ Develop clear research plans  □ Choose ethical course of action

Doctoral:  □ Master the degree program requirements  □ Apply a variety of strategies and tools  □ Communicate effectively  □ Develop clear research plans  □ Use appropriate technologies  □ Teach and explain the subject matter

Please check the QEP learning outcome(s) associated with this HIP:

□ Improve student learning by developing habits and skills for lifelong learning — Curiosity, Initiative, Independence, Transfer, Reflection
☒ Improve student learning by developing habits and skills for integrative learning — Connections to experience, Connections to discipline, Transfer, Integrated communication, Reflection and self-assessment
Abstract

Aggies Reaching Out (ARO) is an outreach/mentorship program designed to promote the value of higher education in communities located in south Texas. In the summer, ARO Directors, Subcommittee Members and Counselors travel to south Texas and spend a week working with 8th grade students, planning and implementing activities, and living with host families. In the fall, ARO Directors and Subcommittee Members coordinate and implement the ARO Reunion weekend designed to expose 8th and 9th grade students to college life at Texas A&M University.

The ARO Directors and Subcommittee Members experience is designed to develop these student leaders who will ultimately construct and implement the week-long ARO program in south Texas and the ARO reunion held in the fall on campus. ARO Directors and Subcommittee members participate in weekly planning meetings, weekly leadership development meetings, trainings, and retreats. For ARO Directors in particular, they participate in additional trainings and receive direct advisor feedback from the ARO graduate assistant and MSC LEAD advisor. ARO Counselors are then provided with feedback on a weekly basis about task completion and overall program facilitation.

In addition, ARO Counselors are also selected to help facilitate the ARO Program. While their time with ARO is more limited, they also attend trainings both before and during the ARO experience. They are provided with key reflection time to come to see the integrative and lifelong learning that occurs as a result of participation in the ARO Program.

Here are the current learning outcomes for ARO Counselors:

**Counselors will:**
- Develop leadership and communication skills through interactions with students, peers, parents, and staff.
- Gain mentoring competencies in working with underrepresented, pre-adolescent students.
- Explore and appreciate the value of one’s own college education.
- Achieve a greater sense of self and one’s own life aspirations.
- Recognize the societal dilemma of the enrollment gap among racial/ethnic minorities in higher education.
- Practice engagement in local and global civic activities. Demonstrate social, cultural, and global competence, including the ability to recognize diverse economic, political, cultural and religious opinions and articulate the value of a diverse and global perspective.
- Work collaboratively, including the ability to consider different points of view, participate effectively in teams, and work with others to support a shared purpose or goal.

Description of the activity

a) **Invest time and effort to purposeful tasks.** Please describe the length of time of the experience.
The ARO Directors experience is a 13-month experience and the ARO Subcommittee Member experience is a 9-month experience. ARO Directors and Subcommittee Members may devote between 2-10 hours per week on planning various aspects of the overall ARO experience.

Selection, Training, and Development of ARO Committee: During this time, ARO Directors work collaborative to build their ARO team including the recruitment, selection, and training of ARO Subcommittee Members and Counselors.

ARO Directors work to plan and facilitate weekly meetings, in which ARO Directors and Subcommittee Members discuss program conceptualization, promotion, production, evaluation, training, motivation, management, fiscal accountability, interpersonal and leadership skill development, risk management procedures, counselor and participant curriculum development, and decision making.

ARO Counselors are selected in February and attend 2 intensive trainings throughout the spring semester. At these trainings, they receive instruction regarding risk management procedures, motivation, interpersonal and leadership skill development, mentoring, diversity, and participant curriculum.

The culminating experience for all is the week-long ARO Program in south Texas in May. It is during this time period that substantial time is invested as the content of the program takes place for 12 hours daily Monday-Friday. It is during this week that the Texas A&M students work hands-on with the program participants, their families, teachers and school administrators, local business speakers, host families, and Former Students to provide this outreach/mentorship opportunity.

b) **Interact with staff, advisors, and/or faculty about substantive matters usually over extended periods of time.**

All ARO Directors and Subcommittee Members interact with the MSC LEAD Staff Advisor and the ARO Graduate Assistant on a weekly basis. The size of the Director and Subcommittee team ensures that every student on the team will get to know the staff in addition to the other students on the committee. Time is spent discussing programmatic aspects, as well as issues like child protection training, risk management, and access and equity issues tied to higher education. In addition, Directors and Subcommittee members meet with staff in the Department of Multicultural Services to cover issues of interacting with and programming for individuals of other cultures and ways to learn from these experiences. Students’ firsthand interactions with staff and graduate assistants allows them to benefit from the experience of these professionals and engage in conversations on how to handle inevitable challenges when they arise in the organization. Due to the intense experience over the extended period of time devoted to this organization, students form meaningful relationships with staff and often seek them out as resources when experiencing issues in their academic and personal life.
In addition, all Texas A&M students on the ARO Program interact with either the MSC LEAD Staff Advisor or ARO Graduate Assistant throughout the week of the program. During the week, most of the interaction between staff and students occurs during the intentional leadership development time built into the daily schedule.

c)  **Interact with peers about substantive matters usually over extended periods of time.**

Students interact with their peers through committee meetings, subcommittee meetings, training & development sessions, and informal gatherings. Students work side by side to coordinate ARO programs throughout their time on the committee.

d)  **Experience diversity through contact with people who are different from themselves**

The ARO Director and Subcommittee experience allows the student leaders involved to experience diversity through people who are different from themselves.

Most of the ARO Directors and Subcommittee members self-identify as Caucasian/White. However, they are diverse in hometown, major, gender, and other demographics that impacts their diversity of thought. As they work together towards a common goal they are challenged to develop new ways of thinking about and responding to different situations.

In addition, the majority of ARO participants are underrepresented youth (Hispanic/Latino, African American/Black, Multiracial/Biracial) who live in south Texas. The ARO Directors, subcommittee members, and counselors travel to south Texas and many are experiencing an environment different from ones they have been a part of in the past. Students live with host families for the week-long experience which allows students to engage in conversations with diverse individuals in an informal, unstructured setting.

To prepare the Texas A&M students for this experience, they are engaged in discussions on how to mentor someone different from themselves and the various cultural, economic impacts facing the ARO Participants that may affect their view of attaining a higher education.

e)  **Receive frequent feedback about their performance – both formal and informal – in settings that allow them to respond to that feedback**

The ARO sub-committee members receive feedback on their planning process continuously from ARO Directors. ARO Directors also receive feedback from the ARO Executive Directors, MSC LEAD Executive Staff, the MSC LEAD Advisor, and the ARO Graduate Assistant. There is also a debriefing following the ARO Reunion and the ARO program.
There are certain aspects of the program that are evaluated in the ARO Counselor assessments and in the ARO Participant assessments. The following year’s planning team has access to these assessments in order to make programmatic improvements.

f) Are provided opportunities to integrate synthesize and apply knowledge gained from their classroom/discipline to their co-curricular experience and vice versa. Students are provided opportunities to discover the relevance of learning through application and practice in a range of contexts.

ARO students have the ability to practice public speaking, working in teams and groups, and demonstrating global and social competence while participating in the ARO program. In addition, we have a variety of majors who take and apply their classroom knowledge and skills to the planning and implementation of our program. Most notably, education majors and sociology majors lend themselves nicely to this program. The education majors have the opportunity to spend a week in a classroom setting. Sociology majors get an opportunity to see societal issues, such as the enrollment gap for ethnic minorities, as they participate in this cultural immersion experience for a week.

g) Are provided opportunities to become aware of their values and beliefs and thus to better understand themselves in relation to others and the larger world.

The ARO week-long program provides opportunities for profound introspection for Directors, Subcommittee members, and Counselors. Assessment of the program provides evidence that these students gain a better understanding of their own background, achieve a greater sense of self, and explore the value of their own college education.

Assessment

The ARO Program conducts an annual assessment after the ARO Program has concluded in May. All students who served as ARO Counselors are sent an online assessment that is learning outcomes based. The ARO Directors and Subcommittee members are also assessed throughout the year with informal observations and reflections.

In addition ARO Directors, write and utilize learning contracts throughout the year, in which they have an opportunity to assess their individual learning. These contracts are living documents that continue to change and evolve as students meet their personal goals.