

ILO focus group session

April 25, 2019

Moderators: Fi Tovo, Griselda Paredes, Allie Fasth, Madeleine Murphy

16 participants in attendance, from Umoja, Mana, Puente, Year One and Project Change.

Below is a cleaned-up summary, essentially verbatim but edited for clarity and concision, of the student responses to the ILO discussion questions.

Question 1: What is the point of a college education – for you? For society in general? (19 responses)

- I have to, for the career I want. I want to be a teacher so you need to have your bachelor's degree. Obviously, if I didn't have to go to school... I wouldn't do it. But now that I'm in school, I like being a student. Education is really important. In order to get your foot through the door you need a degree nowadays. It's really important to have a degree. And also, I couldn't see myself doing anything else besides going to school.
- For me, it's a way to secure my future. Getting a degree is the most basic level of trying to be successful in life. There are other paths that many take, but for me, going to college is the most accessible – it's not easy, but it is the most easy way to secure my future.
- In addition to those pragmatic approaches, it's about determining what you're made of. There's a pragmatic push, like, I need this requirement, to get my degree... to have a good life and a future. But there's also, when you're young, dumb and have something to prove, you get an opportunity to see what you're made of, and push your limits, and see what your potential is... and learn where your comfort zone is.
- I agree with all of you. For me, it's about education, about being able to do something that people before you weren't able to do, which is a big thing in my family – reaching that goal, whatever it may be, and education does help. Even though you might be carrying yourself through high school thinking I can't wait to get out, in college it's a different feeling. It's so important in life to have some type of education, even if it's not college.
- In my family, for me, it was always told to me growing up that I would have to go to school and educate myself because knowledge is something no one can ever take from you.
- I want to be the role model, being the oldest of my family.

- I also do it [go to school] for my little brothers – they copy everything I do. If I put on all black in the morning, I'll see them put on all black. So I try to do positive stuff they can catch on to, make it a habit. For me, this shows them that even though I went to juvie, I still got my GED and diploma... no matter what happens in life, there's always an alternative, there's always a decision that you make that will make or break you.
- For me, the societal approach to this is also something that kind of backs up what we have to do. You HAVE to go to college to get a job, if you want a good career. That's what's being told to us, and it's being translated by our families a lot of the time. I feel like we have a stigma around college that if you don't go, you aren't going to get a good career, you're not going to do anything with your life. And it's so downplayed depending on your family. Society for the most part has this easy straight arrow that you are going to go from A to B to C. You're going to go from high school, then you're going to go to college, then you're going to get a steady job. That's the way it's viewed as, and we're OK with that, we make ourselves OK with it.
- For me, the way I look at college education for society, it's a climbing the ladder thing, even being allowed an opportunity. It's like climbing the ladder, looking at it from a bottom-up perspective. For me, college education looks like building a bottom, horizontal view of things where we can be not dependent on these institutions to educate us on things that are not accessible to us, and being more community based – that's what my college education means to me - and radically transforming the American social order.

Do you feel the non-major, non-job-related GE courses are relevant to you? (9 responses)

- The pointless ones?
- Stats?
- The useless ones?
- They don't apply to you.
- I do value the ethnic studies courses. I'm not an Ethnic Studies major, but there's a lot of stuff I wouldn't know if I didn't take these classes. I think it's really good to be educated on stuff... I want to be the most well-rounded person I can be. I don't want to be the best of the best, I just want to be the best me. If that means instead of climbing up, I climb sideways a bit, I make myself a really good foundation. I believe in this and this and this, and I'm going to educate myself to find out what else I believe in. You're trying to figure out who you are in college, and I if I don't take those extra chances – Oh, I've never tried ceramics, or philosophy - it might

be something that sparks my interest. Take little steps out of your comfort zone. It might be a waste of time, but there's opportunity there.

- I'm an ECON major, very business oriented: efficiency, utility, maximizing gain. I took a philosophy course last semester. First impression was that it's very airy, up-in-the-air ideas, abstract, no relation to reality. But even though one would have that impression – like, what's the point of philosophy - I learned a lot from that class about how to view the world and take things objectively. – Once at work, someone said something really racist to me. At first I was really upset... but then, as I thought about it, one of the things that philosophy class taught me was that nobody really chooses to do what they do – the idea of determinism – and taking that idea, [I thought that] given the choice, she probably wouldn't take that decision to consciously harm people and make the world a worse place. That physiological gut feeling of anger left me. Every class teaches you something, and you never know what that is.
- I call them pointless, specifically math, because math pisses me off, and science... especially when you have to pay for these classes, and they're not even related to what I have to do. There are certain classes I feel should be required like Ethnic Studies, but other classes, I don't know.... I guess I can understand [that you have] your basic arithmetic... Honestly, I wouldn't have much of a problem with these classes if we had better professors. No offence, but if we had cool professors, like Umoja-specific professors, I'd probably have a better time, because I feel like a lot of the math teachers, for some reason here they're from Russia.... It's harder for me because I'm a relational person; it's harder to pass a class with a professor you don't have any relationship with. They teach what they are good at but they don't teach-teach. It would be a lot easier for me, and for a lot of other students - Math is a huge struggle for us in Umoja; if we had a professor who we feel like is there for us.... Honestly it's frustrating because you feel like you're not going to pass. And you pay for the class, and it's not even in your major.
- I agree! A lot of STEM categories that people struggle with, it's because the social aspect is taken out of those. When we're talking about math, we talk about formulas, but we don't talk about who discovered this, where did it come from. A lot of the people who struggle with them are descendants of the people who created them. There is a social disparity because there is a lack of education for so long, with kids being thrown into class and being told "OK, you can do it!" and not knowing about how things have been taught to different people. If we had teachers who gave a fuck, who wanted you to know not just XYZ but all the stuff around it, people would be more interested in learning it.
- If the class is more personable to students, it helps. They become more comfortable about asking questions, and genuinely say "I don't understand this" instead of going to class, sitting there and not understanding.... Sometimes

students feel like they're at fault for not understanding certain material, when in reality they need an extra push.

Question 2: Tell us about an assignment, a class, a reading, or an activity that you

- **Really enjoyed**
 - **Learned the most from**
 - **Struggled with? (10 responses)**
-
- A class that I enjoyed the most was Puente classes that I took when I first got here. I had an English professor who focused on Latin writers, and had that personable perspective; reading a story, having to write a paper, but it wasn't necessarily excruciating – What the hell is this person talking about, what is this story about, I haven't even read it; it was more enjoyable to read, analyze and talk about what it was, and easier to learn that subject and pick up skills without even realizing it because you are so personably involved and invested.
 - Being able to relate to certain stories, or just hear a name familiar to you, it sparks an interest. My first English class here was the second time that I ever read a book that I in some way related to, or heard words that I instantly recognized. That was an eye-opener, to be able to relate to what you were reading.
 - For me, English has always been something I could never relate to, with the books that we read like *Macbeth*, or *Lord of the Flies* -- these types of books that are forced upon us, and for me and people who identify in a different way from what is said in the books, it's not something they can relate to, or they've not been able to focus because there's not that connection – then you go into these classes that are made specifically to make you feel comfortable and make you feel invited, and being able to read something about an experience my family has gone through – being able to sit next to a person that has gone through that - is that much more empowering to read it, to actually understand and comprehend the text that you are reading. It is that extra step into what you are about to write, read and take in. Sometimes it's like, Why am I reading this! It is horrible, I can't do this, I don't want to go to class. I want to do something that is worth my knowledge and worth all that.
 - I can relate, because if we can engage with what we're reading, it shows whoever is teaching us that we can give them our opinions and engage. If we're learning about the Western society all the time, we can connect it because we are living on

their land, but it's not as deep... I just appreciate having this Mana community, because we feel like it is my second home, we engage more with people who have things in common with you, and we learn about our side of the earth.

- I know for me, especially this semester, I struggled a lot with CHEM 220. It was a shocker because I had never struggled to this degree with math or science before. When the semester started I was submerged, I was like, I don't understand any of this, and it just wasn't clicking. And I was under a lot of load from all my other classes – I was taking 18 units – all the other ones were physics-related. The class was kind of out there and my grades were dropping, that was different for me.
- On a different note, even though I did struggle with English before, I also had a really good experience with Ethnic Studies. Just being in an environment where you get to learn about a different history which you can identify with yourself. [Especially] ETHN 101, Latin History. Reading at first a textbook in high school with an ethnocentric point of view, and reading... U.S. history from a different perspective – that was super-empowering for me. It is so important to learn about my culture, and has opened me up to so many different ways of thinking that I never would have thought would have been possible without that perspective.
- And to kind of add on to that: I am in the same class, and the best thing I have read is “From College Readiness to Readiness for the Revolution,” it was about CSM in the 1960s, how the students were autonomous and self-governing, and how they were deciding what they needed. Because the reality is, if you get student input they're going to tell you what they need, what's wrong and how to fix it. It shows the disparities in the community, in a very micro way, in here. It was just very interesting, to see the power of a few students, what they could do.
- I appreciate Ethnic Studies too – I learned so much more about the South Pacific and my people, and it made me appreciate Earth Day more. Understanding that once global warming is moving on, it's hitting my islands first of all. Our sea level is rising; nobody understands this as much as much our islanders. People on the big land don't understand, they think our earth is still the same, it looks the same right now, but they don't understand the many lives that are taken away, or the pollution – that's why I appreciate Ethnic Studies and Earth Day.
- Personally for me, when I was taking Ethnic Studies 104, that was the first time I'd ever heard of that, ever; especially the repercussions, that the U.S. has the highest contamination, and pollute the most – the people who contribute the least amount to pollution are feeling it the most. I would have never ever learned if I'd not taken this class. We don't learn about the islands, the people, the culture – we don't learn the names, the native names – we don't learn about anything that's going on with other people around the world because it's not really relevant to us.
- We all talk about it all the time but we never really do anything.

Question 3: What's the coolest thing you've done at CSM? (12 responses)

- Go to the Umoja conference! It was cool. I never been outside the Bay Area – when I looked out the window and saw the cows – then the smell hits you – you're like, What the hell is that smell! Is that somebody on the bus? That was my favorite part. I was new to that whole experience and I liked it.
- A number of our Promise students have been on the SoCal trip, where you visit several UCs in Southern California. I got to learn more about myself and what I was working for. On the last leg of the trip I got to go to UCLA and talk to a friend, and we discussed future and careers and things I should be interested in; and because of what he said, he gave me a much clearer idea of what I want for myself. It was a good trip.
- I went to the same field trip. I've always thought I just wanted to stay in the Bar Area, and whoah, I think I want to be down there. I saw all these schools – I didn't want to leave here but now I have the opportunity to apply to other schools.
- Yeah, for me it was the SoCal trip with Puente. [And it was someone on the bus.] I love experiencing new things and meeting new people, and thankfully, those new people became my friends. I feel like it's one for the book. That trip was the greatest impact on my college life.
- I can say for Puente as well, the first year I was in it, we went to NCORE [National Conference on Race and Ethnicity]. That was an amazing, amazing experience. Getting to socialize with East Coasters, and people from all over the world; seeing how they think, going to conferences, new perspectives. Also, the best thing I've ever done here is put the Dia de las Muertas event up.
- I appreciate that day because Mana had a display too. I love combining with Puente. It makes us feel connected and whole at this school, as minorities. We get to come together and there is no bullshit, and everyone is smiling, and it's so fun, being able to connect with you guys. I appreciate Puente and Mana – and we get to go to other schools, like last year we went to Chabot, and got to interact with their students and help them raise up the program. I just appreciate Mana for having their community as well, we get many benefits – I feel like I'm spoiled sometimes. We just sing and dance, but that's not all we do - we come with roles and baggage and we work together. That community is unbreakable.
- For me it was honestly just being part of Umoja. That's what engaged me in everything. Being able to engage with everything. And now I'm the VP of the club, and this is the first time I have engaged in Black history month and planning, and engaging with other clubs. Like we want to plan a cross cultural week and

understand that my culture is relevant and I can be successful. I would not have done this in high school. This is the first time I've engaged in Black History month in a school environment. And engaging with other clubs – we want to plan a cross-culture week. Being able to understand my culture, and to be successful.

- The events, what I take from them is just like educating everybody, telling them what your culture is, like Earth Day and Dia De Los Muertos. It's just telling them how you celebrate your culture. They always keep asking questions, and the more questions that they ask, the better for them to know who you are.
- Intervarsity just had this display in Building 10, about "What are you fishing for?" I'm fishing for my people. People are my connections – I'm learning every day; it doesn't matter who you are, where you come from – it tells me who you are, and it makes me think about how many people are in this world. I'm not alone; no one here is ever alone. All these clubs, they're a community. There's a place for everybody here. There's nobody can be left out. That's one thing I love about CSM.
- I think for me, it was about two years ago, I was able to take a student with me to Texas, and we didn't get funding from the college itself, for whatever reason – that's not important – but... [we went anyway]. The conference was in Texas and exposed the students to new areas – they had never been out of the Bay area, or Cali. It was just this sense of expanding the horizons, being able to be exposed to a variety of people that can do similar work. It was his first semester... It was cool that he had that experience.
- Being able to go to high schools, and talking to high school students about my experience in college. Being a first-generation student, me going there and giving them my experience will help them with their college experience.
- Another part I like too, in Elevate Club, we go to Juvenile Hall, we tutor them for college classes so when they come here, they are already caught up and they have a community they can come to. – I remember when [Danny] came in when I was in there. He was telling me all the stuff I could do, and I didn't believe it – they were telling me they could help me, but a lot of people say they can help you but they really don't – they just say it because it makes them feel good – when I came here, I could see that they really meant it. That is my favorite experience. You see how it circles back; you see how it works – like how he got out; I was inspired by Danny, because he was in the cell next to me, and now he's in college. It inspires you.

Question 6: We live in a world of “fake news” and total information, where it’s up to us to figure out who we can trust, and why. – Do you think you are learning skills here that will help you navigate this world? (2 responses)

- I think the skills that we’re learning here translate into our daily lives. It could be as simple as communication. We do have communication classes, and pretty much classes and skills we learn every single day, and we can translate it super easily, and we have a chance to educate others in our lives and communities. And I think that’s super important. Because people that maybe didn’t get the chance to get an education, we can help them comprehend and get to that point. And the skills we’re learning now are going to directly affect those around us, the communities, whatever we’re involved in, because those people are closest to us, and whatever one person does affects another. Being able to share is important, especially at a higher level.
- For myself, the majority of my classes I don’t think have much to pertain to making decisions on one’s own beliefs because they’re subject-focused –English, Science etc. Now that I think about it, actually, there are a couple of classes that give me ideas that kind of help parse out whether a news source is trustworthy or not. Ethnic Studies [for instance]; you’re told this whole narrative about America.... History is written by the victors. Some classes at CSM teach you that you’ve really got figure out who you want to listen to. Cite sources for speeches; listen to the bias; who researched this, a conservative or liberal thinktank, or was it an actual academic institution that has a reputation? Also, for myself, I don’t listen to the news, and this is something I got into the habit in high school. I’m just saying that when it comes to the news, they’re not concerned with people; they are just concerned with getting views so they can make big money off advertising, sensationalist crap that makes you upset and angry, and in my opinion, ignorance is truly bliss.... I never intentionally seek out the news.

Question 7: The faculty have defined a set of “learning outcomes” that summarize what we hope you’ll take away from your general education – in effect, a summary of the skills and abilities that we think college should equip you with (along with the specific skills you get from your major). – Do these all sound meaningful, or relevant to you as a student? (9 responses)

- For number 5 [social awareness and diversity] – I can really connect to this. I talk differently at home and I have to bring it here and it’s a different environment. The

way I'm taught at home, it's more respectful, but here's it's all over the place and it's freedom, but I'd rather it be more like the way it is at home. It's the best life I can live.

For number 4, critical thinking: this one time, someone was talking to me; I started dissecting it and was talking to someone else who doesn't go to college, and I could tell he doesn't go to college, because I was like, I'm critically thinking, and you're not – and he was like, You think too hard! And I said, No, I'm thinking critically!

- To answer the question directly, do all these [outcomes] sound meaningful and relevant? I think so.

They can all be summed up as independent learning development - that the college is trying to teach people to teach themselves, so people can learn whatever they need to learn for themselves.

Effective communication is really vital. You might have the cure for cancer, but if you can't write or talk to people, you're not going to make any money off it, and no one's going to cure cancer.

Quantitative reasoning - everybody hates math apparently, but it's still an important part of your life, even if you do the most social science or liberal arts sort of thing. You're still going to need to do your taxes or see if you can afford your car.

Critical thinking – can you think for yourself?

Social awareness and diversity – I thought that was being respectful to individuals.

Effective citizenship – I thought that was being respectful to different communities.

All of those facets are relevant to making a decent person, and a good citizen.

- These are pretty OK, but I had one urgent thing – wording of “citizenship” shouldn't be there.
- Fellowship would be a better word. Fellowship compared to citizenship – your effective fellowship would be that you are in this space, and you are here to help each other. Citizenship is more towards yourself, where effective fellowship is about how you contribute to [others].
- Citizenship means that you are property of the nation state. Fellowship is about how you are to each other.
- The biggest one for me is number 6 and number 2. I'm a Communication Studies major, and relationships with people is how I consider success. How you interact with people – a lot of people are awkward about meeting new people; they don't know what to say, they don't know what to do. One of the biggest things is breaking the ice, and networking. You could get a job later on.

Also, ethical responsibility. I want to learn as much as I can from different cultures. Everyone is different, you need to respect them.

- For someone who's been on campus for four years and transferred out twice, I can testify that these really do resonate with me as a student, and with everyone I come into contact with at CSM. Some of the professors, I don't know. Are they included in this? They should be.... Because I've been in two different four-year institutions, I don't know if I can say all of this is over here, but – yeah, coming back twice, CSM is my safe haven and this is very intentional. And it does happen, and it does work.

Follow-up: Would you say social awareness and diversity alone is a tool to address some issues you experience?

- Oh yeah. Because of Mana, and witnessing others, using our stories and being able to witness how we approach this, really does help me. I do see the difference with the four-years – there, it's so big, that sometimes not enough people care. There's no space, no program that helped students have a space like this.
- Also because of my experience here, it really put things in perspective in how I communicate at other places. In other universities, it's hella different.

Summary of themes

(Allie Fasth, Fi Tovo, Madeleine Murphy, Griselda Paredes)

What factors stood out as important to student learning?

Connection

- *Between students and faculty:* emphasis on interpersonal connection as a factor in student learning. Strong emphasis on faculty making personal connections with students, on caring and developing relationships – classes that “make you feel invited.”
- *Between students and curriculum:* Frequent references to the value of cultural relevance in the curriculum, focused on reading choices, discussion topics, and especially mathematics curriculum.
- *Between students and the college community:* Emphasis on need to participate in the community outside the classroom (cultural activities, etc.) - Sense of CSM as being home, creating a space for everyone. Great appreciation for learning communities, and for collaboration between them.

Motivation

- *Commitment to family/community*: Students frequently feel themselves to be role models for family and community members. Emphasis on the need to pass it on, to get an education so as to help others become educated. Emphasis on educating others about one's community.
- *Self-realization*: Frequent emphasis on the importance of developing one's skills generally to make the most of one's life and potential.
- *Improving prospects*: The desire for a better career, a more intentional future – acknowledgement of the importance of college for career.

Extra-Curricular Activity

- *Travel*: Student trips frequently described as impactful, eye-opening – many students have not been outside the Bay Area.
- *Organizing activities*: Value of student groups: organizing club activities, collaborating with other groups – described as highly valuable.

Student Reflection on ILOs

- *ILOs largely valued*. Students especially stressed the importance of Social Awareness & Diversity, Critical Thinking, Effective Communication, Independent Learning and Development. Some comments focused on the value of taking steps “outside of your comfort zone,” claims that “every class will teach you something.” Comments reflect students' abilities to make connections between what they are learning and the application of these skills in the wider world.
- *And yet, mention of GE courses triggered some negative feedback*. “Waste of time” – “the pointless ones?” Focus on curriculum (i.e., readings, topics) and some disciplines (e.g., math).
- *Negativity focused on math courses*. Desire for cultural relevance, personal connection; “students feel like they're at fault for not understanding because they really need a bit more contact.”
- *Diversity*: Emphasis on sharing and educating others about one's culture, and on finding out about one's culture.
- *Resonant choice of language in ILOs*. Terms like “citizenship” have unexpectedly negative connotations for students.

Participant Demographics

Gender: A majority (62.5%) of the participants were female.

Gender	Count	Percent
Female	10	62.5%
Male	6	37.5%
Total	16	100.0%

Ethnicity: More than half of participants (56.3%) were Hispanic/Latinx, and nearly a third (31.3%) were Pacific Islander.

Ethnicity	Count	Percent
Asian	1	6.3%
Hispanic	9	56.3%
Pacific Islander	5	31.3%
Multi Races	1	6.3%
Total	16	100.0%

Terms, including summer: The number of terms ranged from a minimum of 2 terms to a maximum of 12, with an average of 6.7 terms. Four terms of enrollment was most common (n=4).

# of terms	Count	Percent
2	1	6.3%
3-4	5	31.3%
5-7	5	31.3%
10-12	5	31.3%
Total	16	100.0%

Terms, without summer: The number of terms ranged from a minimum of 2 terms to a maximum of 8, with an average of 5.0 terms. The number of enrolled terms was fairly evenly distributed among participants.

# of terms	Count	Percent
2	2	12.5%
3-4	6	37.5%
5-6	3	18.8%
7-8	5	31.3%
Total	16	100.0%

Participant Survey Responses (16 total)

About today:					
(out of 16 responses)	1	2	3	4	5
The discussion was engaging	14	2	0	0	0
I was able to express my opinion	14	2	0	0	0
I feel like we all contributed to the discussion	10	5	0	0	5
The questions were helpful in getting us talking	11	4	0	0	0
The discussion helped me reflect on what I'm getting out of CSM	14	2	0	0	0
As for institutional learning outcomes (ILOs):					
I was already familiar with ILOs for the College	3	0	4	6	3
Actually, I had never heard of institutional learning outcomes	5	4	3	2	2

1= "Agree strongly"

2= "Agree"

3= "Neither agree nor disagree"

4= "Disagree"

5= "Disagree strongly"

Comments

- I have been waiting for this because an opinion matters and being able to give back to the community and being able to contribute to the overall picture of CSM is very important and valuable.
- Thankful for this space, and a fine job.
- Great facilities, great food. Thank you!
- Very good!