

SJSU Campus Climate Survey 2015

Introduction

The SJSU Campus Climate Survey 2015 was administered as a web-based questionnaire in March and April 2015 to all current students, faculty, staff, and administrators. This report is a qualitative summary of major themes that arose from the open-ended comments resulting from a systematic reading and analysis of all the usable responses to two open-ended questions in the survey. All responses were read and coded by the same researcher in collaboration with a wider survey analysis team that analyzed the quantitative results from the rest of the survey.

Employees of SJSU (staff, faculty and administrators) were prompted with two open-ended questions, while students were only given one. The first question, for employees only, asked them to share details about any experience of harassment or discrimination they had on campus. It was worded as follows: “If you did experience harassment or discrimination, please explain the situation or event briefly.” It elicited 439 responses (34% item-level response rate). The second question was presented to all respondents and asked for general feedback about the campus climate. The question text was as follows: “We encourage you to add in your own words anything you would like to share about SJSU’s campus climate.” It elicited approximately 1686 responses (25% item-level response rate) from students, staff, faculty and administrators.

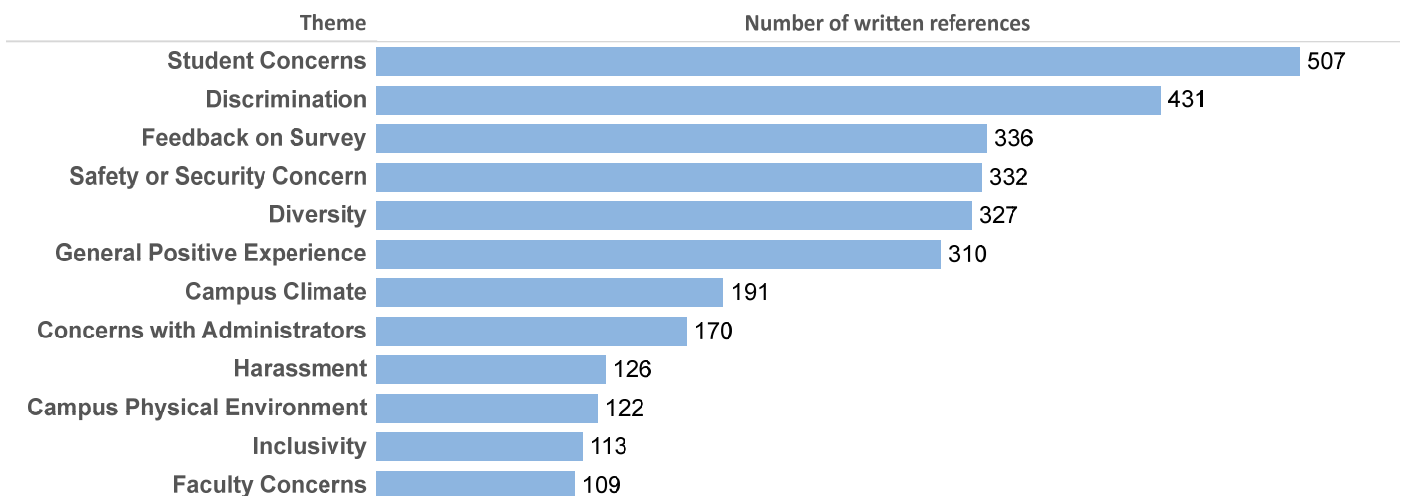
Throughout this report we use frequencies of various themes to convey a relative sense of how prevalent certain issues or sentiments were, but it should be noted that the quantities are only rough approximations based on an interpretation of the responses. Because the subject matter of the survey included attention to potential campus problems that may require further interventions, it is likely that more detailed categories were developed on negative responses than on praise or positive feedback. This should be taken into account when comparing relative frequencies. It should also be noted that every response, even a single sentence, may touch on multiple themes, and thus the total number of themes coded is greater than the total number of comments.

Campus climate findings

Many different topics were raised in the comments; this report focuses on the most prevalent and consistent ones. A total of 42 top-level themes were identified and within most of them were many sub-themes. The themes included topics such as general climate, campus safety, job satisfaction, employment practices, governance, hostile/discriminatory environment, school events/activities, impacted courses, voice/expression of ideas, sense of community and diversity.

The most commonly referenced themes (those with at least 100 mentions) and their frequencies are shown in **Figure 1**. Student concerns was the largest and consisted of a wide range of problems or difficulties students mentioned that were not subsumed under more specific

Figure 1. Most Common Themes of Written Comments



topics related to the survey content. Examples include experiences with faculty, availability of information on events and resources, and issues facing commuting students. Discrimination included any references to discriminatory behaviors or experiences, with age (90), gender (72), and race/ethnicity (60) being the three most commonly mentioned. Feedback on the survey encompasses both positive and negative comments about the survey itself, including suggestions for future changes. Safety or security concerns contains any comments about physical safety on campus. Diversity includes observations and suggestions about the status and appreciation of diversity on campus. General positive experiences are comments that depict an overall positive experience from attending or working at SJSU. Campus climate consists of general assessments of the campus environment, the majority favorable. Concerns with administrators consists of criticism of SJSU administrators, including the office of the president (64) and changes in leadership. Harassment includes references to repeated or aggravated behaviors that appeared to go beyond other forms of discrimination and included such topics as sexual harassment and bullying. Campus physical environment includes numerous aspects of campus facilities and surroundings, including the presence of homeless people (when not a security concern), the state of buildings, and effects of construction on campus; most of these were critical comments. Inclusivity deals with topics of in-group or out-of-group relations often on an interpersonal level, and include reports of respondents feeling excluded as well as the extent to which they believe groups are inclusive. Faculty concerns covers a wide range of issues such as morale, availability of grants, promotions, student interactions, and other job-related problems.

General climate

The number of positive comments in regards to campus climate outnumbered the negative comments. The general campus climate at SJSU appears to be good as a senior wrote, "There is a friendly and welcoming climate at SJSU." Another senior said, "SJSU continues to grow and get better in regards to campus climate. At one point, I thought it was getting bad and moving in a negative direction, but recently the campus is responding great to all ethnicities, religions, veterans, people with disabilities and others". One faculty member stated, "I think SJSU does a reasonable job in the area of campus climate. I am particularly impressed with our new team of administrators. These are certainly three of the most

effective and knowledgeable administrators I have had the pleasure of working with in my 28 years at San Jose State. This level and quality of leadership makes a big difference to my own sense of the 'climate' in which I teach, and I imagine it does to others as well." A longtime staff member wrote, "I have always considered SJSU a very diverse campus and have noticed great improvements in campus climate." Although the majority of comments were positive, some respondents expressed negative opinions about the climate. One unhappy faculty member said, "The administration should be happy to hear that campus climate is hostile, toxic, and intimidating. Is it not that what they wanted?" A sophomore wrote, "Unfortunately, SJSU's student climate is one of the worst I have ever come across. During my time here, I have encountered aggressive, rude, and hurtful people."

Campus safety

One theme that came up during the analysis of the qualitative data from the campus climate surveys was safety. There were over 300 references to safety. As one commuting student revealed, "I fear for my life while taking night classes." A senior wrote, "One of the school's top priorities should be protecting students and making them feel safe to actually be on campus. As it stands now, I do not feel safe on campus during the daytime and I would never take classes at night here." Another student who lives on campus said, "The only issue I can think of is campus safety. I do not feel very safe on campus in the early morning or late evening (before 7AM and after 6PM)." One student reported being concerned for females, and saying, "I do feel safe on campus, but many of my friends who are girls are scared to walk around alone, which bothers me."

Some students described reasons why they do not feel safe on campus. One transfer student wrote, "While an otherwise decent campus, it is occasionally plagued by the issues caused by its downtown location. Issues like violence/robberies/shootings and homelessness." A graduate student asked, "How about that shooting at the fraternity party a few months back? An SJSU employee actually told me that these things happen at schools from time to time and that it is not unusual. Is that supposed to be damage control? I do not walk on the south side of campus now. I am sure that it is normal too." A sophomore stated, "The homeless population is hard to deal with while on campus. The number of bike thefts is

too high to be normal. The amount of people getting mugged at night is also too high.”

Respondents also expressed concerns with the blue light phones. A staff member said, “If you are so worried about personal safety, you could make sure the emergency phones (blue light) on campus work. I do not have a cell phone and I rely on these phones to be able to contact the police if I were attacked. However, the phones around the business school seem to be out of order more than half the time. This does little to make me feel safe.” One graduate student wrote, “It is beyond ridiculous how unsafe students feel and how the blue lights never work.”

In addition there were concerns with the evening guide escort service. An international student stated, “When I call for the evening shuttle service they never say yes directly. They say it will take time and when I ask how much time, they always say we do not know, maybe an hour, we cannot say.” A senior student added, “I do not feel safe at night walking on the SJSU campus, even just waiting for the escort service is scary.”

Job satisfaction

In addition to dissatisfaction with compensation (which will be discussed later), several faculty reported being dissatisfied with the lack of opportunity to pursue scholarly activities and research. One faculty member wrote, “Because of this lack of leadership, scholarly activity has been greatly diminished, outside grants quashed.” Furthermore, one faculty member said, “Presidential decisions and policies have been a major contributor to faculty discontent and a significant drop in individual and departmental morale. I cannot remember such a low state of morale since coming to SJSU decades ago.” Another faculty member stated, “It feels like the campus climate has gone backwards in the past five years. My perceptions of faculty morale have decreased. I use to be proud to say I worked at SJSU. Faculty workload and pay equity issues must be addressed.”

Among staff, there were several reasons that led to them experiencing job dissatisfaction besides compensation career advancement and career growth (which will also be discussed more in detail later). Some expressed that no one cares about them. A staff member stated, “It also never ceases to amaze me what lengths the administration will go to to please the faculty while totally ignoring the staff.” Another staff member wrote, “I do, however, get concerned when I hear faculty or other

campus members say that staff are not important to this campus.” In addition a number of staff members spoke of quitting. One staff member said, “I have been moved around in my department, asked to do jobs I did not apply for and have not been trained for and I am not being paid for it. I am currently looking for work elsewhere.” Another staff member wrote, “I have worked at SJSU for nearly five years and I am at the point where I am looking forward to leaving.”

Administrator job dissatisfaction appeared to stem from concerns with staff and faculty members. One administrator member wrote, “SJSU used to be a lot friendlier, respectful and a fun environment to work at for its staff and faculty. After seven plus years of no pay raise, the recent 3% raise is not enough to make a reasonable living in the Silicon Valley. Administrators must work hard to get its employees a reasonable pay. They also should work hard to create a welcoming and pleasant work environment where staff feel included, comfortable and welcomed. Last but not least, SJSU must encourage and invest in professional development for its staff as much as it does for its faculty. Staff are an integral part of the campus. They must be encouraged to develop, advance and polish their skills to meet demands of the ever changing advancement in technology. This will not only make the staff feel safe, but will also help them be productive and valuable.”

Employment practices

Respondents raised concerns with compensation. As one faculty member wrote, “The benefits are fantastic and much appreciated, but it is almost impossible to live on a lecturer income.” Another faculty member said, “The CFA report on salaries appeared two weeks ago. This stated that faculty salaries in the UC have kept up with inflation, whereas those at every CSU campus have fallen behind. Here it is to the extent of over \$10,000 a year. The numbers make me feel sick to my stomach, sick with anger. At the same time, the campus administration refuse resolutely to push faculty salaries to be commensurate with local salaries, thus perpetuating the inequalities.” A number of faculty also expressed concerns with the cost of living. One faculty member stated, “Moreover, faculty compensation, including at the full professor level, has lagged behind the escalating cost of living in the area. Indeed many tenured faculty make less now, in inflation adjusted terms, than eight years ago.”

Another concern was workload. A faculty member wrote, "I love teaching and my colleagues, however, I would not recommend SJSU as a place of employment for young faculty due to the increasing workload, both in terms of number of classes taught each semester, and the increasing size of classes as well as the low pay." Another faculty member said, "If SJSU wants to promote research, the institution has to change its four classes per semester teaching load policy." On the other hand, staff members were more concerned with career advancement and career growth opportunities. One staff member said, "I wish that there was more growth opportunities and opportunities for my advancement professionally." Another staff member wrote, "There are very few advancement opportunities for staff on campus. It is nearly impossible to move into any type of management position from a lower level staff position no matter what you try to do."

Governance

In relation to governance, one concern was transparency. A faculty member said, "Telling us about major irrevocable decisions after they have happened is not transparency." Another faculty member stated, "We need greater cultural competency in terms of effective ways to communicate, build professional rapport, increase collaborative decision making and shared governance, and transparency. A student wrote, "I would like more transparency among higher administration (with faculty and students). Students are constantly told by faculty we must be the change for our campus, but most of us are too busy to see how we are able to do so. If the university could support change by providing clear guidelines to make an effective change within their governing laws, this would be duly appreciated (doubt this will happen)."

Faculty, staff, and students also expressed concerns with governance at the level of the university president. One faculty member said, "At the end of the day, our commitment to diversity is undefined and superficial. The previous Diversity Master Plan was an effort to reach deeper, but our current president deep-sixed it and the energy behind it had been dispersed and lost. One can only hope that the present Commission will have some effect, but it is unlikely to have as much support because it does not have a comparably wide-reaching process and because our president clearly has other priorities and was only compelled to address these issues by the unfortunate events that transpired in the dorms." A junior wrote, "I

feel as if the university's president does not govern the campus community well. He seems to refuse to listen to any negative feedback from the student body (and does not like to be interviewed by the Spartan Daily regarding current issues), and he does not include the student body on issues that are relevant to us. This creates aggravation over and over among us students when we do not feel heard and are treated as if we are stupid. I would feel a lot happier paying my tuition at SJSU if the administration would work for us students, not against us." A staff member stated, "My biggest complaint about this campus is the lack of engagement by the president to interact with students. There is a widespread opinion that he does not care about students as evidenced by his photo op a few years ago when he carefully chose certain students to be in the picture with him. He is not known to visit events on campus unless there is an important person involved. He had to backtrack about issues on campus such as the racial discrimination case instead of informing staff about it at the time it happened. I found out about the misuse of funds and the sexual harassment cases from the news before I heard about them at work."

In addition, there were a number of concerns with higher level administrators and governance. As one faculty member stated, "The Dean enacts manipulative and retaliatory actions, and/or ignores fundamental issues of shared governance, generating a distrustful and fearful atmosphere with no apparent consequences when such things are reported." A staff member said, "The decisions they have made have all gone against the experts that have been in this department for over 20 years. These decisions cost the university over 30 million dollars and have replaced a working system with one that fails weekly." A student wrote, "The lack of oversight from the university is appalling. People in leadership positions such as the provost ought to be more aware of the projects they support and fund."

Hostile/discriminatory environment

The survey asked several questions about experiences and perceptions of discrimination on campus. A number of respondents chose to elaborate on these issues in their comments. The top three discrimination concerns related to age, gender and race/ethnicity. In general, age discrimination dealt primarily with being perceived as too young. A younger staff member wrote, "My questions or opinions are looked down upon and answered in ways to belittle. Once a coworker said they were 66 years old and

did not need to listen to a 30 year old about what needs to be done to do the job.” One faculty member reported, “I am a fairly young professor, and one of my students (older than me) basically told me that I should not be teaching him because I am so young; he wrote a rather nasty signed evaluation, also focusing on my age.” Older employees also felt that they were being discriminated against. One older employee stated, “I was told that I was too old to be accepted for a position I applied for. I was stunned. Several other people who applied for the same job were also told that they were too old. A very young person was hired for the position.”

The majority of the complaints on gender discrimination came from females. There were 55 references of discrimination against females compared to nine for males. One female worker reported, “There is discriminatory behavior from my co-worker who expects me to do his filing and answer his phone shift for no apparent reason other than being a woman; we are the same job classification.” A female faculty member stated, “In department meetings, it sometimes seems that women are not given the opportunity/time to speak up and when they are able to, our comments and observations/requests are not taken with the same weight as the statements of the men in the room.” One male employee wrote, “I was told I had to do more work in certain areas because I was a male, not a female.”

For race and ethnicity discrimination, white respondents reported the most comments (15) for feeling like they were being excluded. This was followed by Asians (8), African Americans (7), and Latinos (7). One senior who identified as white wrote, “I personally was discriminated against for being white and not of Latino or Asian descent. When I first started at SJSU, I approached a Latina sorority table and asked what the membership requirements were. I was told that they were looking for young students of Latino descent. I replied, ‘Well, I guess I do not fit in then?’ The girl behind the table shrugged her shoulders and said, ‘I am sorry.’ I found the same treatment from some of the Asian based groups as well.” An Asian employee commented, “During the tenure process, I believe that being a man of Asian descent negatively impacted the evaluation of my performance by members of the RTP committee in my department.” An African American employee wrote, “I asked my manager if I could do more challenging tasks and he responded, ‘Where am I going to find another [expletive]?’ I reported this to HR. This is documented and nothing happened to [name].”

Now [name] is retired and I have been held back seven years because of this.” A Latina employee stated, “As a Latina, I am not paid the same salary as other employees for the same position, while having more responsibilities and better performance on the job. I receive good reviews, but there is no effort made to correct the inequity.” Furthermore, respondents wrote of the discussion of sensitive topics concerning past racial and ethnic discrimination incidents. One respondent stated, “What happened to that black guy in the dorms is frankly bizarre and unsettling. Oddly, despite all the media coverage, I have heard virtually no mention of it in any of my classes.” A faculty member said, “When the event happened to the African American student, I was literally shocked such a thing would happen on our campus. The responsible party brought shame to the school.”

There were also reports of harassment. One faculty member wrote, “I was harassed by a fellow faculty member and his Zionist group, and colleagues, who attacked me for holding a workshop on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is the third time this faculty member has harassed me. This faculty member has done it to others as well and continues to get away with it.” Another faculty member said, “I have received inappropriate comments and touching. I learned to ignore it.” A staff member wrote, “[name] has wasted so much money and has been part of at least a dozen harassments against employees. There should have been many more lawsuits that should have been filed.” A senior stated, “My experience transitioning at SJSU has been pretty horrible, ranging from unintentional rudeness and disrespect to intentional verbal harassment in class, and even physical harassment on campus.”

Publicizing events and activities

One interesting theme that emerged upon analyzing the concerns of students was the importance of publicizing/having events or activities on campus. There were 56 comments on this issue. One commuting student said, “It is very hard to find information on what is going on around campus. Almost all activities occur during classes or very late evenings; no alternatives are offered.” A senior wrote, “It could be better if the school lets students know of events on Canvas or by email. Then students will not miss some of the events that they would be interested in. Students only can know about these events when they are searching for them.” Students also explained why they desired more events. One transfer

student suggested, “Have more mass student events to encourage camaraderie.” An international student said, “Have events for students so that they can become a part of campus life.” In addition, students were concerned about school pride and involvement. A senior stated, “To get the school to be more united, I feel like there should be more advertisements and reminders on certain student events so that people who live off campus may feel free to participate. SJSU encourages clubs, but not enough events. We are not investing in programs that make students proud of their college. There is nothing we can point at and say, ‘Hey, check out what my college does. Look at this event/program that we put on.’” An international student wrote, “I would like to get more information on how I can be a part of various academic organizations present in the university.” A graduate student stated, “There is no support for student organizations. Support your student organizations.”

Impacted courses

Students had many concerns with impacted classes with about 48 references to this theme. One sophomore said, “My only downside is the impacted majors. I was very disappointed with not being able to get into the major of my dreams because my GPA was not high enough. Now I am stuck in a major that I am only somewhat interested in, instead of the one I was in love with.” Another sophomore worried about graduating stated, “It is difficult to enroll in impacted classes, which can be frustrating for many students who wish to graduate in four years.” Although the majority of comments on impacted classes came from students, administrators as well as faculty and staff also had a number of concerns. One faculty member wrote, “With the impaction of classes, students are finding it hard to get into classes in a timely manner. Sometimes they are taking any class they can get into rather than classes that might benefit them more in their academic/future careers. Whenever possible, I will add as many graduating seniors as I can to my classes, but this significantly affects my workload. Overall, both students and faculty are negatively affected.” One staff member wrote, “I really thrive on being there for the students. At times I wonder if the students and faculty are an afterthought. We keep increasing enrollment with a limited amount of class space. Students are stressed out enough as it is and not being able to get into a class to satisfy their major requirements only adds to their burden.”

Feeling able to express different ideas

Many students also were disturbed by what they perceived as a lack of acceptance of differing opinions or ideas. There were approximately 70 references to this theme. One freshman described an experience, “Many professors abuse their status and use the class they teach, no matter what the subject, to express their views and impose them on other students. Though they may ask for your opinions, if you express it, you are shot down, humiliated, and called out repeatedly if they know your name.” A graduate student wrote, “Many people at SJSU (mostly students) believe that it should be okay to express your opinions, maintain freedom of speech, and be respectful of others. However, a lot of individuals believe this until someone's opinion is different from their own as in, ‘It is okay to express freely about things I agree with, but if you don't agree with me, you are stupid and ignorant and should get out of here.’ Sadly this happens a lot on campus. I see people who preach being respectful and then turn around and yell at someone for having a different opinion. If these students were legitimately practicing acceptance, they would understand that a person's conflicting ideas are valid and not to be disrespected.” One faculty member said, “On multiple occasions my political views were challenged as I did not applaud others who made statements about current and recent political figures who offended them. I apparently hold views 180 degrees from theirs and I experienced several subsequent comments and less than positive interactions. There were other instances, but it is weird being a minority on the SJSU campus and finding so much intrinsic intolerance on the part of so many people in all corners of the university.” One faculty member suggested, “There should be mandatory workshops for students on tolerance.”

Sense of community

Students, faculty, and staff all had something to say about the sense of community on campus. A student commuter wrote, “SJSU is very much a commuter school in the sense that there is a large strain on creating an on-campus community.” Another student who lives on campus said, “More campuswide activities would help build a sense of community where both commuter and non commuter students could attend. Perhaps having professors inform the students about the events would help increase turnout as well.” A senior stated, “Students are happier when they have school pride, and school pride is only

achieved through a sense of community, which SJSU fails to provide regularly.” A concerned faculty member also mentioned, “I feel like SJSU is fragmented, with little sense of community.” One staff member stated, “Regardless of age, race, gender, religious affiliation, etc., we need to come together and be a community. We lack social events that bring people together.”

Diversity

The largest share of respondents who wrote about campus diversity praised the state of diversity at SJSU. Of the more than 320 comments, 160 were positive, 111 were negative, and the remainder were either neutral or made suggestions without evaluating the current state. One transfer student wrote, “The main reason why I chose to come to San Jose State was because I knew this was one of the most diverse campuses in the United States and I do not regret my decision. This is really a campus which embraces diverse culture and background!” An international student stated, “I love the diversity here. Coming from a multiracial country like Malaysia, it was not difficult for me to adapt to the diversity. I am glad that I chose to come to SJSU as an international student because everyone is so welcoming and accepting.” Employees of SJSU also had good things to say about diversity. One staff member said, “I believe the university has made substantial improvements and advances in diversity for students on campus. I also believe extraordinary efforts are made to hire a diverse faculty workforce.” A faculty member exclaimed, “I really value the diversity and acceptance on campus!”

However, some respondents said that diversity efforts are problematic. A faculty member wrote, “This campus is obsessed with diversity. All the administrative rules and all the workshops are just useless. We are already diverse (faculty members and students) and frankly all the resources used toward pushing the agenda are wasted.” A student who lives on campus said, “The school is trying to become so diverse that it is no longer diverse it seems.” A graduate student expressed a different concern: “SJSU promotes diversity, yet the student body is already extremely diverse. As a Caucasian student I feel like an unwelcome outsider.” An out-of-state student wrote, “Diversity is worshipped, but most of us as students do not want diverse faculty; we want great faculty. The ethnic makeup of the faculty should be irrelevant.” A number of respondents suggested having workshops. A transfer student said, “I have not heard of workshops or

conferences regarding diversity themes, but I would love to participate in the future”. One faculty member wrote, “I think there needs to be more workshops or training to educate administrators, faculty and staff not just on diversity issues, but on specific things that are often umbrella-ed together.”

Conclusion

The themes that emerged provide a strong sense of the major issues, experiences, and concerns expressed by the SJSU community regarding the campus climate. Many respondents wrote freely and extensively, and this report is the primary vehicle for ensuring that their points of view were heard widely.

A final category that was not detailed in this report is a range of comments and suggestions regarding the conduct of the survey itself. These ranged from criticisms that it was too long to suggestions about better questions to ask. Those comments have been noted and will be preserved for the team that conducts the next survey.

More information

The survey results were prepared by the SJSU Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Analytics. Additional reports, including results of the previous survey, are available online at iea.sjsu.edu/assessment/projects/campusclimate.