



SOCIAL ACTION 164

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENT REFLECTIONS

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Organization: *CSU Free Tuition (CSUFT)*

Occupation: Currently, employed by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education as a mentor for the BASTA program, which works with troubled youth who are currently involved in gangs or have been exposed to gang violence.

Impact of Social Action: “When I think of Social Action, I think of my classmates and Dr. Scott Myer-Lipton. Myers-Lipton’s social action course changed my views and ultimately helped guide me towards wanting to do something greater than just live through the motions. Social action takes grit, heart, and most importantly unity amongst a community working towards positive change and speaking for those whose voices are too often silenced. I have put in practice the skills I gained from this course outside of the classroom by mentoring troubled youth, helping them understand that with clear goals and openness to learn from others that they can achieve what they want in life.

In social action there is pain, love, and stress. Things don’t always go the way you imagined them to go but the beautiful thing is taking action day in and day out. Because the students I mentor have worked with many people who have let them down, my main objective initially is trying to build a relationship and rebuild the trust they once lost in the process. Social action can be seen in many aspects of life, from political views to community involvement, helping communities out in the best way that one can. My passion consists of helping those students who need that extra motivation and inspiration, and I love what I do. Dr. Scott Myer-Lipton’s social action course will forever hold a place in my heart because this class instilled in me that if you take on the challenge with others who share similar goals and aspirations together you can make a difference.”

Soci. 164: Social Action Alumni Questions:

- 1. What were the overall takeaways that you learned from working on your campaign? What did you learn about social change? about power? leadership? yourself? community?**

The first takeaway that comes to mind is teamwork. Nothing in the campaign would have been possible without communication, accountability, and leadership. I learned that everyone's voice is important and allowing that voice to be heard will allow your campaign to have astonishing momentum. It was tough, having a group larger than ten as not everyone's schedules aligned; it took sacrifice and determination to really get the most out of the experience. With that said, another takeaway I learned from working on this campaign is implementing sacrifice in our already chaotic schedules. If you are unable to sacrifice time out of your fulltime schedule and/or part time job, then I recommend you take the class at another time.

Many times, my group and I felt like we hit rock bottom, but I can speak for all of the campaign members that Professor SML will give you that spark to keep pushing through. You must strategize a clear game plan and do so with the idea that social change takes a community. I have not always played the leadership role in class projects but in this particular situation I felt an obligation to stand up and advocate not only for myself but my team. However, the beauty of stepping up to the plate as leader was that I did not step up to the plate alone. A few of us took charge and when you can demonstrate strong leadership many will follow.

Reflecting upon myself I learned that I had to push myself to be the student that I knew I could be. Believe in yourself, and be your number one fan. We take these courses to learn, grow, and question. Growing up in school we often want to speak up and give our opinion but instead we are silenced or choose to remain silent. We wait until someone else goes first, or stay quiet until the professor answers, choosing to silence our own voice in a room made to scream it.

Which brings me to my last and final takeaway I learned from working on this campaign, and that is stand up for what you believe in. Learn about your community, embrace it and don't run away from it. Our community is part of our culture. Our community makes us, and as soon as I understood that, I represented something bigger than just myself. I realized I was fighting for the future generation.

2. What did you learn about issue development? (i.e, making demands, finding the target, desire to fight for an issue)? Has this learning had any impact on you since you have graduated?

Issue development is the foundation to every campaign. Making demands allows you to have a roadmap for your group moving forward. Finding your target not only creates a momentum shift but it establishes a purpose for your campaign. It allows you to set out for your first checkpoint. The desire factor of issue development comes from your heart and passion for the issue. It's not something that is forced on you but rather something that ignites you to continue the fight. It's what sets you apart from the start and allows you to team up with other students who share your same drive. Although having learned this inside a classroom the skill set of issue development has transcended into the real world since graduating. I am fortunate enough to work in my hometown, I work for the Santa Cruz County of Education for the BASTA program. I work with troubled youth and have used many of these skill sets from class. There are times when students are in need, and I need to demand necessities for them. It can be as simple as a backpack with school supplies or even food essentials for their families. When you work with a student who is not on the "correct path" you need to find the target and break down what is holding the student

down from their potential. You need to work as a team not only with the student, but the school, and family. To be in this sort of job, or in any, one needs to have the desire to fight the fight. My desire and passion allows me to show up and give it one hundred and ten percent when I work with the students who are on my caseload. This class will challenge you but it will prepare you for the real world.

3. How did your research (Historical Analysis, Target Analysis, and Power Map) help you in your campaign? Has this learning had any impact on you since you have graduated?

All the aspects of research including the historical analysis, target analysis, and the power map is the most important part of the project. Although it can present to be the most tedious part, it is the key information needed to get your campaign off the ground. Professor SML does not have you do this to give you extra work, he does this as a stepping stone for campaign success. Playing into the advantage of having a big group we delegated tasks and split into different sections. We understood how huge this project was but collectively we did not look at this as a class assignment but as a much bigger duty we had to get done.

The first piece of research was the historical analysis, and we wanted to see if anyone had ever tried to make free tuition for all CSU's. This not only allowed us to see who else tried to make college tuition-free for students but it gave us an idea on what they did right and what they could have done better. It was a blueprint to consider and to build off of. New York was the first state to offer free accessible higher education. Not only did this light a fire to our group but it showed us that it could be done. New York came up with a scholarship called the Excelsior Scholarship in 2017. In order to receive the scholarship you have to have been a residence of the state and have made less than \$125,000 per year. It was a start and it allowed us to understand what had worked.

Now for the target analysis, we needed to focus on the .01%. It's when we look at .01% that people are not aware of these 16,000 families that go to private education leaving those at the lower class behind. It has not been fair because those who are able to afford college have better career options and better job opportunities. We also know that many people do not know about the 0.2/0.1 exclusive tax or the luxury estate tax. Much of the right-wing is unaware that these tax breaks would not affect them which makes them hesitant to the idea of free tuition. As a campaign it is also your obligation to find others who think like you but also to start discussing with others who might have opposing views.

When creating a power map, we came across *CSU Students For Quality Education (SQE)*. Established in 2007-2008, SQE was started by students who wanted "education rights." San Jose State had an SQE club on campus and they became an ally for our campaign. We also found another organization called *College For All*, whose mission was to focus on the estate tax of the families who are in .01%. This moved us to pursue this policy as well. Joining forces with these organizations we quickly learned the power of allies when wanting to create social change.

4. How did you recruit students and allies for your campaign? What worked? What didn't work? Has this learning had any impact on you since you have graduated?

Like your typical campus-wide organization, our team worked on flyers and advertisements. However, our recruitment of students and allies for your campaign was primarily done on social media platform accounts that were created for our campaign. We had an Instagram account and Facebook page under the name csuft_sjsu. We had great momentum at first, there were about 11 total students who were very active in our campaign. At the beginning, we reached out to similar activist movements like De-Bug. This tactic definitely spread the word and we gained a student following. Getting recognition from other organizations and SJSU students definitely invited more people to join a group with friendly familiar faces. However, having only one of our members manage both social media platforms we could have been more active in promoting weekly meetings and showing behind the scenes work.

Another form of recruitment we used was using a busy part of campus, like the street theater to bring in attention. Our campaign decided to march around the Cesar Chavez monument to recruit students. We used props and a display to show to our audience a visual representation of the social issue we wanted to change. Members Nicole and Gabby were chained to a desk to represent how the cost of tuition has many students enslaved to the costly education system while the rest of us held up posters, handed out flyers and sparking up conversations with passing students about free tuition. (Instagram: @csuft_sjsu). Expressing ourselves to the public and how we felt about the education system and what we were fighting for was an emotional experience for all the members. This beautiful experience spread the word to many students that were unaware of the cost of tuition being a problem for their peers, and it brought more attention to our rising campaign. Looking back, I acknowledge that this form of recruitment could have received even more coverage if we would have contacted a local news outlet to further amplify the voices of our campaign.

Our efforts were not taken in vain, as we accumulated four allies. The newest ally was De-Bug, an organization that advocates for people who are in need of support and community organizing. Although our mission at the time did not completely align with this particular organization and what they were advocating for, the relationship created was mutually respected and they promised their organizational support. In addition, we met with State Senator Jim Beall and California State Assembly member Ash Kalra who hopped on board as allies to the campaign.

Another effort taken by my classmate Quenia Cruz and I was turning our campaign into an official club or student organization. Not having met the deadline requirements, we unfortunately were not able to make this a reality for our campaign. Given the chance however, I highly recommend you try and make your campaign into a student organization to facilitate student recruitment. Our story in our group might not have made free tuition for all CSU's but you as a reader are able to look at our journey and capitalize on what we didn't do.

Recruitment is challenging, but you need a buy in. For example, what are students going to get out of joining your campaign? Maybe some free swag, weekly lunch, or free stickers. Although we spoke with our actions, we may have not invested the right amount of time into this part. We didn't always have a group of eleven; we started with six members. Throughout the process you

may begin to notice classmates who wanted to start their campaign start to lose their momentum and drive your team shares. This crucial period is where the group must reevaluate how the remaining semester should be spent. When the mission is clear and work is getting done students will gravitate to your campaign and eventually your team will grow.

Learning the process of recruitment and building allies, although a great skill to have at an institution like San José State, is not one I have directly used in my life after graduation. However it has indirectly allowed me to be authentic and at times vulnerable, and open to the unknown.

5. How was your group dynamic? Did your group work well together? If Yes, what contributed to your positive group process. If not, what contributed to that? Has this learning had any impact on you since you have graduated?

The group dynamic thrived on the equal distribution of power that was practiced from the very beginning. Everyone's voice mattered, which is why I believe our campaign grew. Power was shared between all of us and everyone was pretty good about that. We took turns speaking and worked together when it came down to "decision-making, and group-centered leadership" (CHANGE!, p. 53). We never held power over other members and this made us special. When greed over power begins to rise, the group dynamic might worsen and ultimately hurt your entire campaign. My voice matters just as much as a newcomer who would join the campaign weeks later. We understood that if one spoke, we acknowledged their views and ideas.

Another positive group process was having a designated "vibes watcher" each time we met up. It was the vibe watcher's job to keep it real and to call us out in a respectful manner. There were times when the energy felt dull and exhausting and that was when the mood watcher would shine, they would suggest a break or maybe getting some lunch. When you have so much going on, at times one can get lost and forget to live in the moment.

Our group dynamic allowed us to become a family. A family that not only understood the conceptual sociological imagination of this social issue but also one that was able to relate with one another and have each other's back. Everyone in the group brought a skill set and as a team we made sure to capitalize on it.

6. Who was your target, and what strategies and tactics did you use to get them to meet your demands? Were you successful in meeting your demands? If so, why? If not, why not? What was your favorite "action" that your group did?

Our original target was the CSU Board of Trustees, but after doing some research we found out they could not really do anything for us. So we shifted our target to the State Legislature, the "lowest ranking person/organization" who could meet our demands, and we enlisted two of our allies—local State Senator Jim Beall and Assembly Member Ash Kalra—to help write and introduce a bill into the legislature.

Group members and I had the opportunity to meet Jim Beall twice, although initially quite hesitant with our idea of targeting the .01% he thought he was a great ally to have on board. Beall was once homeless and understands what it is like to not have a home. He advocates for

things that he has lived through. Beall believes in treating people equally and is responsible with what he asks for and who he helps. He does not discriminate and has helped lots of foster youth. Jim Beall is fighting for equal justice and is a great ally to support the people but we felt that maybe it was not a great fit for our campaign as he was more interested in his ideas and left little room to be persuaded by us or professor SML. Beall showed further interest in exposing the billionaire's loopholes and thus allocating that money to make free tuition for all CSU's but that could take up to five years to take off. It was a great start but we needed more experience as a campaign.

Assembly member Ash Kalra, the first Indian American to get elected to the CA state legislature, is the 27th assembly member and represents much of San Jose. Ash was previously a teacher and lawyer, and has won numerous awards as a leader. His main goal is the safety of people in the San Jose community, as well as being an advocate for better schools and a safer environment. He was an instructor at San Jose State University, and he has served on numerous non-profit organizations as well. When we met Ash, he was willing to help the student campaign to make progress and to help write and introduce a bill.

I have learned that nothing is gained easily, You have to put the work in and go at it one hundred and ten percent. Just like Professor SML has told us, multiple campaigns have used power mapping to win their campaigns, and we planned on being the next. It's a chess match and you have to point on the pieces in the right place at the right time. This class allowed me to grow. I have used many skills since graduating SJSU, and this class had a huge impact on that. I knew that when I left SJSU these memories of this campaign would always stay with me.

7. Did your group get press? If so, how?

Our group's press came from our allies at De-Bug. My team members Quenia and Ely spoke to Fernando from De-Bug. De-Bug covered our first demonstration and promoted us on their Instagram page. They help cover campaigns and even offered to publish us in their magazine. Quenia and I also had the opportunity to meet with American writer and civil rights activist, Shaun King. It was great to hear him speak his mind out. He was real, and it really motivated us to believe we could pull this campaign through.

Prior to meeting King, we had tried to contact him through social media but failed to get a response. I do believe our organization could have been better and we speculated that if we would have had brochures to hand out the day we met him, he would have brought forth his support via his large following on social media platforms. There are a lot of things we would have done differently. Make your demands clear to all members of the group and how you are going to achieve them. The clearer you can make it sound allows students, allies, and press to jump on board. As far as following through with De-Bug, our campaign struggled. Things would come up and before you know it the semester was winding down. We knew we needed power, and that power was the students, but towards the end we just could not make that happen.

The opportunity for press can also occur unexpectable and you will have to take full advantage of those moments. I recall getting a text message from Professor SML one morning on my commute from Santa Cruz to San Jose. SML was trying to get a hold of one member of the

campaign to speak at a faculty meeting for Human Rights Day at the MLK Library on campus. It was a perfect chance to get our name out there (CSUFT) and possibly gain some support for faculty at San Jose State. Professor SML asked if anyone was willing to speak at the podium in front of faculty, students, and possibly some media. It was very easy to turn my head away or make up an excuse as to why I could not go up there. And although I consider myself to be fairly shy and not a fan of public speaking, I knew this was an opportunity the campaign could not pass up on. As I looked at my phone a few of the members quickly responded and said they could not attend due to work and class timing. But after receiving a phone call from another classmate, we discussed speaking at the faculty meeting. I decided to step up and speak about our campaign. That day I let my voice be heard. I felt like I had a chip on my shoulder and it definitely made me an overall more confident student. It didn't give us any media or coverage but this is a perfect example of taking every opportunity that comes your way during the semester, especially when nobody else wants to step up to the table. I recommend for you to be the one to let your voice, and the voices of the campaign, be heard.

8. Did your group use social media? If so, please explain.

As previously stated, Quenia was in charge of the social media and kept it up to date even after the semester ended. She posted pictures of anything related to the campaign. Quenia was really active on the accounts and would run it by the whole group when the chance presented itself. Our presence on social media was thriving and both of those accounts became well known among students. We all played a part when it came to asking friends to follow the account but Quenia went above and beyond and asked old classmates and professors to follow our accounts and to spread the word.

At one point, we shared a video on Facebook which got over 3k views. The video was done by myself and two other classmates the year before for another class that professor SML teaches (Soci. 165: Poverty, Wealth, and Privilege.). It was a creative project that focused on the issue of homelessness amongst students. A powerful video I filmed with my peers Jeovany and Thomas, and it connected with the campaign as it touched on students who cannot afford to pay for classes and also have a hard time affording housing. This video along with our normal activity on social media platforms did create some momentum and I encourage your campaign to use as many social media outlets as you need to spread the word.

9. What advice would you give current Soci. 164 Social Action students?

I wanted to conclude this by recognizing all the members of my group (in no particular order) A big thank you to Professor SML who reached out to have me and answer these questions, but thank to my classmates, Kristine, Ariana, Dalia, Deisi, Ely, Gaby, Jose, Monica, Nicole, Quenia, and Vince for making a semester to remember. Each and every member was passionate and worked hard in the trenches of this campaign. Reflecting on that, I choose to pass on that same advice to all of you.

Passion, as well as self-accountability, will take you a long way this semester. Be there for one another and hold yourselves to high expectations. Those names I mention will forever be friends.

We went through a lot that semester and there were moments when we didn't feel like we could accomplish anything, but we stuck with it and did some pretty amazing things.

I reached out to Quenia, Ariana, and Jose as I started to answer these questions and wanted to summarize what they said. They all brought up the importance of choosing an issue you want to work towards and staying consistent, dedicated, and resilient. Throughout our campaign, we were well aware that some things could have been handled better, but all that matters was that in the end, we finished strong. Leave your mark, and maybe your campaign will be the next one to break through. Good luck and wish y'all the best.