Senior Faculty 1 & 3 (notes) Analysis
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The senior faculty members participating in focus groups at San Francisco State are, for the most part, in agreement in terms of their assessments of the university and its students. From traits of successful students to university improvements, this faculty is passionate and concerned for the university's future.

What is a successful student?

The faculty started by speaking about what makes students successful. Interestingly, they feel that graduation and schoolwork are equally important as what students accomplish on a larger scale. One faculty member describes a successful student as, “...someone who has had the opportunity to do more than classroom work. To do a project with a professor, do some kind of internship.”

Similarly, two separate faculty speak about the value of life skills in student's success, “the social skills, ability to disagree, life skills, they get them in college, not in the classroom,” and, “they are expected to continue their work outside the classroom. You aren't the only part of their intellectual life.” In addition, when a student is “able to think for oneself” and “pursue topics creatively” that is a measure of success. According to this group, a successful student is a well-rounded student.

What are the factors when students are having a hard time moving toward graduation? What does SF state do and not do to assist students in their goal toward graduation?

While the faculty would like the students to apply their skills outside of the classroom, it seems that student's individual skills within the classroom are lacking. Faculty have witnessed a general deficiency in basic skills such as writing and communication. A faculty member ponders this inadequacy, “...one of the biggest problems is that the writing problem has not been solved when they get to me as juniors. They are not ready for written English, is that because of high school or because they are ESL students or both...” This faculty member agreed: “The problem is their conceptual learning, they can't integrate. They have basic conceptual difficulties, applying stuff.”

One faculty member from the Math department noted, “the lack of basic math skills is a real problem... [students need to] recognize how much work they have to put in.” There was also a general consensus that the school should be assisting students more in these areas, “If we had lots more tutoring...showing students how to learn and study and be successful...give them great study skills and strategies...” As well, “the faculty need to know more about what is being offered in terms of tutoring so we can better help students.” It is clear that the senior faculty believe that San Francisco State students could use more assistance with basic scholarly skills.

What are barriers to student success?

While attaining these communication skills may be difficult, many faculty spoke about additional barriers to student's success. Most of the faculty acknowledged the financial hardship of most students. One participant said: “They work often times, 20, 30, 40 hours a week, and the tears of exhaustion I get, not because they're not capable, or motivated, they're just trying to pay rent...how are you going to succeed when you have 2 hours of sleep? That's a huge factor.”

Another faculty member responded to this, citing two significant problems: “[1]The financial aid has gone down and (2), tuition has gone up...[In addition,] job opportunities have gone down- [and] they're taking anything they can.” The necessity for students to work in order to stay in school cuts into the amount of time they put into their learning. Added one participant: “I don't think they have time to read,
do the things they have to succeed. You can't skim this material. You have to read it twice, and who has time?”

Furthermore, “90% of students are studying for a class 5 hours a week or less and that class is recommended 2-3 hours per classroom hour, that should be 10-15. We don't know everything about them, but I would agree they are studying a lot less than is required.”

Even if students did have time to study, the faculty agreed that “lack of classes and seats in classes is a huge problem.” Besides lack of seats, one faculty member explains the difficulty of understanding or completing what's required to obtain a degree, “we don't think about making it easy or convenient or reasonable. Even then, sometimes they don't even offer the class so the students can complete the requirement.” Therefore, it seems that besides internal factors, there are external factors to student success at SF State.

Do you have a sense of students' ability in the classroom?

Faculty would like to be able to help students more with their learning. A faculty member commented: “We get PhD's and we don't get them on how students learn. There could be more done to have really basic workshops on the research on how students learn and what helps them to learn.” Faculty want to play a more active role in student's success inside the classroom, but they feel that they don't have the tools to make that happen, “...how do we get those students on board to see that this is relevant?”

One faculty member even asserted that “students are turned off by education.” On the other hand, some faculty feel that despite their best efforts, students don't take advantage of what they offer. Said one participant, “I have documents, and sound files, and study sessions, regardless, often times they don't take advantage of what you offer to help them succeed.” In this same vein, “...students want to do well but don't know how.” There is a general sense that both faculty and students desire more information and tools to help move SF State in a better direction.

How does technology affect how students study and learn?

Most of these focus group participants agree that technology is heavily influencing how students learn and how professors teach. Some believe faculty should be embracing technology more, while others believe it hinders student's abilities. One faculty member remarked: “I feel like we're not taking advantage of the way the web works, what they're good at now, we're not taking the next step. What can we do to educate them, that's not the tried and true, three times a week, come to class...I feel like my lectures should be videoed. If you miss a class, you can watch a lecture. I don't know why we don't have that structure here by now.”

Similarly, this faculty member just started a Twitter account for her classes. She said: “instead of coming to class with handouts, I just put it up there, put it on my website, and that's another way to connect with students. That's how they do it. I haven't done a Facebook, but if we embrace it, I think it's another source of information.” Then again, this faculty member thinks that “…being constantly connected, makes [studying] a lot less efficient, and I don't think [students] have realized that…I think it's a real problem. I don't think we should wholeheartedly embrace that.”

Similarly, a faculty who teaches Chinese literature and art chimed in, “I don't want them spending any more time online than they do already, I think it's a detriment to them.” It is overwhelmingly clear that technology has created a new educational landscape that “requires teachers to teach differently since “students have a short attention span and are easily distracted.”
How has technology changed in the past 10 years?

For faculty in this group, how they use technologies offered on campus has, in general, been helpful to their teaching. However, some find that it is difficult at times to keep up. One faculty member expressed his concerns: “[Technology is] always different from semester to semester, you can't master and use it, it's a continual investment in teaching it, it's always changing. By the time we make a decision, students have moved on to something else.”

Some faculty would like to use classroom technology but see difficulty in implementing it. A participant commented: “I wish the university would get organized in terms of technology. For example, I use clickers in class, and students have to buy two different clickers, and other schools have made a choice, this is the clicker we are going to use, and I think students will feel more friendly toward it if they know and plus, providing some basic training to faculty, to why they should use that, how they can be used most effectively, faculty will feel more inclined to use it.”

In a similar way, there was a lot of discussion about rooms with projectors: “the fighting that goes on to get a room with a projector, I was going to go up to 60 students just to get one of those rooms. That's a big deal. If you plan a classroom with a certain technology, and 3 rooms have it...” Most faculty in this group have used iLearn and have found that it's a useful teaching tool. Furthermore, they have found that the tech support for iLearn was “responsive.” It seems that if there was a bit more organization and supply of technology, many faculty would be happy to embrace it.

Have you observed a change in the balance of faculty in your department? What about service, research, teaching?

Faculty in this group are very passionate about their role at San Francisco State. One member of the English department said, “[The department] puts a big priority on teaching and research, I think service comes third...we take teaching super seriously.” A science professor agreed, “We view teaching and research as completely intertwined.”

Many faculty see service as a lesser priority. On the topic of service a faculty member stated: “There are some people on campus who have told their faculty not to do service since it won't count towards tenure and I'm sorry, that attitude is destroying shared communities. And if we're going to have a faculty that governs the university, we need to have administration that honors that service.” Another faculty member has noticed an “increase in expectation of uncompensated volunteer work. There's no release time anymore.”

In a similar way, “So much work is required, there's no time for our own work or professional growth.” Following in that vein, this faculty member explained, “Most of us are not very productive in published research, because most of us are always teaching. But also the administration doesn't want to reduce the load, because we need to do it to survive, so...” On a positive note, one department chair talked about his view of senior faculty research, “We gave them huge research expectations, larger than anything CSU has done before, and the result has been absolutely outstanding faculty.” It seems that given time and resources, faculty at SF State are fully capable of excellent teaching, research and service.

Did you use the faculty club when it was open?

Participants in this focus group would like to see a place where faculty can convene and relax. All of the faculty that were on campus when there was a faculty club utilized its services. One member would like to run into “colleagues that you may have been on a committee with that work across campus, and just sit down...” without “programming it into a meeting.” The consensus is that the faculty club was a
great place to be social and meet people. Currently, there's “no place for faculty to get together” and that “even a lounge,” a “space to meet...is better than nothing.” But the likelihood of a new faculty lounge seems to come down to money. Asserted one participant: “Faculty are not going to pay $100 a month for a faculty club. The university cannot afford the level of subsidy required to keep one going. It would be nice to see what other CSU campuses do. We are one of the few that doesn't have it.” It is clear that faculty at SFSU would like a place to congregate and relax.

**How have budget cuts affected you and your teaching?**

The budget cuts have clearly changed the university - from faculty to students and administration. One focus group member explained: “There's so much of the work that the faculty has to make work, mandates, or check the records, every time we ratchet down the budget, and that happens, it seems like, we're at the bottom of the funnel and all of these little adjustments have to be made. I have a teacher that should be funded...Why should we be figuring out ways to give a teacher something they deserve? It's just demoralizing. Every little squeeze, means more from me with less appreciation.”

The demoralization on campus seems to also resonate with students, According to a participant: “What I'm finding in morale and research is that my students are felling more, there's a malaise. I do feel like they have less motivation, less driving force to finish, they seem like they are despairing. I don't know what they can do to help us, we're all trying to be cheerleaders, and we're worried about ourselves, and I don't know what to do for them. I just feel that they're losing hope, and it's hard to see.”

In addition, one faculty member observed, “I do sense a lot....of fear on campus” and would like to see more “detailed, honest communication” about the budget. “For other faculty, the budget has changed their classroom environment: “I've had to change my curriculum detrimentally because of class size. I cannot supervise 45 individual research projects; I can [do] 30. So that experience of doing original research in a classroom is not the same, and it has affected my teaching enormously. I've had to adjust it so that I can still do research. Instead of getting individual attention, I say, well maybe you have to work in pairs, which is disastrous!”

With more students in classes (“our graduate courses are now like 21 [students], that's a lot more than 12 students”), one faculty member explains she's had to lower her standards for students,“I'm teaching more and more GE people, and fewer people are self-selecting for subject matter and are taking my class just because they could get it, and that means that the kind of expectation I can set for them is pushed down, people come in with no interest or prior knowledge...” It is evident that from larger class size, to lowered expectations, the decreased budget is putting an emotional strain on the majority of the campus and negatively affecting SFSU’s environment.

**I'd like to hear an especially memorable of exciting teaching experience you'd had at State.**

Despite the good deal of improvements that these senior faculty would like to see significant improvement on, there is always room for great experience or connection while at SF State.

“Talking about cost accounting and having a student who worked at a medical marijuana operation, using their vocabulary and using it as an example, and I thought, I'm in San Francisco now and I'm really happy to be here. It was just so fun, in 20 years...(laughs).”

“I team taught with biology, and it was great, we taught a course in the history of Chinese science.”

“It continues to be going in the field with my students. I go for hours, days, weekends, weeks, and the university, we have more restrictions, but we are still able to take our students out into the real world.”
“So many international organizations come through San Francisco on a regular basis, and having an international conference, and get speakers who I know are coming to come out and do special events for our students, and deals for our grad students at the conferences.”

“The mayonnaise moment, and it was in a small class talking about product development, and we talked about pizza around the world, and someone said, this is what our pizza's like, we got to go all around the world and see differences, and it was all happening right there.”

“I teach students how to read electrocardiograms and so they go to their jobs, EMT's, clinics, and it makes me feel like they can apply it to the real world.”

“There was a course I team taught on science and philosophy and it was during the great enlightenment and it was a wonderful course to teach, and I think they enjoyed having two different perspectives and two different backgrounds in the class.”