

SJSU Campus Climate Survey 2015

Overview

Results from the 2015 Campus Climate Survey indicate that overall attitudes toward the university are mostly upbeat. A majority of students, faculty, staff, and administrators rate the university favorably on a range of attributes. Still, new feedback from campus stakeholders suggests that SJSU has largely not made progress since the previous survey in such areas as curtailing incidents of discrimination, allaying concerns about physical safety, providing venues for civil and open exchange of ideas, and maintaining effective shared governance and leadership.

Conducted in March and April 2015, the new survey asked all students and employees to rate SJSU on its climate, diversity, student supports, working environment, administration, and on-campus interactions. Respondents also provided details on the frequency and nature of discrimination or harassment on campus. In addition, the survey collected written comments, all of which were read and grouped into common themes. In total, the survey obtained 6,862 usable responses, including 2,125 open-ended comments.

General climate viewed favorably

On a range of attributes, most students, faculty, staff, and administrators rated SJSU’s overall climate positively. For example, 71 percent of students perceived the university climate as either “moderately” or “very much” respectful,

Figure 1. General Climate Perceptions by Students

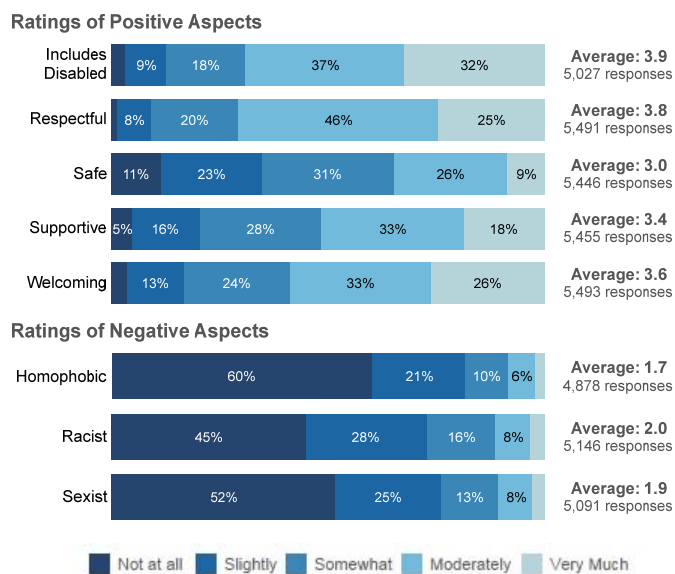
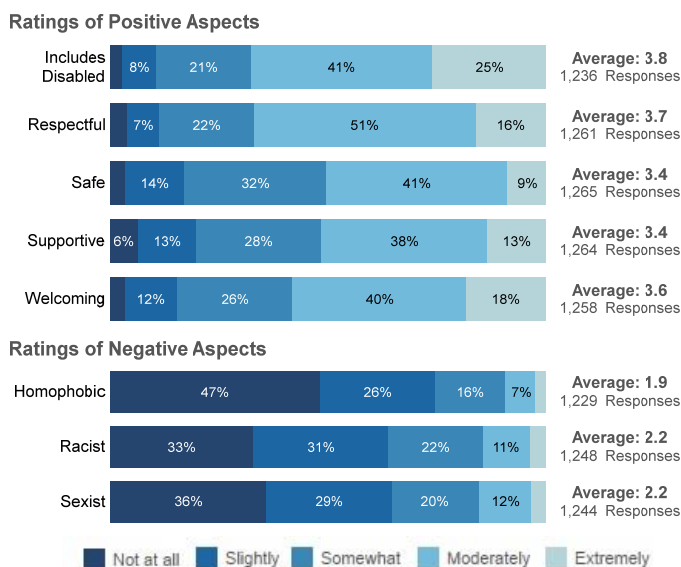


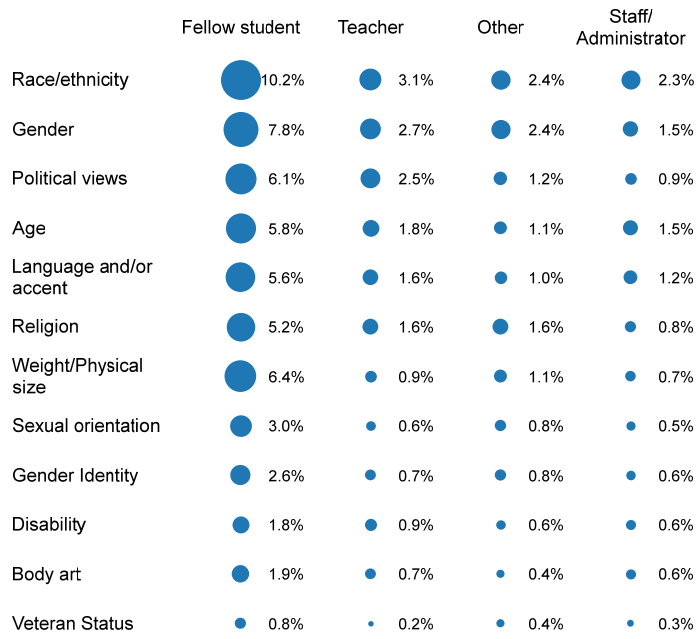
Figure 2. General Climate Perceptions by Employees



while 59 percent saw it as welcoming. The respective figures for faculty, staff, and administrators combined were 67 and 58 percent. Large shares of campus respondents also viewed the campus as mostly free of problems such as sexism and racism. Among students, 73 percent said the campus was “not at all” or “slightly” racist, and 77 percent rated it as “not at all” or “slightly” sexist. The combined employee percentages were 64 and 65 percent, respectively. **Figures 1 and 2** summarize the general climate responses.

A multivariate analysis indicated that perceptions of SJSU’s overall climate were closely linked to opinions on other issues. For students, the strongest predictor of general climate views was whether they perceived a sense of community on campus. If they said that SJSU was successful at fostering a strong sense of community among students, faculty, and staff, they were much more likely to believe that the general climate was favorable. By contrast, if they thought that a feeling of community was lacking, they were much less sanguine about the climate overall. For employees, the best predictors were whether or not they believed that their immediate working environment was supportive and welcoming. Other strong predictors for both students and employees included whether they thought differences of opinion could be aired openly and whether they felt that their opinions were valued.

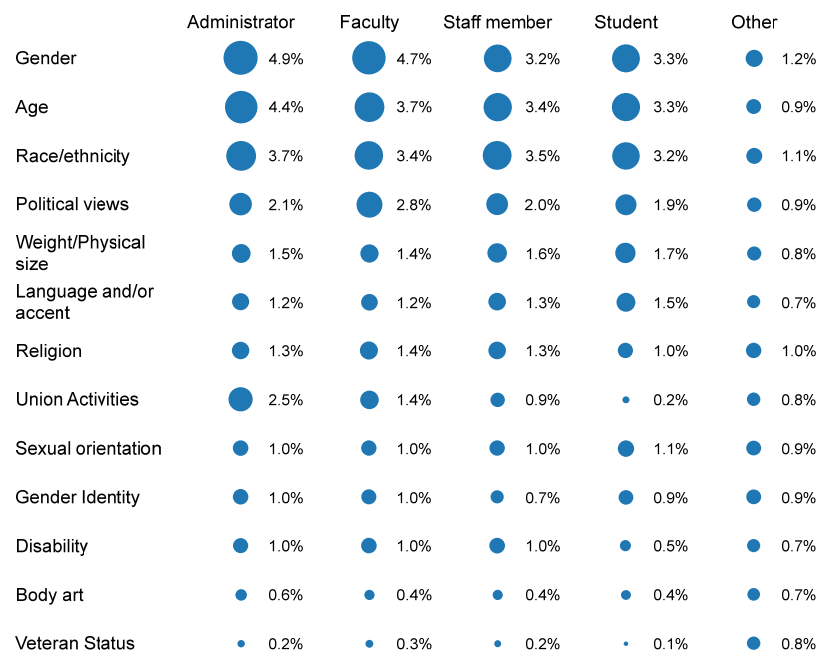
Figure 3. Source and Type of Discrimination Experienced by Students



Episodes of discrimination, harassment not uncommon

Even while general opinions were mostly favorable, many on campus have experienced an incident of harassment or discrimination at SJSU. Among university employees, 39 percent of faculty and 34 percent of staff said that they had been subject to some form of discrimination “occasionally” or “frequently.” Including those who said they “seldom” experienced one or more types of discrimination, the total share of employees who reported

Figure 4. Source and Type of Discrimination Experienced by Employees



encountering any form of discrimination was close to 60 percent—61 percent for faculty, 59 percent for staff, and 57 percent for administrators.

The rates for students were lower, with 25 percent experiencing discrimination “occasionally” or “frequently,” and another 27 percent indicating “seldom” occurrences, for a total exposure of 52 percent. That proportion appeared to be unchanged from 2010. Although the survey wording changed slightly from 2010 to 2015, on the same basis 51 percent of students in 2010 reported at least a “seldom” incident. This frequency is similar to national estimates in 2015 made by the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), which found that 58 percent of students had witnessed some form of discrimination or harassment at their institution, and 44 percent had experienced it personally.

Nonetheless, SJSU students in 2015 were marginally more likely than those in 2010 to know how to officially report discrimination on campus, even though more than a third in 2015 still acknowledged that they did not.

Large majorities of staff, faculty, and administrators in 2015 said that they knew how to report such incidents. However, in a question posed only to faculty members, a 54 percent majority believed at least “somewhat” that subtle discrimination was tolerated on campus.

Based on the analysis of written responses, there were more than 550 comments related to harassment or discrimination on campus. (Employees were presented

with an open-ended question specifically asking them to detail incidents of discrimination, but students were not.) Many of the incidents referenced by respondents appeared to involve hearing offensive or derogatory comments, both inside and outside the classroom.

Often discrimination occurred between members of the same peer group. Students most often experienced discrimination from other students, faculty from other faculty, administrators from other administrators. Staff were almost equally likely to indicate an incident involving administrators as they were with fellow staff.

Figures 3 and 4 show the relative prevalence of incidents by type and by source for students and all employees, respectively, as a percentage of all types of incidents indicated. As an example, in Figure 3, among students, 10.2 percent of the

reported types of incidents—805 separate responses—indicated an episode of racial discrimination originated by other students.

The frequency of particular forms of discrimination differed somewhat between students and employees. Students who reported encountering discrimination on campus were most likely to experience an incident based on race/ethnicity, followed by gender, political views, and age-related incidents. For faculty, gender was cited most often, followed by age, political views, and race. The most prevalent incidents experienced by staff were based on race, age, gender, and political views.

In both the student and the employee samples, women were much more likely to report gender discrimination.

For incidents of racial harassment and discrimination, several groups in both samples were more likely to report the occurrence of racial discrimination, including blacks, Asians, and Latina/os compared with their white counterparts. Employees identifying with two or more races likewise reported higher rates of racial discrimination, as did students who were of Pacific Island or Middle Eastern backgrounds.

The written remarks provide some evidence that age discrimination on the basis of being perceived as too young may be as common on campus as that of being perceived as too old; however as it was not asked on the survey, the exact frequency is not easy to establish.

Safety a growing concern for students

The survey recorded a marked increase in fears about safety on campus, in particular by students. The share of students who indicated fear for their safety while on campus increased substantially from 2010 to 2015, and the pattern was consistent across multiple measures in the survey. Asked whether they would characterize the general campus environment as safe, students in 2015 were almost perfectly split in thirds between characterizing it as safe, unsafe, or in between. On another item, whether they feared for their physical safety on campus, a 54 percent majority of students reporting having at least some fear. The average rating on the scale of 1 (“not at all”) to 5 (“very much”) dropped to 2.7 in 2015 from 3.4 in 2010, one of the largest changes observed between the two surveys. In terms of demographics, female and nontraditional gender students were both much more likely than men to express concerns about safety, and Asian students were significantly more likely than either whites or Latina/os.

Students were twice as likely as faculty and staff to agree or strongly agree that they feared for their safety, and four times more likely than administrators, suggesting that a sizeable gap in perceptions may exist.

Safety was also the fourth most common theme raised in the written responses. More than 300 written comments referred to matters of physical safety on campus. Some of the most common sentiments in the comments included

African American perspectives

The survey results indicate that African American employees and especially students may have greater concerns about several issues on campus.

For example, black students were more likely to

- Characterize the campus as racist
- Experience an incident of race-based harassment or discrimination
- Agree that there is racial tension on campus
- Participate in activities to promote sensitivity or diversity

They were also less likely to

- Agree that there was adequate representation of minorities on the SJSU faculty and staff
- View the campus as welcoming
- Believe that SJSU was building a sense of community

Similarly, among African American employees, including faculty, staff, and administration, there was also a higher likelihood of viewing the campus as racist, experiencing some form of racial discrimination, and being less satisfied with diversity initiatives. At the same time, black employees reported having greater satisfaction with their level of autonomy and overall job satisfaction, and rated their professional relationships with coworkers higher.

fears of being on campus after dark or early in the morning, concerns about the presence on campus of people who were not affiliated with SJSU, perceptions of crimes that had taken place, and the idea that some or many of the neighborhoods surrounding the campus were not safe. A number of respondents expressed concerns that campus emergency “blue light” phones were out of service and that nighttime safety escorts were not available when needed.

Open communication sometimes breaks down

An appreciable number of employees were skeptical about whether SJSU has an environment conducive to open communication and civil discourse. In a plurality of staff, faculty, and administrators, each were more likely to indicate that the university was not so successful (“not at all” or “slightly”) rather than successful (“moderately” or “extremely”) at enabling differences of opinion to be expressed openly and regularly. This is particularly noteworthy because answers to this question turn out to be highly associated with perceptions of the overall university climate.

Despite those ratings, a majority of staff, faculty, and administrators reported at least a modicum of comfort in discussing on campus potentially sensitive topics like race, religion, and economic status, with addressing their own economic status being the most uncomfortable to discuss. In addition, most faculty and staff reported feeling able to either voice criticism of department administration (faculty) or report wrongdoing of a manager (staff) without fear of reprisal.

Latina/o perspectives

On the whole, Latina/o students were somewhat more optimistic than their peers about aspects of SJSU’s climate. They were less likely to experience incidents of discrimination or harassment, less likely to have safety concerns, and more likely to view diversity on campus favorably. Latina/o students were also more likely to rate the campus as respectful and to appreciate the university’s diversity efforts such as the inclusion of diversity topics in the general education (GE) curriculum and other ways it promotes diversity.

For Latina/o employees, however, responses were less favorable. They were more likely to experience an episode of discrimination than non-underrepresented groups. They were likewise more skeptical about SJSU’s success at including minorities on its faculty and staff, most often rating those efforts as “slightly successful,” as opposed to non-underrepresented employees, who were much more likely to say that the university was “moderately successful” in that area. Aside from those issues, though, on most aspects of the climate Latina/o employees’ responses did not significantly diverge from those of other groups on campus.

Disabled perspectives

Although the campus community as a whole tended to rate favorably the university’s efforts to include the disabled, members of the community who identified as disabled were less satisfied. By one measure, 23 percent of disabled students—and almost a third of disabled employees—rated the overall SJSU climate as “not at all” or only “slightly” inclusive of the disabled, versus 12 percent of non-disabled students.

Employees were further asked about their immediate work climate, and a quarter of disabled employees did not view their immediate environment as inclusive. In addition, a quarter of disabled students said that they had either “occasionally” or “frequently” been discriminated against because of their disability, and 56 percent believed (“agree” or “strongly agree”) that the campus should pay more attention to the needs of disabled people. The corresponding percentages for disabled employees were 28 percent and 60 percent.

For students, the balance regarding overall openness was reversed, with 50 percent responding favorably that differences of opinion could be aired readily on campus, 21 percent unfavorably, and 29 percent in the middle category. A majority of students indicated some level of comfort with talking about each of six sensitive topics listed on the survey—economic status, political views, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status. They were least comfortable discussing race and veteran status, while sexual orientation and religion appeared to trigger the least discomfort.

LGBT perspectives

SJSU community members who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) were more likely to experience the university climate as homophobic. For instance, while only 7 percent of heterosexual employees perceived the overall climate as “moderately” or “extremely” homophobic, the equivalent rate was 29 percent among all employees who identified by any other sexual orientation. Nearly a third of employees who did not identify as heterosexual reported experiencing either occasional or frequent discrimination due to their sexual orientation.

Students reported fewer problems on these issues, but there were nonetheless some important differences for LGBT students. Approximately 12 percent of non-heterosexual students indicated occasional or frequent occurrences of discrimination, and LGBT students were more likely than their heterosexual peers to view the university climate as homophobic (17 percent versus 6 percent).

More than 100 written comments also spoke of problems around open communication at SJSU. More than 60 comments raised concerns about the general ability to discuss sensitive topics, with race, religion, and politics mentioned the most often. Another 70 comments, notably by both students and faculty members, expressed the need for greater tolerance of multiple viewpoints on campus—often on political and religious topics—especially when opinions differ from those of the majority on campus.

Asian perspectives

Asians or Asian Americans constituted more than 40 percent of students and 18 percent of employees, among those who chose to identify their backgrounds. Of the student respondents, 27 percent were Asian Indian, 25 percent Chinese, 19 percent Vietnamese, and 12 percent Filipina/o. For employees, the breakdown was 21 percent Chinese, 18 percent Filipina/o, 15 percent Vietnamese, 12 percent Indian, and 12 percent Japanese.

Asian students were more likely than white students to view the campus as having problems with racism and adequate representation of minorities in its work force. They were also more likely to express fears about physical safety on campus and indicated more instances of discrimination based on race as well as language/accent.

For Asian employees, there were no measurable differences in their opinions on SJSU’s general climate versus all other employees, but in the immediate work environment, they were more likely to note the presence of racism and sexism. They likewise reported higher rates of exposure to both racial and language/accent discrimination.

A few comments on communication referred to the hate crimes that occurred on campus in recent years and raised questions about why those incidents had not been discussed more widely on campus.

Campus diversity appreciated, but concerns remain

The survey likewise sought feedback on issues related to diversity and adequate representation of various groups on campus. Answers to several of the questions indicate widespread recognition and appreciation of the diversity on campus, and many stakeholders believe that SJSU is successfully fostering diversity. Specifically, majorities of both students and employees indicated that they valued the work SJSU was doing to promote diversity. On other measures, by a ratio of five to one, students were more likely to believe that the campus has been moderately or extremely successful at developing an appreciation for multicultural society (64 percent versus 13 percent who said “slightly” or “not at all”), and 61 percent perceived SJSU as successful at promoting and celebrating diversity in all its forms. In the classroom, 63 percent of students said they believed that all identities and experiences were actively appreciated, and 66 percent agreed that there were other clubs and organizations outside of class that appreciated the backgrounds of all students.

Opinion was more divided among SJSU employees, but in most cases they were still more likely than not to perceive these areas as successes. Within the faculty, 42 percent rated SJSU as “moderately” or “extremely” successful at promoting diversity in all its forms, compared with 31 percent who answered “slightly” or “not at all.” The respective ratios for staff were 53 percent favorable

versus 25 percent unfavorable, and for administrators, 46 percent favorable versus 31 percent unfavorable.

Asked whether job recruitments in recent years had made an honest effort to hire diverse faculty, a large majority of faculty (69 percent) said they “agree” or “strongly agree” that they had. Most faculty members also felt that their departments supported including diverse gender and ethnic perspectives in the curriculum, but only a third believed (“agree” or “strongly agree”) that there was enough representation of minority faculty on Academic Senate committees.

As far as the current state of diversity on SJSU’s work force, 55 percent of students believed that the university was succeeding “moderately” or “extremely” at having adequate representation of minorities in its employee ranks. The respective proportions of faculty, administrators, and staff were 43, 45, and 52 percent.

Diversity was also one of the most frequent topics in the written comments, with the majority of comments being favorable about the state of diversity at SJSU. However, roughly a third of the comments had a negative assessment of diversity, arguing that either the university had not done enough to promote and recognize diversity or else that it had gone too far. A few dozen comments also made suggestions about ways to improve and sustain diversity initiatives on campus.

Work environment a strength

Most employees voiced generally favorable views of their immediate working environment. In fact, on comparable survey questions, aspects of the immediate climate—that it was respectful, welcoming, supporting, and free of racism, sexism, and homophobia—were consistently rated more favorably than the university as a whole, a pattern that held for faculty, staff, and administrators.

A majority of staff said that their work environments were free of sexism and verbal abuse, and by an eight-to-one margin, they said that SJSU was a good place to work. However, a plurality of 41 percent said that SJSU was not particularly successful at encouraging collaboration across departments and colleges. Faculty were presented with largely different questions, but most agreed that their departments were free of verbal abuse and that their colleagues were committed to preventing sexual harassment. A large majority of faculty felt supported by their chairs (71 percent), as well as respected by their colleagues (69 percent).

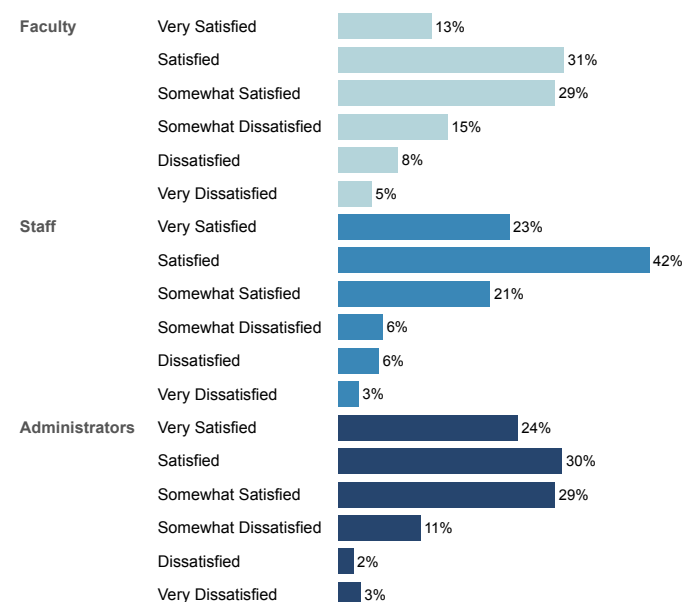
Job satisfaction stable, but concerns for morale and professional growth

Overall, most employees expressed satisfaction with their jobs and various aspects of them. Although faculty were on average the least satisfied, fully 73 percent of faculty expressed some degree of satisfaction (“somewhat satisfied,” “satisfied,” or “very satisfied”) with their jobs. The rates were even higher for administrators and staff, at 84 percent and 86 percent, respectively. **Figure 5** contains the complete distribution of responses by group.

Staff in particular were quite satisfied with their professional and social relations with colleagues, but also their job security and autonomy. They were somewhat less content with opportunities for development and advancement, but a majority still had a favorable view of those aspects.

Faculty were most content with their teaching—including support for various styles of teaching—and their level of autonomy. For the most part, they thought that senior faculty supported junior faculty, and they were satisfied with their professional and social relations on with colleagues. Most were also satisfied with their academic freedom and felt supported by their chairs and departments. In addition to having significant dissatisfaction about campus leadership, which are discussed below, faculty were least satisfied with opportunities for scholarly pursuits and professional development, but even on those matters a plurality held a favorable view. Still, a majority (51 percent) did not think

Figure 5. Overall Job Satisfaction by Employee Group



Survey methods

The 2015 Campus Climate Survey was the latest in a series of periodic studies to better understand experiences of all members of the campus community. Previous surveys were conducted in 2010 and 2006. The questionnaire consisted of separate versions for students, faculty, staff, and administrators, but contained several common questions across all versions. There were nearly 200 possible response items on the survey, including two open-ended questions for employees and one for students. The 2015 survey contained several changes versus previous years, and thus not every question could be compared over time.

All current students, faculty, staff, and administrators were invited via e-mail to complete the survey online in March and April 2015. Responses were anonymous, but those who provided their contact information were eligible to win a gift card for their participation. Below is a summary of the survey's response.

	Total Population Contacted	Usable Responses Received	Estimated Participation Rate
Students	33,659	5,586	17%
Faculty (including temporary)	2,320	493	21%
Staff & administration	5,329	783	15%

A small number of responses (less than 1%) were determined to be unusable because they contained few or no answers to questions.

The 2015 survey overall was more representative of the university community than was the 2010 round. The response rate reached 17 percent (compared with 13 percent) and the mix by ethnic group was closer to the population percentages. Still, notably women and graduate students were somewhat overrepresented in the 2015 sample, and Latina/os appeared underrepresented. Exact comparisons are not possible because the survey response categories differ from those of other university data sources.

All figures shown in this report are the unweighted statistics from the usable sample. Unless otherwise indicated, all percentages are of those who responded to a particular item, and exclude the item nonresponse.

that faculty morale on campus was good, a sizeable decline from 2010. Faculty were almost evenly split on whether their compensation was equitable, but most believed that other employment practices such as the evaluation of lecturers and the handling of grievances were fair.

Concerns about campus leadership

Some of the strongest views expressed in the survey—both in the written comments and in the ratings—were about matters of campus administration and governance. When comparable questions were asked in 2015 and 2010, there was a substantial decline in opinion regarding campus leadership, in particular by faculty and by administrators themselves. Almost two-thirds of faculty in 2015 said they were dissatisfied with campus administrative leadership, with many believing that the university was not using its resources to help faculty succeed. The rates of dissatisfaction were lower for administrators and staff, at 47 and 40 percent, respectively. However, asked whether SJSU was a well-managed university, most administrators (59 percent) also disagreed. (Students were not asked a comparable question.)

Across all employees, the greatest predictors of satisfaction with administrative leadership were whether respondents believed that the administration shared important information and whether they felt that their opinions were valued at SJSU. Of the employees who indicated that they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with information sharing, two-thirds were satisfied or very satisfied with overall campus leadership. By contrast, satisfaction with overall leadership was at less than one percent among those who were dissatisfied with information sharing. Similarly, 60 percent of employees who believed (“agree” or “strongly agree”) that their opinions mattered voiced satisfaction (“satisfied or “very satisfied”) with overall leadership, versus only 4 percent of those who did not believe that their opinions were valued.

Based on written comments, other specific areas of dissatisfaction included perceptions that stakeholders were not being consulted in decision-making, that there was not sufficient proactive communication about policies and decisions, and the general belief that SJSU was not being managed effectively.

Feedback on the survey

More than 300 respondents took time to make comments and suggestions about the survey itself. Their remarks included both criticism and praise for the effort, and a number provided constructive feedback on how to conduct the survey and use its results better. Those responses will be retained and shared with the appropriate individuals in future surveys.

More information

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

Related reports

“Preview of Findings.” December 2015. Available from iea.sjsu.edu/assessment/projects/campusclimate

“Detailed Data Exhibits.” December 2015. Available from iea.sjsu.edu/assessment/projects/campusclimate.

“Qualitative Report.” December 2015. Available from iea.sjsu.edu/assessment/projects/campusclimate.

See also

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Higher Education Research Institute. “Findings from the 2015 Diverse Learning Environments Survey.” October 2015. Available from www.heri.ucla.edu/dlePublications.php

Garvey, Jason C., and Rankin, Susan R. “Making the Grade? Classroom Climate for LGBTQ Students Across Gender Conformity.” *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* 52 (2015), no. 2.

Hurtado, Sylvia, and Ruiz Alvarado, Adriana. “Discrimination and Bias, Underrepresentation, and Sense of Belonging on Campus.” Higher Education Research Institute. October 2015.

Reason, Robert D., and Rankin, Susan. “College Students’ Experiences and Perceptions of Harassment on Campus: An Exploration of Gender Differences.” *College Student Affairs Journal* 26 (Fall 2006), no. 1.

Wells, Alison V., and Horn, Catherine. “The Asian American College Experience at a Diverse Institution: Campus Climate as a Predictor of Sense of Belonging.” *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* 52 (2015), no. 2.