2007-2008 Teacher Scholars

Exploring SJSU's Dual Mission of Professional Preparation and Liberal Education: Understanding Why Our Students Want a College Degree
2007-2008 Teacher Scholars

- Gale Antokal ~ Humanities & the Arts
- Deanna Fassett ~ Social Sciences
- Ken Gerht ~ Business
- Stacy Gleixner ~ Engineering
- Peter Lee ~ Applied Sciences & Arts
- Mary McVey ~ Education
- Ferdie Rivera ~ Science
- Lorene Sisson ~ Library

Amy Strage ~ Faculty-in-Residence, Education
Our musings on student attitude led us to want to understand why students are here

- Many students bring a *consumer attitude* to the classroom (expecting a service/product in return for their investment of time and money).
- A consumer driven attitude towards getting a degree affects a wide range of student life from choosing a major to allocating time for studying.
- There is a mismatch between faculty and student perceptions on the purpose of getting a college degree.
- A better understanding of each others’ perception would help relationships between students and faculty and ultimately engage more students in what the university is truly all about.
Our Mission defines what we think is the role of SJSU

- In-depth knowledge of a major field of study.
- Broad understanding of the sciences, social sciences, humanities, and the arts.
- Skills in communication and in critical inquiry.
- Multi-cultural and global perspectives gained through intellectual and social exchange with people of diverse economic and ethnic backgrounds.
- Active participation in professional, artistic, and ethnic communities.
- Responsible citizenship and an understanding of ethical choices inherent in human development.
Student consumerism is reinforced in a number of valid sources

- When thinking of our student population, there were many substantial, valid reasons for being a consumer in their education.
  - There is strong family pressure to get a high paying job.
  - Colleges advertise how successful graduates are at getting good jobs.
  - We predominantly honor alumni who become wealthy.
  - Industry advertises a desire for practical knowledge that translates directly to the work force.
Student consumerism has been reported in the literature since way back!

- When we began researching the literature, we were surprised to find this problem being bemoaned from 1969 onwards!
- Most of the published articles are op-ed type pieces with little quantifiable data or solutions.
- One study of WPI Sociology students did a survey of consumer attitude in students.
  - 43% of students felt that they were entitled to a degree because they paid the tuition.
  - 73% said they would take a course in which they learned little but got an A.

“We’re the Customer-We Pay the Tuition”, *Teaching Sociology*, v30(1), p. 100-107, 2002.
We chose to understand why students are here and through understanding bridge the gap

1. Why do students attend college and want a degree? What is their perception of the value of education? How do these views differ by major demographic characteristics: gender, age, ethnicity, and major?
2. What are student consumer attitudes, to what degree are they held, and what kinds of students hold them?
3. What are student perceptions of the role of the university in their lives, and how do these perceptions affect the quality of their education?
4. How do these student perceptions affect the learning opportunities and activities in which they choose to participate?
5. What is the connection between student consumer attitude and participation in learning opportunities and activities?
6. In comparison, how do these student views differ from faculty perceptions of these issues?

2007-2008 Teacher Scholars
We have a 3 tiered plan to grapple with student consumerism

- Student Surveys
- Student Focus Groups
- Round Table Discussions of Faculty & Students

Tangible things faculty and students could do to truly engage in higher education
A survey was developed to answer our 6 research questions

- Primarily targeting undergraduates in a wide range of majors (600 students)
  - Art
  - Business
  - Engineering
  - Physics
  - Social Work
  - Comm 20 (broad range of majors)
- 38 bubble questions, 3 open ended (major, race, class taken in)
- Takes about 15 minutes
The survey probes at a wide range of student thoughts and attitudes

- Satisfaction with SJSU Mission and college in general
- Relationships with faculty and students in major
- Consumer attitude towards college
- Specific campus events and programs they engage in
- Reason for wanting a college degree
- Confidence in their future
The survey is rich with demographics to correlate with:

- Age, gender, race/ethnic background
- Major, GPA, # of credits
- Transfer, commuter
- How they are paying for school, first generation college student
- Time spent working, studying, relaxing, caring for family
Respondents represent a fairly even spread of demographics

- 196 students surveyed so far from:
  - Upper division business
  - Upper division social work
  - Lower division Comm 20
  - 1.5% surveyed were grad students

- Gender: 58.9% female, 38.1% male

- Age:
  - 18.3% less than 19
  - 49.6% 19-22
  - 18.3% 23-25
  - 7.1% 26-30
  - 5.1% over 30

- 35.5% report English is not their 1st language
- 53.8% Started at SJSU, 46.2% Transfer
- 31% live close or on campus, 69% commute
- 43% live with family
There is a lot of rich, subtle data in the survey

- 41.6% reported “no one I feel close to has graduated from or is attending college”
- 68% have no outside responsibilities (time or financial) for family
- Students report their ultimate degree objective is
  - 40.6% Bachelor’s
  - 41.6% Master’s
  - 6.6% Ph.D
  - 3% Professional certificate
  - 4.1% MD, JD, etc.
- Our students meet their college expenses with (could choose all that apply)
  - Their own money: 58%
  - Parents: 54.3%
  - Scholarships: 20.8%
  - Loans: 18.8%
These students are full time and spend more time relaxing then studying or working

- **Units this semester**
  - 1-6: 3%
  - 7-12: 28.9%
  - 13-17: 62.4%
  - >18: 3%

- **Self reported GPA**
  - <2.0: 5.6%
  - 2.01-2.5: 11.2%
  - 2.51-3.0: 34%
  - 3.01-3.5: 31%
  - 3.51-4.0: 14.2%
Students were asked why they are here

Why do you wish to earn a college degree? (Choose up to 2)

- Obtain a good paying job
- Prepare for a career or profession about which I’m passionate
- Become a better educated person
- Social status
- Meeting family expectations
- Other __________
A key concept in this study is understanding the disconnect between faculty and students’ opinions on the role of higher education.

Why do you think students choose to pursue a higher degree?

What do you think should be the reason they choose to pursue a higher degree?
Students think they are here to get a job they are passionate about and/or is good paying.

Why do you wish to earn a college degree?
They think we as faculty understand that!

What do you think PROFESSORS believe are STUDENTS’ primary reasons for earning a degree?

- good paying job
- passionate career
- better educated person
- social status
- family expectations
- other

- Students
- Student view of Prof
Students are satisfied and think we are accomplishing SJSU’s Mission

- How satisfied are you that your SJSU education and experiences are
  - Giving you in depth knowledge of a major field of study?
  - Giving you a broad understanding of sciences, social sciences, humanities, and the arts?
  - Creating skills in communication and critical inquiry?
  - How well, in general, do you like college?

1: Not satisfied at all   5: Very Satisfied
Students have given a great deal of thought and are confident in their future

- **Q14**: How confident are you that, in the long run, you will find a job or career that is personally satisfying?
- **Q15**: How much time have you spent trying to decide what your future life goals are?
- **Q16**: Are you pursuing a degree in an area of study about which you are truly passionate?
- **Q17**: How confident are you that, in the long run, you will find a job or career that is financially rewarding?

1: Not at all confident   5: Very Confident

1: No time at all   5: A great deal of time
Students report fairly good relationships with faculty and students.

1: Competitive, Sense of alienation
5: Friendly, Supportive, Sense of belonging

1: Discouraging, Unsympathetic
5: Approachable, Helpful, Encouraging
General satisfaction correlates well with good relationships with faculty and students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q5</strong></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.397(**), 0.000, 195</td>
<td>.202(**), 0.005, 195</td>
<td>.277(**), 0.000, 194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q6</strong></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.446(**), 0.000, 194</td>
<td>.354(**), 0.000, 194</td>
<td>.378(**), 0.000, 193</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Students on our campus have somewhat of a consumerist attitude

- Q8: Many indicate that instructors should treat students as if they are customers rather than apprentices.
- Q9: Many agree that if they are paying for their college education, they are entitled to a degree.
- Q10: But students are evenly divided as to whether instructors should take into account the grade they need in a particular course (for grad school, financial aid, etc.)
Student engagement is limited

While at SJSU, I have...
1: Never..3:Sometimes..5: Frequently

- Attended a MUSE class: 1.62
- Participated in the SJSU Reads Book Event: 1.28
- Attended tutoring or a workshop with LARC: 1.63
- Attended tutoring or a workshop with the Writing Center: 1.69
- Attended an SJSU sponsored talk or performance not related to my major: 1.97
- Participated in service learning (community service as part of an SJSU class): 1.92
- Participated in hands-on research in an SJSU lab or facility: 1.83
- Participated in an SJSU student club related to my major: 1.87
- Participated in an SJSU student club not related to my major: 1.71
- Attended an on campus talk or performance related to my major: 2.02
- Attended a workshop or event sponsored by the Career Center: 1.86
- Eaten at an on campus facility: 3.56
- Attended an SJSU sporting event: 2.08
- Taken an SJSU class that does not count towards my degree: 2.25
- Attended an SJSU religious service or event not affiliated with my religion: 1.23
- Attended an SJSU cultural or ethnic event not affiliated with my ethnic, cultural, or racial background: 1.57

2007-2008 Teacher Scholars
Students do not value the same components of a university education as faculty do

- Students are not engaged in any of the extracurricular activities we listed as important
- When asked to choose all that shaped their education and development while at SJSU, students chose:
A key factor of this study will be to understand how this consumerism and engagement correlates with other factors.

- With the majors we have surveyed so far, we have seen **no correlation** of consumerism or engagement with factors we hypothesized would be significant:
  - First generation college students
  - Transfer
  - Commuter
The work is still in progress

- Much more detailed analysis is needed to fully understand the correlations
- The surveying is still in progress
  - Upper division engineering
  - Upper division physics
  - Lower division art
- We need to enter and analyze the open ended responses for major and race/ethnicity
- Small focus groups will be conducted to clarify some impressions from the survey
1. **Why do students attend college and want a degree? What is their perception of the value of education? How do these views differ by major demographic characteristics: gender, age, ethnicity, and major?**

- We found that the two primary reasons students want a degree are “to obtain a good paying job” and “to pursue a career they are truly passionate about”
- We saw no change in this with age or gender (for the majors surveyed).
- The correlations based on ethnicity and major are still in progress.
Preliminary answers to our research questions

2. What are student consumer attitudes, to what degree are they held, and what kinds of students hold them?
   - Consumer attitude is moderately high on this campus
     - 55% agree or strongly agree that they are entitled to a degree if they pay the tuition.
     - 38% agree or strongly agree that the instructor should take into account the grade needed in a course (for grad school, financial aid, etc.).
   - Further in depth study of the data is under way but so far we have found no strong correlation with any demographic variable.
3. What are student perceptions of the role of the university in their lives, and how do these perceptions affect the quality of their education?

4. How do these student perceptions affect the learning opportunities and activities in which they choose to participate?
   - Students strongly feel SJSU is accomplishing its mission and are satisfied with their college experience.
   - However, they are very unengaged in SJSU events and clubs.
   - They said they “never” or “almost never” participate in all of the activities we listed as being an important part of SJSU’s campus.
   - They attribute classes (84.8%) and interaction with other students (69%) versus participating in SJSU sponsored events (12.7%) and clubs (21.3%) as shaping their education and development.
5. What is the connection between student consumer attitude and participation in learning opportunities and activities?

6. In comparison, how do these student views differ from faculty perceptions of these issues?
   - Our campus has a moderately high consumer score and a very low engagement score.
   - One of students’ primary goals for getting a degree is getting a “good paying job”. Students think faculty rank that reason **as even higher**!
   - Students don’t engage in activities that faculty feel are important in contributing to their development and education.
Your Thoughts…

- Our ultimate goal is to change both student and faculty behavior through better understanding of each other’s perspectives towards the role of higher education.
- What are your thoughts on tangible ways that this could be implemented into your classrooms?