GQ  Is the term *social justice* commonly understood by the campus community?

The group was asked what people think of when they hear the words “social justice.” The first person to respond said “equity,” while another said “a lack of services and support for disadvantaged populations.” Ethnicity, cultural identity, and cultural politics came into play when a third person chimed in with “multicultural populations diversity,” and a fourth played off that with “empowerment of those populations.” Another person talked of “history” and “backgrounds.” History also popped up a few more times as discussion of this question continued. There is agreement that social justice has a “history.” “Access for disability” was discussed as something the group thought people didn’t talk about on campus in relation to social justice.

The group also reached unanimous agreement when asked whether or not “human rights” are an important part of social justice. Not surprisingly, the first phrase to pop up following this agreement was “civil rights.” This lead to an affirmation that lesbian/gay/bi/transgendered rights are also a part of social justice. Furthermore, one faculty member commented on student awareness at SF State compared to another campus that this person lectures at, “Our students are enormously aware of these issues, very different from students in other places where I go guest lecture.”

Shared governance is an issue where some interesting points were raised. When the notion of it being democratically shared on campus was brought up, one faculty member stated, “Students were saying that, in my class, they were saying it does not go hand in hand… They said they don’t feel that there’s a participatory model where their voice is heard.”

This issue gave rise to a recent “law” passed on campus that outlawed smoking outside of designated areas. The “law” further reduced the overall number of designated smoking areas on campus. This is where this faculty member’s students had an issue with this concept of shared governance. Should shared governance be part of social justice? As this participant put it, “What we’re hearing is yes, our students believe it should. But it hasn’t been achieved here.”

When asked if SF State displayed a commitment to shared governance, there was a near-unanimous “no” from the faculty members. The first example given condemning SF State was the imposing of furlough days on faculty. As one person put it, they “really don’t understand how, what, [they] have ‘agreed’ to take a furlough.” This person further commented that it is not only faculty who are upset by this, but students as well because of the learning time they are forced to give up.

Another issue raised by faculty was the “rationing system” imposed on faculty when it comes to open seats in a classroom. As another person put it, “We have seats that we are happy to put students in but the students who have 16 units, we’re not allowed to put them in the seats even though we have the seats….We have to wait for four weeks to get them in.”

This participant also pointed out that, “If we have shared governance, we would all be involved in creating a rationing system that provided as much access as possible to students rather than imposing a system that actually is not sufficiently fine.” The important thing to focus on here is the assertion that, if there truly were shared governance, then everyone would be involved in creating a rationing system. This participant suggests that SF State clearly does not demonstrate a commitment to shared governance because there was no communal process here. It is just a rationing system that has been imposed upon faculty without their input.
Although, one faculty member stated that he did believe SF State showed a commitment to shared governance, but at the “department level.” He said: “I have seen a great commitment to shared governance and in a sense both and, uh, it usually takes a form of decisions being made, decisions then being objected to and there is a step back and there is a voting process and whatever the outcome of the vote has been that’s the way the department has moved forward. In that sense I have seen the shared governance process at work.”

Communication was noted as being a key concept when the group was asked for suggestions on how the campus can improve its commitment to social justice. “Communication, like this forum, we are actually having a dialogue about what are the topics. But before decisions are made.” The key here is “before decisions are made.” The moderator summed this up in a comment: “So it would be a more socially just campus if we were involved in the decision making.”

There was nearly complete unanimous agreement. However, despite this, one faculty member did point out that such a process would simply not be feasible in most situations on campus: “That’s not really practical. I mean, we can do that for some decisions, but it simply isn’t practical for much of the day to day practicalities that have to occur.” This person implied that a discussion on every decision to be made or vote to be passed simply wouldn’t be practical in the long run. It would slow down the campus far too much. The participant went on to say, “I think larger, complex university issues – I’m not certain you can give them a full hearing.” This participant also pointed out that, because such a process isn’t feasible, “we have to trust someone in a representative system and that’s maybe where there’s a gap between decision makers and people that represent some of the staples.”

A further comment brought in the notion of top-down models and how things are currently done on campus, how things have been done “uniformly across the campus.” Further comments were made about how “it’s amazing how little has to be done uniformly if you probe a little bit,” but we also live in an era where uniformity is demanded.

When the subject of having a person on campus specifically for a social justice job, a “social justice person,” was brought up, the discussion somewhat went off on a tangent with discussion about two people who had previously been hired for the job, but discussion quickly came back around to the topic at hand. One faculty member made an interesting comparison when talking about a recent meeting of the UC regents: “The regents for UC just met around the issues that have been, albeit isolated incidents, that have happened at three campuses. And so you’ve got people at the level of the regents who are delegating policy for all the UC system and, um, you sort of see someone in this role on the campus as someone who would be more responsible for directing a similar kind of process.”

This notion of people delegating policy gave rise to a suggestion of having a social justice committee rather than just a single person. As one person put it, “I am more and more convinced that if we’re going to spend money, I would like to spend it by getting groups of people on board, by getting folks across colleges to really start projects to increase social justice on this campus.” The important thing, however, is that it be a “cross-college committee.” In response to this, one person pointed out that “you can’t get that much done” on a committee, basing this on prior experience of working within a committee.

The talk around a committee expanded further beyond simply being a group of people being in charge of social justice issues on campus. One faculty member put a unique spin on it: “What I’d like to see, lets spin this out a little bit, so supposing we had our usual one for each college. That person would not just be on a committee but would be charged with projects and other works and having to make a report at the end of each year on the advancement of social justice within that college.” It’s not just issues, but events
and the organizing of said events that this group would be charged with. Another person took it a step further by adding in that, when this group goes to make their report, that this participant would “like to see a calendar of events in social justice so that everyone around can know there’s a central place to go to and participate.” This point saw unanimous agreement from the focus group attendees.

**GQ Are the terms community service/civic engagement commonly understood by the campus community?**

Almost immediately one person gave a rather unique response, “I think it’s understood but it’s embraced differently by different colleges.” When asked to clarify on this statement, this person responded by saying, “Part of it is I don’t know what other colleges do other than some of the activities I’ve done through the ICCE where you do meet people from other departments.” This participant said that the notion of it being embraced differently stems from the fact that this person doesn’t know what other colleges do unless working on activities through the ICCE. This implies a level of isolation between colleges unless it comes to something dealing with collaboration between faculty like the ICCE activities. This person further commented that, in this process of revision on campus, this person would like to see SF State “become the community service civic engagement campus of the CSU.” This person wants to see SF State become a place “where people will pick this campus because they knew they were coming here and that was going to be a definite and solid component of their education.” This can only be done by starting with the erosion of this isolation and greater awareness of these terms both between colleges themselves and between colleges and students.

Another person chimed in that they do not see an understanding of community service/civic engagement on campus. This participant said: “I purposely chose the position [at SF State], because of sitting at home and reading the job description for my department, going online, and reading about this institution in terms of it being this wonderful civic conscious engagement [campus].” However, this person’s expectations have not been met. The participant continues: “I come here and I’m shocked that it is not happening. There’s this small core of people that you see that are engrossed and engaging and try different methods of service learning and you see these faces in Jerry’s office. You see the same people and this is a campus with all of these folks and I’m like, ‘What is going on?’ And I have been extremely disappointed in what I’ve seen so far.”

When specifically talking about what comes to mind when someone says the words “civic engagement,” a response that garnered a bit of agreement was that students don’t know what this phrase means. As one person put it, “I hear students say ‘I don’t know what that is. What is that?’” The fact remains, as another put it, that “students are not as aware about our civic engagement community service mission.” Another person chimed in by saying that “service learning” is a term that students know. It is a term that they can identify with, perhaps, because it is not as bold as a phrase like “civic engagement.” Service, perhaps, is able to communicate more on the level of a student than a word like engagement. It depends entirely on the implied meaning that a student takes from such a phrase.

The group didn’t expand much on whether or not the environment and environmental activities can be considered a part of civic engagement/service. A few people acknowledged their agreement, but one person in particular simply said “lukewarm.” Another person took civic engagement in a completely different direction, saying, “When I think of civic engagement, I think of the connection that links people to government or governance somehow and so sometimes activism in the community may or may not make that full wing, right, it just might be out there in the public arena.”

Perhaps, then, you could consider environmental activities to be part of civic engagement, but really, it depends on the person. It depends on what they think of when it comes to a phrase like civic engagement.
In asking this question, it’s almost as if telling the group that environmental activities are part of civic engagement and the rest is simply gauging their response. As the moderator put it, “it depends on who you talk to, you know, the definition or what that means to people really depends on who you talk to and that different teachers/different students that students maybe aren’t as keyed in to these concepts as faculty are but that they might practice these concepts without giving them the label, without thinking, like you say ‘I don’t know what means’ but they’re doing it; they’re volunteering but they might not think of volunteering with the label that we talk about on campus.” This ties back into students identifying with service learning rather than civic engagement. The definition, and term, students use to label their service is different, but as the moderator says, they’re doing it. It is important to remember, then, that definitions are subjective, hence why they differ from person to person (in this case, from the faculty/campus to the students).

Interesting enough, faculty did agree that, despite what was discussed above, that students do demonstrate an understanding of certain level social consciousness/social awareness. One faculty member remarked, “I’ve seen here they are far more socially aware than the students I have seen at any other specifically business schools.” Not really content to label this as an awareness of social justice or social responsibility, the faculty instead chose to identify it as an awareness of “social injustice.” The group implied that while students may not be aware of social responsibility or social justice issues in the way the campus is aware of them, the students are fully aware of the social injustice in the world around them. One person strongly emphasized this by saying, “Our students can name every historical injustice.”

On the subject of improving the commitment to CECS, the moderator asked for responses to be focused, “improving our commitment on campus has to do with, he says, values and furthering it has to do with activities.” One faculty member posed a question in response to this, “One of the reasons we even have the issue of civic engagement comes from the assumption that the university is disengaged, right?” This person further remarked, “A lot of people operate with that model that there are things the university is there to do - educate, and don’t necessarily see the engagement as a significant part of that process of education.” The big issue with improving the commitment at SF State is consolidating those values of education and engagement. We cannot push forward any type of improvement if people continue to see these two issues as separate (with one being more important than the other). Another person caught on to this and said, “We have to change that – seeing it as a whole – it’s always an add-on. You have to see it as a whole package.” In a way, we can effectively “improve our commitment…by linking it with ways of furthering it,” by linking it with education.

Communication was brought up, again, as a key way of improving and furthering the commitment. One person suggested the creation of a website centering around social justice activities: “With activities this website type of idea where all the social justice activities for different classes, different exercises, or things that are related to social justice that are going on around campus that where students, for example the students that were feeling we ‘talk the talk, but don’t walk the walk’ I could say, ‘Well, let’s look at the website, you know, what are people doing in different departments?’” In this example, communication is the key that links engagement with education. Tied into this whole aspect of communication is the notion of recognition for community work. As one person put it, “We do have the ceremony in April where we recognize a student and a community leader and then a faculty member, but we are talking about one representation per group per year.” Another said, “valuing what we do is just not recognized.” Many people get shafted by this “one representative per group” method of recognition. There is a clear desire to be valued both from this person and a couple other people who spoke up. Another person came up with an idea, saying, that recognition “could also be fairly simple and just tie back into the web thing, you could just feature everything.” That is to say, it would be fairly easy to recognize outstanding projects by simply featuring them on this proposed website.
Another important issue raised by this focus group was the distinction between social justice and CECS. As one person put it: “When I think CECS, I think more kind of relating it to the service aspects on RTP, for instance. When I think social justice, I think of it more as a personal area of interest.” A couple faculty members commented together, saying they “see CECS as an avenue…for social justice.” Another person chimed in, “I always keep social justice in terms of principles and history and then CECS is action.” In this sense, we get a clear, defining line between the two. Social justice is seen more as something that gives a defining set of principles and CECS is the action that a faculty member takes based upon those principles. It’s a case of defining this distinction through a “concept/action” dichotomy.

The last part of this section dealt with how the campus can improve its commitment to social justice. The first thought to pop up was a “declaration of values,” as one faculty member firmly stated. However, as this participant pointed out, that declaration would be nothing more than lip service without any action because the “values get reinforced through activity and action.” To further cement the practical application of a set of values and action to enforce those values, one person said they “would like to see college councils be much more engaged with what we can do as a college to improve leadership, wisdom, innovation.” This is a clear set of values that need to be reinforced by these college councils, these proposed social justice committees.

GQ To what extent do the requirements for RTP provide sufficient encouragement for faculty to do community service/civic engagement work?

The first faculty member to speak up following this question, one who had to leave the group early shortly after answering, spoke with a tone that suggested she felt no stress with any of these requirements. Perhaps it is because, as this participant stated, it is done in a specific way in their department. This department’s RTP committee has “worked specifically to include social justice” as part of this process. As this participant further commented, “I felt like my tenure process was facilitated because I matched the things that I have sort of, my research, my scholarship, and my community service, they work together, they are integrated, and that works in my department.”

Following this participant’s departure, the moderator moved the discussion to more specific areas. First, the group was asked about this raised bar in terms of publication and whether or not they think that it is changing the nature of SJCECS activities or faculty. One faculty member said no, stating that what is changing is the status of faculty members. He said, “The higher the profile of our faculty, the better able we are to get our students into good places.” In essence, these faculty are “stepping up to the plate” to help students, despite the fact that service is not the most important factor in getting promoted.

An unfortunate side effect of the shift in focus on RTP requirements is the emphasis that is now placed on research. This has lead to a vehement resistance of teaching undergrad students. As one faculty member put it, the problematic issue here is “the unwillingness to teach undergraduate education and much more of a focus on teaching graduate students and research because of this issue.” Research/scholarship and publication are defining factors at this point. This has lead many faculty to shift their focus away from service and placing an emphasis on research and publication - something that this participant implies is linked to a focus on teaching graduate students. Another person commented on this, saying that it is fairly common knowledge that with “most universities that it’s your publications and your teaching…[that] take precedence over what makes you an outstanding faculty member and your contribution to the body of knowledge and your advancement in the field.” This person further commented that he has gotten around this lack of emphasis on service, and has been able to “take service and incorporate that in my teaching as well as my publications and really it can be very time consuming, extremely time consuming, but is also very rewarding.” At this point, to this participant, it became a matter of staying true to one’s self. This assertion garnered unanimous agreement from the faculty members in the group.
Despite the negativity surrounding the raised bar, faculty members generally agreed that they haven’t been affected much, if at all. One person replied, saying, “I have received a lot of support from my department and from the administration, the school administration supports what I do.” Another faculty member, when asked if they feel valued as well, replied, “In my department? Yeah.” This is interesting to note, particularly because there was some degree of disdain in previous discussions regarding the lack of recognition faculty receives for their work.

Continuing on, one faculty member made a suggestion. She found the situation regarding research, publication, and service to be inefficient, “Why the heck do we have these individually based, we each have to do each of these three things.” She proposed to change this: “How about your department as a whole constructs a team that contributes to the community in a way that contributes to scholarship, to teaching, and to service? And you, as an individual, if you feel it’s in your interest to do each of those things…you can join the team.” She specifically commented on how each faculty member being required to do each of these three things doesn’t seem like an efficient way to run things (especially when people have different strengths). Another person later commented on this, saying that when they first came to SF State, they found it to be difficult to work in all three areas. She raised an important question, “Why do we have to be so strong in all three areas?” This discussion really begs that question. Why is faculty required to be proficient in all three areas? This process puts faculty in a corner and forces them to work in an area they may not be strong in. One participant later laments, “I’m a qualitative researcher, I’m not a strong quantitative researcher.”

**GQ Is the budget sufficient to address the social justice values and commitment to civic engagement-community service we already have on campus?**

Before the moderator was able to finish the question someone said they believe that the cuts have affected the university’s ability to support CSE activities. Once the moderator did finish, two more people voiced that, they too, believe the budget cuts have negatively affected the university’s ability to support these activities. One faculty member took it to the next level, going so far as to discuss this in terms of how it also affects the people who work on campus. From a personal perspective, the participant stated: “it directly impacts it because what do I end up doing? I end up going out and doing some other work to make up my salary and that directly impacts the amount of time I can give to this job.” This gives rise to this participant’s assertion that the budget cuts have had a direct financial impact not only on the campus, and the programs it can support, but also on the people and the faculty, behind those programs. They are forced to look elsewhere to make up the money that is lost as a result of the pay cuts that they are forced to take.

There was a large amount of collective disdain as well when the subject of the new withdrawal policy popped up. As one faculty member said, her course is designed with a fieldwork course attached to it. This professor’s department is not a fieldwork department and so there isn’t anyone actively working to place this participant’s students out into the community. As this person put it, “I don’t have anyone to do placements so students find their own placements and what we’ve always done is they drop if they can’t find a placement. It’s really hard to find placements right now.” However, dropping or withdrawing has become a painstaking effort now. The participant went on to say, “The drop period is so much shorter and they’re penalized if they withdraw.” Another group member even spoke with disgust towards the new policy, saying, “Ugh, what a crisis!”

Another important issue brought up in regards to the budget cuts has been, as this participant put it, the “strong attrition rate.” “Faculty have been leaving,” this participant put it. It is clear to see that the budget crisis has taken its toll on many faculty at SF State, especially those who chose to leave rather than stay. This person put a positive spin on the departure of faculty as well: “Faculty have been leaving and so, in
almost a counter-intuitive sense, it first makes the faculty who are staying very attuned to the fact they are staying because they have a very strong commitment to the philosophies of the campus - the social justice, the students, etc.”

**GQ How are budget cuts impacting student demographics?**

As one faculty member stated, their “department recently declared impaction…we have people applying for the major, we have close to 700 applicants for the major, and we’ll be taking, I think, 180 or 160.” This paints an alarming picture - over 500 students are going to be turned down from their major of choice. That translates to 500 students whose dreams are being destroyed by the budget cuts. The cuts have given rise to a very specific checklist to determine who gets into this program as well. One faculty member commented, “In trying to develop criteria for selecting those people, apart from GPA, we’ve weighted first to go to college, on financial aid, and first to finish high school in their family.”

Unfortunately, rather than support any commitment to social justice, this checklist effectively restricts the availability of the major. This puts it in direct conflict with one part of social justice that SF State claims to be committed to - equal access.

The last couple points lead nicely into what was brought up next - the climate that the budget cuts have created. Are they affecting everyone in the same way? As one person put it, it’s not just that faculty are leaving, they simply “aren’t coming anymore.” Another person commented on this, saying that faculty are “becoming less cooperative, less collaborative, less willing to do something, try something, etc…You don’t have a climate that creates that openness, that willingness.” Perhaps this climate has become a deterrent for new, prospective faculty. As discussed earlier, one group member has only been on campus for a couple years. This participant specifically chose the position at SF State because of the social justice/CECS commitments. Unfortunately, however, these commitments have taken a backseat as a result of the budget cuts.

The faculty agreed that current students are attending school in a less than ideal learning environment. One faculty member commented: “For students it’s dreadful, and the chaos of this semester with furloughs has been ridiculous.” There was also a train of discussion linking stress with “the number of units they can take with the amount of working that they have to be doing outside to try to get the money and their entire notion about how they’re going to finish college.” It’s no secret that college students don’t have much money. Many have to work multiple jobs just to make ends meet. Someone despairingly commented on this: “They have to work multiple jobs and take classes. I’ve seen them dropping out.”

**GQ Do you think there is adequate communication/collaboration on campus regarding social justice and community service/civic engagement activities?**

This question lead to the subject of sharing activities on campus and then to a discussion about a faculty club. In response, one participant said, “People need a chance to just have a casual conversation outside the hallway about things.” It simply boils down to having a place to hang out. One person added onto this, saying, “Working downtown, it makes coming to campus without a place to go…Sure, I’ll come out for this, but after this, I have no place to go. The library doesn’t exist anymore.” Another person answered this with a question: “Where can I hang out?” Again, it essentially boiled down to having a place to hang out and this notion that people need a place talk, a place where faculty can easily convene and have a conversation.

The discussion did take a different turn, however, when one person commented that they, along with other faculty members, “used to get together from different departments…a lot of extremely good projects got started there.” This same person commented that having an official club came with both a
plus and a minus for the administration. The plus was the aforementioned projects that would likely get
started in such a group. The negative would be the “ability to get faculty across colleges to be solid.”
They would become a cohesive unit, able to band together and resist administrative directives more
easily. In this sense, the group would serve to raise consciousness among faculty. It would, effectively,
create a more tight-knit community.