

City and County of San Francisco
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



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Executive Director

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**San Francisco Human Rights Commission
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****PRESS RELEASE****

San Francisco Human Rights Commission Executive Director Sheryl Evans Davis Serves as Panelist on ‘Building Just and Sustainable Communities: Are Colleges and Universities Doing Their Part?’ at Symposium Co-hosted by the Presidio Institute and California Campus Compact

On February 21, 2017, the Presidio Institute and California Campus Compact, a statewide coalition committed to furthering the public purposes of higher education, co-hosted a panel on higher education’s role in the greater community. Guests heard perspectives on the role of higher education in local communities from Andrew J. Seligsohn, President of Campus Compact nationally; Sheryl Evans Davis, Executive Director of the San Francisco Human Rights Commission; and Pam David, Executive Director of the Walter & Elise Haas Fund. Each explored why colleges and universities have both the responsibility and the opportunity to create strong, healthy communities.

Opening remarks by Seligsohn gave way to a prompted discussion on methodologies for colleges and universities to advance the public good. First, institutions need to build student citizenship capacity. While academia cultivates skills in analysis, collaboration, and discussion, it rarely applies the same dedication to “soft” skills. Both institutions and communities can benefit from members of society with developed capacities appropriate to engaged citizenship, such as listening and interpreting. Colleges and universities need to build and join partnerships to achieve community goals, and institutional practices should be reformed to support community strength. Finally, all of these efforts should be integrated to provide pathways that serve the local community.

Through incorporating a focus on community engagement, institutions of higher education and their larger communities can

- prepare educated and engaged citizens
- enhance curriculum
- strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility
- address societal issues
- contribute to the public good



Next, Davis continued this theme by sharing her thoughts on “anchor institutions.” Her students view institutions inaccessible to locals as roadblocks, prompting her to consider whether higher education should favor local access over jobs as a means to building communities. Asking “what else do we need in communities to make anchor institutions successful,” she incorporated key components of Seligsohn’s methodologies. Institutions build in communities where land is cheap and community members lack the funds to dispute development. As such, colleges and universities should be mindful of their broader communities and support community-based scholarships. There is a lack of trust between locals and institutions that institutions can overcome by challenging themselves to build and to include rather than displace. Stakeholders must be equalized in order to address and resolve issues. When institutions choose small businesses over large vendors, or provide funds to support community events, Davis concluded that they can form strong, stable communities.

As a seasoned cross-sector leader with expertise in community development, nonprofits, and philanthropy, David concluded the panel. Although she considered the aforementioned plans for community engagement well-conceived, few colleges and universities exemplify the degree of commitment to just and sustainable communities necessary to make them feasible. A commitment to community is “the exception, not the norm.” Efforts toward community fail because colleges and universities do not integrate them into their curricula and locals are not the motivation for community engagement.

Colleges and universities take up enormous amounts of land without concern for the broader community. Housing for San Francisco State, the University of San Francisco, and U C San Francisco constitutes a major use of land, but to what extent do higher education institutions consider housing as an issue when expanding? In conclusion, David called on colleges and universities to consider the public good and take responsibility for their actions within their broader communities.

About the Presidio Institute

Presidio Institute is where organizations invest in their problem solvers and gain a new lens on leadership. Its unique training methodology reinvigorates an organization's leadership culture by inspiring a collaborative mindset, imparting a new skillset, and bridging divides across sectors. The institute was established in 2013 as a project of the Presidio Trust, an innovative federal agency that transformed the Presidio of San Francisco from a military post to a new kind of national park through a cross-sector partnership model. Learn more about Presidio Institute leadership education programs at www.presidio.gov/institute.

About California Campus Compact

Since its founding in 1988, California Campus Compact has worked to build the collective commitment and capacity of colleges, universities and communities throughout California to advance civic and community engagement for a healthy, just and democratic society. Through innovative programs and initiatives, grant funding, training and technical assistance, professional development and powerful research studies and publications, California Campus Compact each year invests in and champions more than 500,000 students, faculty members, administrators and community members involved in diverse and ground-breaking activities that support and expand civic and community engagement throughout California. To learn more, visit <http://www.cacampuscompact.org/>.

By Claudia Lew, Media Relations Intern, Presidio Trust

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