



## **SOCIAL ACTION 164**

### SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENT REFLECTIONS

**JOSH BAROUSSE**, enrolled in Social Action in spring of 2007, graduated BA, Sociology, Community Change Concentration, from SJSU in 2007; Master of Public Administration, San José State, 2010.

**Organization:** *Gulf Coast Civic Works Project*

**Occupation:** Currently, founder and publisher of Spotlight, a nonprofit news organization dedicated to local independent reporting on policy, politics, and government in the South Bay. Previously, worked for a California State Senator, two San José Councilmembers, managed a campaign for a candidate for Mayor of San José, and worked for a housing advocacy nonprofit.

**Impact of Social Action:** “My Social Action experience was really a transformative experience both in my college career and in my adult life. I was finishing up my undergraduate career and had no idea what I wanted to do after college. From participating in the *Gulf Coast Civic Works Project* and taking the Social Action course, I then developed a deep passion for politics and social justice. I learned all about the power of student activism and grassroots organizing, gaining valuable skills such as policy advocacy, contacting media sources to pitch stories, and learned about the legislative process -- how a bill becomes a law and its impact on working people. I experienced life-changing events through Social Action that took me out of the classroom and into the field -- lobbying members of Congress, approaching lawmakers at the Democratic National Convention, testifying at the State Capitol in Sacramento and organizing town hall meetings in the Gulf Coast to hear first-hand accounts from residents whose lives had been devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Without a doubt, my Social Action experience opened doors for me I never thought would be possible. I can honestly say, it has served to be the single most powerful experience that has shaped me into who I am today!”

#### **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? etc.**

The biggest takeaway I learned from our campaign with the *Gulf Coast Civic Work Project* was how policy influences change. I learned about the legislative process and how a bill becomes a law. From grassroots organizing in our Soc. 164 class and the larger GCCWP campaign, I learned the power of advocacy and messaging. How to contact elected officials, influencers, the

media and the most effective way to message is to empower those who are affected the most.

**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?**

There are several issues that I deeply care about. I learned a great deal about how to really listen to yourself and find the issues that drive you, that you're passionate about. Once you find that, that's your motivation to work hard and fight for an issue or issues that you care about most. From there, you first identify others who care about the same issue you do and then identify who you need to lobby (i.e. is it a city issue? county? state? federal?) and first get your local representatives on board. For instance, with the GCCWP, we worked with our local San José representative in the U.S. House of Representatives, Zoe Lofgren who introduced a bill to fund a *Gulf Coast Civic Works Project*, to bring displaced workers back to the region and rebuild the civic institutions themselves.

These early lessons in my Soc. 164 class have indeed had a profound impact on me since I graduated. When advocating for affordable housing policies for *Silicon Valley At Home*, I was able to identify which lawmakers to target and work with other stakeholders and those impacted by these policies to join us for advocacy meetings to effectively get our point across.

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

Our research played a critical role in helping us with our campaign. For instance, understanding the historical context of systemic racism, gentrification, low wages and lack of infrastructure really helped me get a good understanding of the root causes that lead to poverty. Power mapping was also a useful tool in helping us identify which lawmakers we needed to meet with to get support for the congressional bill.

**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?**

We were able to grow our campaign in strength in numbers by recruiting students and allies to our cause. We did this by using old school grassroots organizing by flyering on campus, providing classroom presentations, and speaking to other like-minded student organizations.

**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?**

Our group dynamic was interesting. I feel our group worked well together. We had a wide array of students with diverse backgrounds and interests. I think the main thing that contributed to our success was that we all brought different experiences and skill sets to the group (i.e. organizing and outreach skills, media skills, writing and messaging skills, advocacy skills, etc.). This

learning has taught me in my professional life that one needs to be open to all sides and perspectives, know when to lean in and take a step back in group settings, be thoughtful of others and overall just be a good team player in order to accomplish the overall goal you're striving for.

**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 target actually included 2008 presidential candidates who we wanted to urge to support a GCCWP bill in the 2009 congressional session. Candidates such as then- Sen. Barack Obama, then- Sen. Hillary Clinton, then- Sen. John Edwards, then- Sen. John McCain and others. We contacted their campaigns by emailing, calling and even attending rallies in the Bay Area and sharing our campaign executive summary one-pager with the candidates. I got to attend rallies for Barack Obama in Oakland and John Edwards at San José State. In fact, Dr. Scott Myers-Lipton was able to get a few minutes alone with the Senator following the rally to share more about the GCCWP and our campaign. In this regard, we had some success although we had some challenges really getting through to most candidates.

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

Yes, we did indeed get various media outlets to cover our press conferences and rallies. We did this by compiling a local database with print, digital, TV and radio media outlets and their contact info and then sent press releases to these outlets with all the relevant information needed for them to cover.

We had great success and received a lot of media coverage from publications such as The Spartan Daily, the San Jose Mercury News and TV coverage from KTVU Fox 2 and ABC 7.

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

Unfortunately, social media was not as prolific as it is today. In fact, back in 2007, the only social media channel used among college students was MySpace, which was not a platform used for organizing or outreach.

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

I would tell current Soc. 164 students to use this experience to really find what issue(s) you're passionate about -- drives you, what keeps you up at night? It's ok if you don't know what that might be now, you may develop a passion during your social action experience. I developed a passion for government and politics from my experience. Learning about the legislative process and strategies and tactics for advocating for policy change at the federal level, led me to a career in public service.

So keep your eyes open, be open to learning, and of course, listen to yourself. You'll find that passion!