



## **SOCIAL ACTION 164**

### SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENT REFLECTIONS

**FALL 2018: MAYRA BERNABE**, enrolled in Social Action, graduated spring 2019, BA, Sociology, Community Change Concentration, Minor: Applied Computing for Behavior and Social Science.

**Organization:** *Student Homeless Alliance (SHA)*

**Occupation:** Organizer, *Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action (COPA)* in the Monterey Bay region, working on developing leadership skills in ordinary people so they can engage effectively in public life; to build power to negotiate with public and private sector leaders; to work for the common good by transforming the economic, social, political, and cultural pressures on their families and neighborhoods. Some of Mayra's campaign work involves housing, behavioral health, Census 2020, Police and Safety, COVID, the extension of the California Earned Income Tax Credit, and the extension of the eviction moratorium.

**Impact of Social Action:** "While at SJSU, and specifically after taking the Social Action course, my life took a turning point. It was through this class that I began to recognize my agency and ability to influence and bring about change. It was through the book *CHANGE!* that I began to understand the leadership roles that any ordinary individual or student is able to play to bring about change. In all of the years prior to that point, I had been involved in community service and activist groups, and I would call myself a leader, but in retrospect, I think that I still had doubts about my abilities to actually initiate and lead. The Social Action class helped me to redefine leadership in simple terms that resonated with me since I knew I wasn't a traditional leader who was outspoken and charismatic; rather, I was more quiet, calm, and with a more serious demeanor. Both types of leaders are important and can contribute, but the knowledge I gained from Social Action helped give me the boost in confidence to proceed with what I knew and believed in, and to fight for what is right regardless of not meeting the traditional traits.

In my organizing work with COPA, I have taken roles as a Media Team Lead, training and leading a group of leaders to work on press using similar approaches and format. I learned these skills in Social Action, which gave me media knowledge, as I knew how to contact and connect with news reporters and build relationships with journalists. I had also learned how to create a press release (or a "presser") with an appropriate and catchy title to attract the press. In Social Action, I began meeting with city officials through my advocacy work with the *Student Homeless Alliance (SHA)*, which furthered my understanding of city government and state government. In my current profession, I continued to build on this foundation and further learn city and county government terminology and processes. I am in constant communication and

involvement to both challenge and/or engage with key officials. The self-agency and confidence I developed in Social Action carries on in my work 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?**

Some of the main takeaways I took from this class were:

(1) Everyone has something to contribute, no matter how big or small, vocal or non-vocal. It is important to get to know your group mates and understand their strengths and areas of needed improvement so that everyone is able to contribute their strengths to campaign and work on their areas of improvement.

(2) I learned about traditional vs. modern leadership. Traditional are those leaders who are charismatic, vocal, and easy to initiate or lead; it also looks like a top-down structure versus modern leadership which consist of leaders who may not be so vocal, perhaps may be even shy, but are as much dedicated to do the work and are more likely to share the leadership roles. Each one of us has different traits, but regardless if we are on the more charismatic or on the quieter side, we can all demonstrate leadership and be agents of change. I learned that I myself was more attuned into the more modern type of leadership and that this was the space I never knew I needed to practice what I love to do.

(3) Also, I learned that sometimes we have to make real noise to get the attention of those in power, especially when we ourselves were just developing our campaign and still had no power. Power is what we are trying to build, and this could be done by organizing ourselves and being strategic, intentional, and thoughtful.

#### **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?**

Yes, the learning I had through this course definitely had an impact on me. I learned that to make demands we have to be **strategic and specific**. For this **research is key!** Without the research it becomes so much difficult to understand the issue or be able to propose possible solutions. We have to make a power analysis to then be able to determine the main target or targets. In my work, I dedicated many hours to conduct research through online research, but also by meeting and talking with community experts in the field. This was important as it allowed me to have a

deeper understanding of the issue and then be able to articulate or speak about it to others including the press and city, county, and state officials.

I also learned that no matter how hard we worked or how specific we were with our demands, they can still be turned down or rejected (and most likely will be), so it's important to become an expert on the issue and have alternative possible solutions to be able to negotiate once we get to the table of negotiation. For us, this was evident in the many meetings we began to have with the school admin, and how much they lacked the basic information about student housing and food. It was great to step into a meeting as the experts of the issue and be able to question how the school was administering their "supposed" programs and propose possible solutions. This has been something I have been able to continue to use and build on in my work now.

**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?**

As mentioned above, research was the most important part of our campaign. The historical analysis was useful as we were able to take some of the work done by the previous group before and begin to understand what was done, the obstacles encountered, and the lessons learned. This allowed us to continue to build relationships and pursue promised commitments given to the group from the administration, in particular it was helpful to know the exact dates of the meetings, who was in attendance, and what was said. Our campaign changed focus a bit (going from San Jose larger community and student homelessness to only focusing on student homelessness), so we had to do a lot more research specific to SJSU and other CSU's across the state, once we began to lay out the key players involved to make a power map, it was great to visually have something to reference back to during our campaign and then be able to add or change as needed as our campaign evolved.

**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 recruited students through social activities, tabling, class presentations, and actions/events. Throughout the semester we would do class presentations and post flyers throughout the school buildings. In our weekly meetings, we would begin to identify who would do what and which buildings so that we could cover all areas of campus and for us to hold ourselves accountable. We had dedicated days of the week that we would table and our group members would assign themselves to shifts around their class schedules. During our tabling, we had flyers, and posters, as well as sign-up sheets, at times some goodies and candies or music to invite students to come visit us. We found that when we had social activities like the "Snackin' with Spartans," a tabling event in partnership with the rest of our class groups to invite students to come meet their fellow activists; we had food and games, music, a photo booth we created, and information about how to join our campaign or become an ally.

We also had many different actions and events like hosting the annual Poverty Under the Stars where we camped out on campus to bring awareness about the student homelessness issue and a candlelight vigil to bring students, allies, and community to support our demands and request the school president to meet our demands - this event included Dr. Myers-Lipton leading us in

singing songs, student poetry, and facts about our issue, but also speeches by some of our allies we invited and members from the interfaith community, and just some great heartfelt moments of solidarity. This was a really good way we recruited allies through actions and events like Poverty Under the Stars and the Candlelight Vigil, but we also made allies by setting up meetings and establishing our relationships. The more visual and vocal we started to become, the more students and allies we started to recruit. It was hard work, but it was worth it!

**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 did work well together. We had a positive group dynamic due to our shared agreements and consensus. I was voted into the presidency, but from the beginning we established that our group would be a centered leaderful leadership, meaning that we all shared the responsibility and leadership, and not one person would be in charge of it all. It was helpful to have Dr. Myers-Lipton's book to guide us and give us ideas about how we could lead our group meetings. We did have a vibe watcher, who would be on the lookout for our group environment and vibes to ensure everyone was contributing and participating, as well as a group facilitator who would plan the agenda and lead the meeting. We also always worked in pairs whenever we would go out and do outreach or pursue meetings. We would begin our meeting with ice breakers, and activities to be relational with each other aside from just getting into business. I found that the more we would get together and learn about each other, the more trust and positive our interactions would be, this included being intentional about having social gatherings and making sure no student was left out of participating or contributing their thoughts and ideas and together deciding on key decisions. We would be in constant communication with each other, primarily using the "GroupMe" group messaging app, but also regular text or emails.

Also, we made sure those who wanted to practice running a meeting got a chance to do so, by alternating facilitators and working together with those who had the experience already. I also made it my personal mission to ensure everyone in the team would feel welcomed and appreciated, so I would often check-in with group members on a one-to-one and see how they were doing. I found this to be helpful in helping identify the strengths and areas of needed improvement of each member, but also it opened a space to begin to imagine and brainstorm new ideas that would then branch out to the rest. Till this day, I can still recall each of my group members, and remember how much of their time, energy, money, and passion each one contributed, thanks to our positive group dynamics and many hours of hard work to be relational to each other.

**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 main target was the president of the university Dr. Mary Papazian, with Vice-President Patrick Day as our secondary target. At the start of our campaign, we struggled to get a meeting with the president. We emailed and called the president’s office multiple times, every time documenting the day and what was said to us. We did everything in the book to try to be civil and cordial before we had to turn up the heat. With about three months of unresponsiveness and the semester soon coming to an end, we called in a press conference, marched into the president’s office, and later that same night, held the annual event Poverty Under the Stars. It was an intense day and by far one of the most memorable days. Many of us had never done such a thing, and the adrenaline running through us was real. The media was all over it, we had their attention, and we also finally had the attention of the school admin. We were all over the Bay Area news, including local newspapers, radio, and social media. That same day, we got called into a meeting where a few of us were able to attend and finally able to speak about our demands to the vice-president. The press conference and Poverty Under the Stars were some of my favorite actions as it was the times that we finally began to get recognized and receive recognition for our efforts, but it also was moments that allowed me to begin to grow my public face and relationships with those students and allies I met throughout those actions.

Our campaign had both victories and defeats, it was like a rollercoaster. Ultimately our demands were met after a two-year campaign, but not before we faced defeat, (or at least that’s how it felt at that time). In the first semester, only one of our demands was met, the rest were left unaddressed until later the following semester. At that time, we also held a press conference and were finally for the first time going to meet the university president, it took us a few hours as we sat in the table of negotiation with the key players. After a few hours of negotiation, we walked away with a “no” response to our demands, but were successful in at least securing a commitment from the president to “house every Spartan student,” but with no real specific timeline.

In retrospect, I believe the reason for our failed demands at that time was because we were both unwilling to compromise or bring alternating solutions. The SJSU Administration held firm on their need to conduct further research before applying any of our solutions, and we were firm in demanding that our solutions were the best solutions at that time. Fast forward to 4 semesters later, and after continuous meetings with the school admin, as well as city, county, and state officials, our campaign demands were finally coming into fruition. At this point compromise, dialogue, and negotiation were practiced and well executed by the newest leadership at that time and on both fronts. The success of this was due to all the ground work done from all the students from each semester and the continuous meetings we held with all key players including the allies we garnered from city, county, and state leaders, but most importantly all the hard work all students put into making it possible. Shout out to Professor Scott for all his guidance and dedication to us!

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

Yes, definitely! We cultivated over 50 news stories over the course of a few months. This is not accounting to the following semester which I still was involved in. At this point I lost track. Dr. Scott and his book were essential in teaching me and my group members about how to adequately reach out to the media, how to write up a press release with catchy titles and key facts, but most importantly repetition of those key facts, and also the times or days it was most appropriate to call or email. I created a spreadsheet that myself and the other media team members would use to keep track of who contacted who, and the notes of any interview requests or questions they had, as well as planned out follow-ups to each media outlet days before our events and the day of. Myself and my team took assignments and would delegate to the other members about who was available to talk to a reporter and then coordinate interviews. I became well-versed in this field of the media team, and the following semester I was training the newest members.

A key thing about getting press was to establish relationships with the reporters and continue to stay in touch even when we had no actions or events. I found that after our first big action, many of them wanted to follow our story and stay updated with our doings, so I would often text or email some of them, especially the key media outlets that we wanted to ensure they run a story. To this day, I have continued to practice and strengthen these skills in my current profession. I have even kept in contact with some of the media reporters and some of them have continued to reach out to me for other news stories and reporting, something that I will always cherish from this class.

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

Yeah, though not to the fullest capacity. We used Facebook, Instagram, and at times Twitter. We had a few group members dedicated to managing the accounts and would help each other as needed to keep our doings, events, and actions. I would say that as our campaign began to pick up and become more known, our social media also picked up, and so it's really important that not just only one person is running all the social medias, but multiple because after a while it can become a lot for one or two to handle, especially if we want to keep our followers up to date and alert about what we are doing.

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

Celebrate every victory, big or small.

Invest in relationships from all sides, students, press, officials, community, allies, etc.

Never give up. Failure is something we don't like to face, but it's important in this work as it allows us to learn from it and only get better.

Research, research, research. Research is key! If you don't do your research, you will struggle with your campaign, so please don't try to skip corners.

Patience is crucial, this work of social change takes time, and at times it may seem like you are not getting anywhere but you are. If you are just starting your campaign, it may especially feel

this way, but know that all your hard work is important and stepping stones for the future group that can and will lead into victory.

Also, set time for reflection and what you are learning about yourself and the work as your campaign progresses. It's through these moments, that we learn and identify more about ourselves.

Last but not least, it's important that you take care of yourself, practice self-care, have social gatherings, and have fun. You can do it! Si se puede!