A Change for the Better: NSSE Qualitative Analysis

San Francisco State students comment on what is going well and what they would like to see changed.

"What one change would you most like to see implemented that would improve the educational experience at this institution, and what one thing should not be changed?"
In 2017, students at San Francisco State University completed the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). For the first time, the NSSE offered 4 prompts for open-ended feedback for institutions to choose from. San Francisco State chose to ask students what they would want to see changed and what they would like to see remain the same.

Overall response rates for this new prompt was 35%. This was more than the U.S. average for all prompts which was 32%. More importantly, this was an improvement over the 2014 administration during which San Francisco State had a 16% comment rate with the default prompt. This increase when changing from the default to "changes" prompt was seen in the NSSE 2017 across institutions. The average response for the default prompt was 11%, while the "changes" prompt had an average response rate of 45% (Dugan & Silberstein, 2017)+.

The most common themes across comments included:
- Class Availability
- Graduation
- Diversity

Making steps to support the positive aspects and minimize the negative issues found in these comments will help to increase San Francisco State's level of student engagement in 2020.
To Change?

Of the students who commented, 644 (95%) reported at least one thing at San Francisco State they would like to see changed.

The 5 most commonly included areas for changes to be made were:

1. Greater class availability (17%)
2. Quality of information from and/or access to academic advising (11%)
3. Increase student involvement (8%)
4. Lower tuition (6%)
5. Students not graduating in four years (5%)

Class availability was the most common topic in the student comments. Availability was broadly conceptualized as missing certain classes, not enough open spaces, and classes only offered at times which did not match the student's schedule. Issues surrounding the topic, such as the effect classes offered on time to graduation, were also common.

Graduation issues or delays was a frequent theme across the respondents. However, interestingly many of those who commented on the topic were doing so from a third-party view. Many students remarked that even though they graduated on time, they were concerned and upset for their friends who were not able to do the same.

Money.

A common theme was cost. Students remarked on the cost of tuition, textbooks, housing, commuting and funding for a variety of departments.

Working 9 to 5

Students expressed concern over the amount of support for students who work full-time.

Graduation Woes

Many students expressed concern over not being able to graduate in four years. This was commonly cited as being due to a lack of classes needed or difficulties determining which classes they needed to take.

Traveling Students

Many students mentioned a reduction in price on BART and/or Muni would be beneficial to their commute.*
Of the students who commented, 244 (36%) reported at least one thing they enjoyed and wanted to see continue.

The 5 most commonly included areas to continue were:
1. Support of diversity and diverse student population (13%)
2. Commitment to social justice (13%)
3. Effective professors (11%)
4. Culture of openness (9%)
5. College of Ethnic Studies (9%)

In addition, 24 (4%) of commenters indicated they enjoyed their overall experience at San Francisco State. The general themes of progressiveness, diversity and openness found among the comments reflect that many SF State students value concepts core to the mission of the university.

As expressed in the word cloud (left), the things students enjoyed the most were often related to the culture of openness, diversity and social justice at San Francisco State University.

"I have good experience in SFSU. This is an awesome school. The faculty and students are friendly."

"One thing that I would like to see implemented is keeping the College of Ethnic studies and providing more funds to that department."

"I don't know what I would want to see changed, but please never change the dedication to inclusivity on campus."

3% of comments mentioned keeping or funding the College of Ethnic Studies. Interestingly, 90% of these were made by students from other colleges.
Looking to 2020

The NSSE will be administered at San Francisco State University in the Spring of 2020.

Addressing some of the concerns and comments left by students may help inform what issues will still be relevant and which may have improved.

Some known aspects which may affect the themes addressed in 2020:

Transportation

In Fall 2017, San Francisco State began offering students the GatorPass which allows students free Muni and discounted BART rides.

If this system continues, there may be reduced issues around cost of BART and Muni.

Graduation

If San Francisco State is still on track with Graduation Initiative 2025 goals, in 2020 there should be a reduction in issues surrounding graduation rates and timelines when compared to 2017.

Break the Cycle

Many of the themes mentioned in 2017 were also mentioned in 2014. More focus on fostering strengths remedying challenges will help 2020 be full of positive change.

Diversity & Openness

Many of the comments indicated the commitment to diversity and inclusion at San Francisco State was an important factor to continue to foster.
"I have been very satisfied with all my experiences interacting with faculty and staff at SFSU. They have been very helpful in assisting me when needed."

"Personally, I had a great experience during my four years of college and I am grateful and excited for opportunities that will be coming."

"Interacting with so many different people of all ethnicities, religious beliefs, political viewpoints, sexual orientations, abilities, etc. has added to my breadth of education. I am very fortunate to have attended SFSU, and hope that I am accepted into the graduate program."

"The one thing I would not change is the existence of the College of Ethnic Studies. I truly learned a lot from being able to take course from the College of Ethnic Studies and I would hate to see that change. It is extremely valuable to have courses that teach about ethnic studies and other cultures."

"SFState has broadened my understanding about social issues and has added to my appreciation for the Bay Area for its openness and social progression. The faculty, staff members and students that I had the opportunity to work with strived to bring up issues of inequality, prejudice, racism, etc. and has caused me to be more aware of the injustices and question how these social behaviors have become norms."

* At the time of the survey, the GatorPass which results in free Muni for students during the school year had yet to take effect.

^ SFSU Values and Mission): https://planning.sfsu.edu/


For more information on the NSSE please visit: https://air.sfsu.edu/ir/student_engagement