

**CONCERNING THE STATUS OF
ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER STUDENTS
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO**

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I. INTRODUCTION

PREFACE

In recent years, the administration of the University of Chicago has begun taking significant steps towards addressing the needs of students in certain identity groups, particularly students of African, Latino, and Native American descent. The creation of first the Coordinating Council on Minority Issues (CCMI) and now the Office of Minority Student Affairs (OMSA), the organization of annual Martin Luther King, Jr. and Cesar Chavez Commemoration Days, the coordination of a Mentorship Program for African American, Latino, and Native American students, and the administration of targeted scholarships and academic opportunities have been some of the highlights of the University's efforts to act upon the voiced concerns of these minority groups. The authors applaud the University administration for its attention to critical problems affecting the welfare of these students.

At the same time, the needs of another major identity group have largely gone unaddressed. Students of Asian and Pacific Islander descent, both foreign- and American-born, have constituted the fastest-growing population of color on the University campus and in 2001 comprised approximately twenty-two percent of the entering freshman class, yet very few sectors of the University have adapted to reflect this demographic shift. Whenever students belonging to these groups have inquired into the lack of targeted services for their special needs, the prevalent short-version response has been that Asians and Pacific Islanders are not an under-represented minority among the student population, leaving the students to infer that the University equates welfare with "satisfactory" representation in the student populace. Another common response has been that the University is not aware of the issues facing students of Asian or Pacific Islander descent and thus does not know how it can best address them.

Therefore, the overarching purpose of this report is threefold. First, this report will provide background to understanding the circumstances of and working with students in the identity group most commonly referred to as "Asian," outlining the many unique characteristics of the group. By doing so, this report will also illustrate how the primary criterion of under-representation is a poor fit for assessing the needs of students belonging to the "Asian" bloc. Most importantly, this report will outline some of the known needs of Asian and Pacific Islander students on campus as well as some of the unrecognized issues facing Asians and Pacific Islanders in higher education in general.

It is the authors' deepest hope that by succeeding in this purpose, this report may encourage University administrators to begin allocating more resources towards targeted programs and services for the benefit of students of Asian and Pacific Islander descent on campus, and that by doing so, they may also benefit both the broader community of color and the campus community in general.

This report is by no means exhaustive, and does not attempt to thoroughly cover all of the relevant subject material. It is meant, rather, to provide a primer to understanding students of Asian or Pacific Islander descent and their needs, and to suggest some critical steps necessary to improving their development and learning experience at the University of Chicago.

DEFINITIONS AND KEY TERMS

The aggregate racial bloc most commonly referred to as *Asian* is in fact composed of an extremely broad spectrum of ethnic groups that inhabit the largest continent on the globe. It denotes people whose ancestry can be traced to East Asia (China, Korea, Japan, Mongolia), Southeast Asia (Brunei, Thailand, Laos, Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar/Burma, Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, Cambodia, East Timor), and South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives). An area of uncertainty exists beyond the South Asian subcontinent, however. The U.S. Census has designated people whose ancestry can be traced to Central and West Asia (Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Yemen, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon), many of whom are commonly referred to as *Middle Eastern* or *Arab*, as belonging to the racial category *White*. Because Central and West Asians face several issues similar to those of South, Southeast, and East Asians, however, it seems more logical that they be included in the *Asian* bloc. Therefore, the definition of *Asian* in this report will encompass people from those regions. It should be noted, however, that demographic data on Central and West Asians in the U.S. is extremely lacking due to their inclusion in the *White* category.

In recent years the *Asian* category has also been expanded to explicitly include those whose ancestry traces to any of the island archipelagoes of the Pacific Ocean (grouped broadly into Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia and including such ethnic groups as Samoan, Tongan, Tahitian, Tokelauan, Guamanian/Chamorro, Mariana Islander, Saipanese, Palauan, Carolinian, Kosraean, Pohnpeian, Chuukese, Yapese, Marshallese, I-Kiribati, Fijian, Papua New Guinean, Solomon Islander, and Ni-Vanuatu); hence, *Asian/Pacific Islander (API)*.

The term *Asian/Pacific Islander American (APA)*, on the other hand, is used to denote people of Asian or Pacific Island descent who were born in the United States or those who immigrated to the U.S. at various ages and with various levels of acculturation; it was coined to acknowledge a similar set of experiences among API ethnic groups in the U.S. For the purposes of this document, the distinction between *API* and *APA* is most relevant due to the necessity of distinguishing between an international segment of a racial group and a minority population in the U.S. The reasons for this necessity will be discussed in later sections.

In between clearly defined *APIs* and *APAs* are those who came to the U.S. but continue to migrate between here and one or more countries in Asia. Among these *transnationals*, some migrate with their families, while others have left the country of origin without the support and guidance of family members.

For the remainder of this report, the abbreviation *API* will be used as a conglomerate to identify Asian and Pacific Islander international students, Asian American and Pacific Islander American students, as well as those transnational students in between the two. When discussion turns to one or more subset groups (*APAs*, *transnationals*, or any of the specific ethnic groups, etc.) but not the entire population of API descent, these individual subsets will be clearly specified.

Two other relevant terms meriting definition are *race* and *ethnicity*. In this report, the term *race* is used as a broader, continent-level grouping, e.g. the Asian or African *race*. In contrast, the term

ethnicity is used to denote more specific country-level groups, e.g. *ethnic* Mexicans, Afghans, Sri Lankans, etc.

II. PROFILE OF THE API DEMOGRAPHIC

In the following section, major characteristics of the API racial group will be outlined. It should be noted, however, that the term *characteristics* is used in a somewhat atypical manner; what this section will actually attempt to demonstrate is the highly fragmented nature of the API identity group and the resultant need for disaggregation of the API racial category. In fact, aside from the common emphasis placed on family and group, the API population is actually marked more by its differences than by any shared heritage or histories. Unlike African Americans, who as a racial group are brought together, among other means, by the shared history of slavery, and Latinos, who are at least somewhat connected by a common language, uniting *APIs* is often difficult or even unlikely due to the extensive diversity of the group. Only through the shared experience as a minority in the U.S. have any segments of the API population found enough common ground to work together at the community level. When attempts have been made to generalize commonalities among sectors of the API group based on specious data or misconceptions, they have resulted in gross stereotyping that has inflicted an immeasurable amount of damage. The latter part of this section will discuss a few of these common stereotypes that have been applied to entire APA populations in the U.S.

THE PRIMACY OF FAMILY AND GROUP

One of the rare commonalities among all the populations within the API racial group is the primacy of family obligations, and the priority of group concerns over individual ones. Though it has become more common recently to talk about the “group mentality” of APIs (especially the Japanese) and to contrast the individualism of “the West” with the group mentality of “the East,” it is much more difficult to truly comprehend the nuances of this family- and group-focused mindset. An attempt to expound on the intricacies will not be made here, as no vocabulary exists in English to allow facile comprehension of the strength of group pressures in affecting individuals’ behavior. It must suffice to mention the overwhelming priority family and group interests take over individuals’ interests in API cultures.

DIVERSITY IN ORIGINS AND HISTORY

First of all, APIs are extremely diverse in their ethnicities and heritages. Each API ethnic background possesses a unique sense of ethnic identity with a distinct linguistic, cultural, and social history that significantly pre-dates, and takes priority over, any recent notions of pan-ethnic solidarity. At times, even specificity at the ethnic level does not adequately convey the primacy of tribal, clan, or regional roots; for example, though Indians may be considered one ethnic group, such significant differences exist among regional groups in India that the implementation of a national language (Hindi) was necessary for national government. Even in the case of APAs born and raised in the U.S., ethnic and regional identities passed down from parents or grandparents remain stronger than the APA racial identity, though the shared experience of growing up as a minority in the U.S. contributes significantly to a heightened sense of racial solidarity.

In addition to the precedent of individual, small group identities, interactions between many of these backgrounds provide an often salient obstacle to API unity. Recent history, and in some cases pre-

colonial history, has involved the exploitation, invasion, or oppression of one API ethnic group by another. The East Timorese struggle for independence from Indonesia, the partition of India and Pakistan, and the “race riots” between indigenous peoples and the ethnic Chinese Diaspora in Southeast Asian countries are just a few of the recent inter-ethnic conflicts that have created pointed division among APIs. As a consequence of such histories, prejudices and tension are common between API ethnic or regional groups.

A telling illustration of these forces at work on the University campus is the tension between Korean and Japanese student organizations that manifested itself twice in the past two years. In both instances, the tension appeared when the Korean Students Organization began conceiving an event to discuss Japanese imperial war crimes during the Second World War. Both years, the corresponding Japanese student organization, due to various reasons, did not feel comfortable co-sponsoring the event, though efforts were made by the Korean organization to extend an amicable invitation. Meanwhile, the PanAsian Solidarity Coalition, a student organization whose primary purpose is to propagate a sense of pan-Asian solidarity, suggested the event not occur during the annual *PanAsia* series. Such instances illustrate perfectly the conflicts between ethnic identity, inter-ethnic conflict, and attempts to promote a broader pan-ethnic unity, as well as the impact such conflicts have even on the University campus.

DIVERSITY IN IMMIGRATION PATTERNS

Another primary area of diversity within the API racial group, and one that particularly affects the APA subset, is immigration patterns. The history of APA immigration to the U.S. has often been characterized as a trickle, followed by two large waves. The initial trickle consisted of Indians and Chinese brought to the U.S. as servants and slaves, and Filipinos who abandoned the Spanish galleon trade and settled in Louisiana. The descendants of these immigrants have mostly assimilated both culturally and genetically with the majority. The first wave, which consisted largely of Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, and Indian laborers, began arriving in significant numbers in the mid-nineteenth century and continued to do so until 1930, when restrictions on API immigration brought the wave to a halt. By the end of this wave, there were nearly one million APAs concentrated in the western states. Though this wave faced a large amount of discrimination and exploitation, exemplified by the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, the descendants of these immigrants have also largely assimilated. The children of these immigrants were among those buying war bonds or joining the armed forces (if not joining their parents in the internment camps), and the third generation comprised the college population that sought to transform higher education and the realm of civil rights in the 1960s and 1970s.

The vast majority of APAs today, however, arrived after the 1965 Immigration Act. That act, and others following it, ended restrictions on API immigration and promoted the immigration both of highly educated professionals to fill a shortage in certain fields, and unskilled laborers to take jobs shunned by domestic American workers. The immigrants of this wave have been much more heterogeneous than the previous wave, and represent ethnic groups from across the entire Asian continent. Their reasons for migration have been equally heterogeneous: unlike members of the previous wave, who migrated largely out of poverty and economic necessity, immigrants arriving in this most recent surge may have come to the U.S. for any number of reasons, including war, oppression, persecution, economic necessity, economic or educational opportunity, or family reunification. It is this

wave that has shifted American demographics at the national level and continues to fill about one-third of the country's immigration quota annually.

Arriving in substantial numbers among this current influx, and of particular note, are refugees. During the last half of the twentieth century, international conflicts, civil wars, and ethnic violence displaced millions of people, many of whom gathered in refugee camps and other temporary communities, awaiting resettlement. In the U.S., the 1975 Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act, the 1980 Refugee Act, and the 1987 Amerasian Homecoming Act allowed over one million Southeast Asians – Vietnamese, Cambodians, Hmong, Lao – and other refugees to resettle on U.S. soil. Refugee resettlement has in many cases produced concentrated ethnic communities plagued by common poverty-related problems as drugs, disease, illiteracy, unemployment, crime, gangs, etc.

DIVERSITY IN SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS

Closely related to the diversity in immigration patterns is the diversity in APA socioeconomic backgrounds. Though the API racial group is as socioeconomically diverse as any, U.S. immigration policies have created a distinct and heavily polarized spread of socioeconomic backgrounds among the APA population. As previously mentioned, the 1965 Immigration Act that allowed most APAs to come to this country gave preference to highly educated professionals and unskilled laborers. The corresponding mosaic of APA socioeconomic backgrounds thus reflects this legislative preference of the two extremes: while highly educated professionals such as doctors and businesspeople are well-seated in the middle to upper socioeconomic range, unskilled laborers are at the very bottom of it, falling below the poverty line. According to recent U.S. Census Bureau data, 33% of APA families have incomes of \$75,000 or more, but 20% have incomes of less than \$25,000. In addition, compared to non-Hispanic White families, a higher percentage of APA families sit in the highest income bracket of \$75,000 or more (33% APA versus 29% White), but nearly twice the number of APA families also fall below the Federal standard for poverty (11% APA versus 6% White). Thus, there is a distinct concentration of both affluence and poverty within the APA population.

In the corollary area of educational attainment, the same bipolar tendency can be seen. According to recent Census Bureau statistics, of those 25 years and older, APAs are more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to have earned a bachelor's degree (42% and 28%, respectively), but also more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to have less than a ninth grade education (8% compared with 5%), with APA women falling further behind non-Hispanic White women than their male counterparts. An association can also be seen between socioeconomic levels and reasons for migration. In cases of forced migration such as refugees, or in cases of migration out of safety concerns, socioeconomic levels tend to the lower pole. On the other hand, among those who migrated for economic or educational opportunity or otherwise out of choice rather than necessity, socioeconomic levels are much more likely to be in the higher range.

Again, of special note are refugees. Many refugees represent the poorest APAs, and furthermore there are ethnic correlations. For example, Vietnamese, Hmong, Lao, and Cambodian American populations, all of which are dominated by refugees from those countries, are among the poorest ethnic groups in the U.S., with Hmong Americans earning the least per-capita (\$2,692) of all APA ethnic populations. This extremely low income level is further alarming due to the fact that 96% of APAs live in urban areas, where costs of living are high. Additionally, while 43.6% of Indian Americans, an ethnic

group that includes a significant number of highly educated professionals, are managers or professionals, only 5% of Lao Americans hold such higher-level positions.

Another region manifesting socioeconomic tendencies is that of the Pacific Islands. In Hawaii, native Hawaiians (those of at least 50% indigenous ancestry) constitute 37% of the recipients of welfare and 44% of the food stamp recipients in the state, despite making up just 20% of the population. According to recent data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau, which is limited to aggregate figures on Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) combined, NHPIs lag behind most other groups in terms of income level, with a per-capita average that is 37% lower than that of non-Hispanic Whites. The unemployment rate of 10.4% for NHPI men and 10.9% for NHPI women is lower than that of Native Americans, on par with that of African Americans, and higher than that of all other racial categories, including the aggregated Asian category.

The recognition of such strong ethnic – socioeconomic correlations has driven many institutions of higher education to disaggregate the racial category of “Asian” on their applications in various ways. Some differentiate based on American versus international origin, while others have delineated groups based on regional economic tendencies, with the most detailed differentiation observable in California institutions: both Stanford University and the University of California system list eight different APA ethnicity options (Stanford: Chinese American, Ethnic Hawaiian, Filipino American, Japanese American, Korean American, Other Asian American, South Asian American, and Vietnamese American; UC system: Chinese/Chinese American, East Indian/Pakistani, Filipino/Filipino American, Japanese/Japanese American, Korean/Korean American, Pacific Islander, Vietnamese/Vietnamese American, Other Asian).

DIVERSITY IN NATIONAL ORIGINS

Yet another area of great diversity among APIs is in their countries of origin; this particular characteristic has produced a notable disconnect between international students and American students. API international students and APA students both generally possess prejudices about the other group, as there are certain experiences, unique to each group, with which the other cannot identify or empathize. For instance, APIs from abroad, including APAs who are immigrants, are generally more steeped in their traditional customs, including group-focused mindsets, language, and behaviors. They commonly look down upon American-accultured APAs as having abandoned these ways, referring to them by derogatory names such as “ABC” (American-Born Chinese) or “ABCD” (American-Born Confused Desi¹). On the other hand, many American-accultured APAs likewise scorn recent API immigrants for their conspicuously un-American ways, commonly using the term “FOB” (Fresh Off the Boat) to describe them. Because of such a chasm between the international and the American segments of the API group, and the different sets of experiences each represents, the two must be differentiated.

In recent years, an additional division between international APIs and APAs has manifested with the rise of affluent API transnationals. As countries across Asia have gained more economic wealth, more and more affluent families in those countries have sent their children to the U.S. for a highly coveted American education. One ethnic group facing sharp division on campus because of this growing phenomenon is the Koreans. For the past several years, relations between highly affluent

¹ *Desi* is a term referring to a member of the South Asian Diaspora

Korean international students and less privileged Korean Americans have been very strained, with confrontations and physical violence plaguing the ethnic Korean population at the University.

COMMON STEREOTYPES AND MISCONCEPTIONS

There are two prevalent generalizations applied to people in the API racial category: the “Model Minority” Stereotype, and the “Perfidious Foreigner” Stereotype; gender-based stereotypes are also commonly associated with APIs. Primarily, these stereotypes were created by over-generalizing and exaggerating certain characteristics of some APA immigrant communities, but have since been used against anyone of API descent in the country. As these constructs appear to affect API students on campus in various ways, reviewing them is necessary to facilitating an understanding of the circumstances and issues facing API students.

THE MODEL MINORITY STEREOTYPE

The most common prejudice until the events of 9/11 was that APIs, and more specifically, Asian Americans, are the model minority – that Asian Americans are academically superior, hard-working, specially gifted in math and science, non-threatening, financially successful, and the racial minority in the U.S. that was, as *Newsweek* magazine put it, “outwhiting the whites.” General consensus places the roots of this construct in the 1960s, and some believe it was intentionally propagated during a time when especially African Americans were raising grievances concerning their continued economic and social plight. According to this theory, APAs were used as a case-in-point to discredit claims by other minorities that institutional racism continued to hamper their upward mobility.

While this stereotype, like most, is admittedly based somewhere in reality, it is largely a severe over-generalization. For instance, the perception of APAs as having a special knack for math and science can be traced directly to the specialty areas of those highly-educated professionals immigrating to fill shortages. Moreover, statistical evidence that has been invoked to support claims of APAs as the model minority is exceedingly problematic. Such statistics have purported to show that APAs are sprinting up the socioeconomic ladder, but they focus on the concentration of APAs at the upper end of the socioeconomic scale – those well-educated professionals – and generally ignore the concentration at the lower end. They also do not disaggregate the various ethnic groups nor their corresponding reasons for migration. Other statistics that seemingly show financial success among APAs disregard such factors as the number of wage earners per family (APAs on average have the highest number of wage earners per household of any racial group) and the aforementioned fact that almost all APAs live in relatively high cost-of-living areas.

Of the ill effects on APAs, and APIs in general, two are particularly relevant. First, the stereotype is predictably used to downplay any issues faced by APAs. As a result of the model minority bias, poverty, crime, drugs, gang-related violence, etc. are rarely associated with APAs at the national level, and efforts by APAs to draw attention to such problems in their communities have largely landed on deaf ears. Another consequence of the stereotype is internal reinforcement and perpetuation. As recent API immigrants have “acculturated” themselves to the notion that their children should outperform everyone else in the class and should choose a well-paying profession related to math or science (fields that have become known as “traditional” pursuits for APAs), they perpetuate the

stereotype by shaping their children to be the model minority. Similarly, as APA youth become accustomed to expectations of high achievement, they sub-consciously begin conforming to these expectations, despite the increased anxiety it may cause them. These problems are well-documented as a significant source of stress for APA students.

THE PERFIDIOUS FOREIGNER STEREOTYPE

A much older stereotype associated with people of API descent is that of the perfidious foreigner. Based almost entirely on physical appearance, this construct presumes that APIs, and even the second- and third-generation APAs among them, will always be aliens, never assimilating nor identifying with America or “the West” in general. Moreover, it pits APIs against “the West” in an “us versus them” paradigm, presuming that APIs are by default at odds with “the West” and seek to undermine it, holding loyalty only towards countries in Asia. Though this bias was used to justify the official internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, it has more recently become secondary to the model minority stereotype. However, that is not to say that it has faded entirely into history. APAs continue to be excluded from most popular images and depictions of American identity, and patriotic sentiments or slogans are often exclusive of APA ethnic groups; a common epithet against APAs continues to be, “Go back to where you came from,” though more and more APAs are American-born. Additionally, recent international events such as the spy plane incident with China and especially the attacks on 9/11 have rocketed this prejudice back to the front line, with the frequency of bias-motivated crimes against Muslims and South Asian Americans increasing exponentially after September 11, 2001.

Furthermore, the perfidious foreigner stereotype often works in tandem with the model minority stereotype, resulting in, for example, the fear that APIs are using their intellectual gifts to silently maneuver into key positions where they can further Asian governments’ interests (and hinder American interests), or that they are using financial leverage to do the same. The symbiotic relationship between the model minority and perfidious foreigner stereotypes illustrates that even seemingly benign bias on an entire group continues to pose a threat, as that bias may turn belligerent at any moment.

THE EXOTIC ASIAN WOMAN / THE ASEXUAL ASIAN MAN STEREOTYPES

The gender-dependent stereotyping of API women as exotic and hyper-sexual, and of API men as asexual and impotent, is another prominent prejudice against APIs. Beliefs in the submissiveness of API women, the “foreign allure” of API physical features, and the thriving of the prostitution industry around American military bases in Asia have contributed to the rise of phenomena such as mail-order brides and the so-called “Asian fetish.” Even more alarming is the association of sexual assault and physical violence with this objectification of API women; a large but still-undetermined number of mail-order brides and immigrants forced into sexual slavery are subjected to repeated battery and assault by their spouses or “debtors” to whom they owe “transportation fees” (up to \$50,000 U.S.).

On the other hand, the same strange, foreign features, combined with a perceived lack of masculine assertiveness, have caused perceptions of API men as impotent and unattractive to predominate. The emasculation of the API male has roots deep in colonial history, and is closely tied to perceptions of APIs as the model minority. Only recently, with the rise in popularity of such “manly” API celebrities as Chow Yun Fat and Jet Li, has this bias begun to change. The current generation of male college students, however, continues to suffer ill effects of this stereotype, and a substantial body

of research concerning its psychosocial impact on APA males exists, corroborated on-campus by staff of the Student Counseling and Resource Service (SCRS).

Because of the uniquely extensive level of diversity among the various API ethnic and regional groups, one cannot simply aggregate them into a single identity group and trust that grouping to provide accurate functionality. It is hopefully now apparent that the API racial group is so fractured that it must be disaggregated to discern a more accurate picture of its various constituents, and that whenever grossly aggregated statistics have been applied to the entire API population, the result has been the imposition of egregious misconceptions and stereotypes.

III. ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS

In this section, the needs of the API student population will be examined, and the current situation experienced by API students at the University will be assessed. The overview of needs that follows is by no means exhaustive nor in order of priority, and is dominated by anecdotal evidence, informal surveys, and discussions with various staff members. However, the wide spectrum of anecdotes collected and also the repetition of similar anecdotes by different students is cause for concern, and indicates that focused attention to the particular issues facing API students on campus and more formal studies of API student welfare are in great need.

INCIDENTS OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

One widespread and urgent issue facing API students on campus is racial discrimination. Sometimes, this discrimination is indirect, and/or based on the model minority stereotype, as when non-API students choose a course-section by searching out the one with the least amount of APIs who will “ruin the curve,” but more often it is direct and based on the openly belligerent perfidious foreigner stereotype. This is perhaps the most disturbing and abundant set of anecdotes; it seems that, especially in the dormitories, it is not entirely surprising to find epithets written on students’ message boards or discriminatory comments heard in the common areas. Outside of the dormitories, the discrimination continues; in one Humanities class, a peer editing exercise resulted in the following comment being written on a Korean student’s paper: “Learn English or go back to where you came from.”

Even more alarming is the fact that faculty and staff have been implicated in incidents of discrimination, and are accused of making disparaging remarks. One prominent faculty member is reported to have told a Filipino American student that “Asian girls should cover themselves up,” while another is reported to have criticized APIs for “always trying to graduate early,” a remark completely insensitive to financial pressures that may make early graduation a necessity for some students. At the hospital, one Japanese American student was asked repeatedly by the same staff members if she spoke English. Despite answering affirmatively each time, they continued to speak to her very slowly and loudly. When the Muslim Students Association, which is primarily comprised of South Asians, held a Friday *Jumma* prayer service on the Main Quadrangle the previous academic year, University employees stood around and disrespectfully joked with each other about the service, laughing aloud for the duration of it.

Other common forms of on-campus discrimination against API students involve the gender-based stereotypes. Instances of non-API students commenting on “beautiful and exotic” API female students are unsettling in frequency, and one white student had the following message displayed on his online Telnet profile: “Pillage the village of Asian women.” The nature of statements such as this is perhaps most disturbing for its implications of sexual aggression, and in this instance, no action was ever taken against the student. In fact, many API students who have faced discrimination state that they felt they had little recourse; many simply did nothing, because they did not know to where they could turn, bringing to light another serious shortcoming in student resources.

SENSE OF ALIENATION

Such discrimination, particularly instances of outright hostility, contributes to another issue facing API students: a sense of alienation and exclusion from the broader campus community. For API students – and especially for those international students among them – who have always comfortably lived by various API cultural norms, to come to campus and then find themselves in a concentrated, close-quarters environment among peers who see API mannerisms as strange or display contempt towards them is personally damaging to their development and in some cases may be psychosocially traumatic. On the other hand, for APA students who have thus far found acceptance among their peers and may not possess a keen sense of racial identity, to be discriminated and pigeon-holed by racial prejudice may raise questions regarding their racial background that require counseling and guidance. Often, discrimination against American-acculturated APAs has resulted in higher levels of racial consciousness among them, but support is necessary to ensure the proper channeling of frustration and an affirmative processing of these experiences.

MISLEADING RETENTION RATE

For other minority groups, the common method of discerning whether or not there is a significant amount of cultural alienation has been to look at retention rates. In the case of APIs, however, the retention rate criterion cannot be used as a gauge of API students' satisfaction with their experience on campus, as various pressures may prevent API students from acting on negative experiences. When asked why they did not transfer, many API students who report a strong sense of alienation simply shrug and say that transferring was not an option. One Asian American student added, "... unless I could have transferred to Harvard," implying that high parental expectations restricted her options. In fact, many API students at the University report that disobeying their parents has never been an option, and thus choice of concentration, transferring to another college, or taking time off were never viable alternatives to unhappiness and/or stress resulting from life on campus. One extreme example observed by the Student Counseling and Resource Center was an Asian father who refused to allow his daughter to take a leave of absence. The daughter had been sexually assaulted and wanted to take time off from school until she could recover emotionally, but the father believed that taking time off would be shameful. The father also insisted that the assault was her fault.

Family-related difficulties are a well-documented source of stress especially for APA students. Though many APA students on campus appear to be in successful pursuit of "traditional" degrees in biology, economics, etc. with high grade point averages, a significant number of them are likely obeying parents' wishes and trying to live up to high expectations, despite personal desires to pursue other, less traditional academic and professional paths. Substantial research exists on APA college graduates who, having pursued traditional paths, find themselves extremely unhappy and turn to non-traditional ones.

An international API student responding to the question of why he did not transfer noted other pressures: "Well, we came all this way already... transferring is almost like quitting, and you don't come all this way to quit." Indeed, a large number of factors may pressure international students into remaining on campus rather than transferring or taking a leave of absence. For instance, many, if not most, Singaporean students are attending the University on a corporate or government scholarship. These scholarships pay for most or all of their expenses while they are enrolled. However, they are extremely exclusive, and may decree strict regulations such as the maintenance of a minimum overall

GPA of 3.5 or even 3.7, a commitment to non-involvement in political activism, a required concentration of Economics, etc. Such strict regulations effect a high level of stress upon students seeking to fulfill these requirements, for whom failure or “taking time off” are not options.

LACK OF CULTURALLY SENSITIVE SUPPORT

The various issues facing API students – strong parental and family pressures, financial difficulties, cultural conflicts, racial identity uncertainties, discrimination, gender-based insecurities, and even a reluctance to approach counseling resources – require special attention and sensitivity. Resources that can provide support in a culturally sensitive manner have become widely recognized as necessary to creating a healthy education environment for all students. APIs report, however, that staff members, especially those whose purpose is to provide students with personal attention and counsel (e.g. academic advisors and CAPS staff), are often insensitive to API-specific issues when presented with them. For example, several students who presented their advisors with family pressure-related issues in regards to their choice of concentration report that the advisors did not respond adequately, and the students did not feel that the advisors had a firm grasp of their concerns. Other universities, recognizing the special sensitivity required to address certain API-specific issues, have implemented positions with titles such as “Coordinator for Asian and Asian American Student Affairs” (Northwestern University) and have hired culturally aware faculty in various student affairs offices.

NEED FOR MENTORS AND ROLE MODELS

API students also express a need for more mentors and role models in the academic, professional, and spiritual areas. In the academic sphere, students have emphasized the need for more API and especially APA faculty whose specialties lie in non-traditional fields such as the social sciences and the humanities. Professionally, API students note that API staff on campus are also concentrated in traditional areas such as the Hospital, and those who are not sincerely satisfied with the traditional path state that they would greatly benefit from seeing APIs on campus in non-traditional fields. In the spiritual realm, Asian Muslim students report a critical need for spiritual guidance. Unlike other major faiths on campus, they do not have a center in Hyde Park, a spiritual mentor (*Imam*), and have only in the last month begun to plan for the creation of a prayer space with Rockefeller Chapel. For the past two academic years, they have been forced to utilize Bond Chapel, a location replete with Christian icons, for a prayer space.

INTEREST IN APA STUDIES CURRICULA

In addition to academic mentors, there is also a desire for more academic curricula focused on APA-related subjects. Although the University is known for its area studies programs, including the East and South Asian studies departments, classes focusing on API literature, history, and social/political issues in the U.S. specifically are few, and currently there is only one faculty member who could be said to have an academic background in APA studies – Professor Mae Ngai. When Professor Ngai or other professors have held APA-interest classes, however, they are well-attended; Professor Deborah Nelson, who taught an Asian American literature class a couple of years ago, describes the demand for APA-related courses as “indisputable.” Thus, a demonstration of interest has

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been made, yet little action has been taken to increase the number of APA-related courses at the University.

EXCLUSION FROM EXISTING MINORITY-FOCUSED OPPORTUNITIES

Contrary to the model minority stereotype, APAs also require assistance in pursuing certain professions in which APAs are traditionally under-represented, such as the arts and the non-profit sector. In many cases, minority-focused programs and scholarships have been cognizant of this, and have made themselves available to APAs; the Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP) is one of these. However, this inclusion of APAs has been institutionally ignored by the University, and while students of other minority backgrounds are encouraged and assisted in applying for SROP, APAs are essentially unaware of the opportunities available to them through SROP and other such programs.

ACCULTURATION AND ADJUSTMENT

Another need facing particularly API international students is that of acculturation and adjustment. Without proper support, their experience at the University may quickly become negative. Although University students who study abroad with a University program are offered various support systems to deal with language and acculturation issues, very few services are offered to international students coming to the University from all over the world – and primarily from Asia. Meanwhile, API international students are often easily identified and profiled as “foreign;” for instance, four years ago con artists commonly targeted APIs for trust scams due to their perceived unfamiliarity with American norms. Incidents of victimization and discrimination such as this and the aforementioned against a Korean student in Humanities class can be very damaging for students already self-conscious of their differences.

HOMOGENEITY OF THE API POPULATION

Perhaps the most important issue affecting the long-term welfare of the API population on campus, however, is its own homogeneity. Moreover, the homogeneity affects perceptions of APIs among the broader campus community and contributes to the perpetuation of a number of misperceptions. Anecdotally, it is clear that only a select few API ethnic groups are well-represented among the student population. If one were to use student organizations as an unscientific indicator of demographic distribution, then by far the most well-represented API ethnic groups are Indian, Korean, and Chinese, since the South Asian Students Association, which is overwhelmingly dominated by ethnic Indians, the Asian American Students for Christ, which is a primarily Korean Christian group, and the various Chinese ethnic organizations regularly have high participation rates. In the U.S., at least two of these ethnic groups (Chinese and Indian) have a significant presence in the higher APA socioeconomic concentration previously mentioned. On the other hand, using the same gauge, there seems to be very little representation of API ethnic groups whose American populations are marked by socioeconomic disadvantage, such as the predominantly refugee APA populations of Hmong, Lao, Cambodian, and Vietnamese. In fact, there are no active student organizations to represent any of these ethnic groups. An unscientific survey of API students’ surnames further confirms this; most API students’ surnames are identifiably of Korean, Chinese, or Indian origin, and very few are of Southeast Asian origin.

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Similarly, homogeneity exists among API faculty. Though there is likely more socioeconomic diversity among API faculty, the ethnic spectrum represented remains narrow, many are immigrants, and they are concentrated in traditional fields of study.

The homogeneity of the API student population has various negative effects, and plays a role in other issues facing APIs on campus. Most commonly, it perpetuates model minority misperceptions; a significant number of APIs appear to be from more privileged backgrounds, and many are pursuing mathematics- or science-related fields such as economics or biology. It also perpetuates ignorance of the APA ethnic groups already overlooked by the model minority construct – those from majority lower socioeconomic background. Likewise, the homogeneity among API faculty propagates the stereotype that all APIs are foreigners, and that, again, they are specially gifted in math- and science-related fields.

Of course, it should not be expected that every single API ethnic group on the globe be represented in the student body, but the key point is that ethnic groups present in large numbers in the U.S. are under-represented in the campus community, and the representation of APA ethnic groups among students on campus appears to have some correlation with socioeconomic privilege. Again, it is crucial to differentiate between APAs who represent a minority population in this country, and those international students who represent a different set of circumstances, having traveled across the globe to study. For certain Asian countries with an increasing capability to send highly privileged students to American universities, non-differentiation between the international and American sectors of an ethnic group may result in an overshadowing of less-privileged Asian American segments. Among students of Korean descent, for example, there seems to be an increase in the number of well-to-do international students, while the number of working-class Korean Americans is on the decline. This is not to say that all international students come from these highly privileged backgrounds, but just as the great diversity within the API racial group obliges disaggregation, the large number of differences between API international students and APAs necessitates recognition as well.

An issue that currently exists to some extent, but will definitely become more critical should the University agree to work towards increasing the representation of traditionally lower-income APA sectors, is the need for financial assistance. In fact, there may already be a significant number of APAs of lower socioeconomic background interested in attending the University who are discouraged due to a lack of financial aid, thus producing the narrower spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds seen among API students. Similarly, a host of other issues – those not normally associated with the model minority view of APAs – may also become more prominent should the University increase the representation of APAs from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Korean Americans have one of the highest college dropout rates in the state, for example, and Filipina Americans (i.e. Filipino American women) in the high school and college age range are reported to be at great risk of considering or attempting suicide – more than young women from most other ethnic backgrounds.

IV. STUDENT EFFORTS

What follows is a brief survey of recent student efforts to improve the circumstances of API students. It is important to distinguish these efforts as student-led because they are an indication of the students' progressiveness and persistence in working for the benefit of their community; despite extremely limited support from the University as an institution, students have managed to make a substantial number of landmark gains for APIs on campus.

In the early 1990s, a Chinese American student activist, upset by the lack of APA-focused academic curricula on campus, began a campaign to realize an APA studies program. A committee of professors and other academics was formed to study the prospects of an APA studies program at the University, but apparently did not produce a conclusive report.

During the 1995-1997 academic years, a small flurry of API community activity took place, with the formation of a politically-oriented APA student organization, Pan Asian Americans Coming Together (PAACT), and other politically aware efforts such as the publication of an APA literary magazine called *Zoom*. Due to lack of API student awareness and participation, however, the efforts were short-lived.

In 2000, the first *PanAsia* series was organized. Though inspired by faculty affiliated with the Center for East Asian Studies, who never intended the series to possess a political agenda, the first series' organizers saw the necessity of aligning the series with a broader effort to build awareness of API and APA issues. From the outset, student organizers talked about the stereotypes, victimization, and exploitation plaguing the API populace, and about the *PanAsia* series as an attempt to speak out and destroy misconceptions. The following year, with the second *PanAsia* series, efforts to work with other minority groups on campus were redoubled, and several events during the series focused on common issues facing different communities of color, with representatives from OBS, PRSA, OLAS, and Arab Union participating.

Immediately after the completion of the second series, an article was published in the *Chicago Weekly News (CWN)* by an Asian American student deriding the *PanAsia* series and questioning both its efficacy and the existence of API social problems. Many API students, both organizers and those who usually did not participate in student activities, were very upset with this editorial, and *PanAsia* organizers held several "town hall meetings" during which discussions were held about the editorial, possible responses, and long-term solutions. The results included the publishing of two response articles, and the formation of the PanAsian Solidarity Coalition (PASC).

Since its creation, PASC has organized several programs and services that continue to benefit API students and the broader community of color. The annual PASC Leadership Conference has given RSO leaders a chance to learn organizational strategies and network with other API student groups; attended by representatives from as many as ten API organizations, the Conference has resulted in increased collaboration and better relations among API groups. The Asian / Asian American Mentorship Program, which has recently begun receiving some institutional support, has provided undergraduates with role models and a structure to facilitate interaction with older and more experienced APIs. PASC leaders also approached Career and Placement Services (CAPS) staff and began collaborating with them on API-specific programming. Finally, in their most recent achievement, PASC organizers have ensured the representation of APIs in the Amandla Student Resource Center.

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In creating all of these programs and services, API student leaders were responding to a lack of institutional support for their population, and took the initiative to amend the situation themselves. Their success in these efforts, however, should not be seen as a replacement for long-term institutional support. The burden of providing such support, both academic and otherwise, should fall upon administrators, staff, and faculty as an aspect of ensuring a healthy environment for academic, personal, and professional development.

V. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

In order to address the various needs and improve the overall welfare of the API population on campus, the authors propose the following set of solutions, which can be divided into two primary sections: plans to improve the academic experience of the API population, and plans to improve student services for the API population.

PLANS TO IMPROVE ACADEMICS

In order to improve the academic experience of API students, three issues must be addressed: the under-representation of API faculty in non-traditional fields such as social sciences and humanities, the shortage of American-educated APA faculty and faculty of certain APA ethnic backgrounds, and the dearth of curricula focusing on APA-related topics.

While the under-representation of API faculty is not universal in all academic areas on campus, the distinct types of under-representation of API faculty that do exist perpetuate stereotypes and create a poorly balanced set of role models and mentors for API students. In order to counter these types of under-representation, programs such as the Provost Initiative on Minority Hiring should be extended to target potential API faculty, and other similar efforts should also be expanded so that improved API representation is understood as necessary to having a truly diverse faculty.

Regarding the lack of APA-related curricula, two primary courses of action should be pursued. First, full-time faculty lines in different academic departments should be allocated for the hiring of APA studies specialists. Since APA studies is an inter-disciplinary field, APA studies faculty could be hired in various departments, including English, Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science, etc. Second, active recruitment of postdoctoral academics specializing in APA studies should be undertaken as an immediate solution, as these postdoctoral academics could immediately begin teaching classes on APA-related subjects while full-time faculty hires are pursued.

PLANS TO IMPROVE STUDENT SERVICES

In order to better address the non-academic needs of API undergraduates, several improvements must be made. API students must be included in the mandate of the Office of Minority Student Affairs and must be offered targeted services and programming to address their various needs, culturally sensitive personnel in all areas of student services must be made available, and disaggregation of the racial category to reflect immigration and socioeconomic correlations must be implemented.

First and foremost, students of Asian or Pacific Islander descent must be included in the mandate of OMSA. This is perhaps the most critical step because currently, API students have minimal institutional recognition as a racial group with unique needs. They are isolated from minority student services efforts, a situation that perpetuates perceptions of API students as a non-minority and excludes them from participating in community building among people of color. Thanks to community-building programs on campus, relations between African American and Latino students are significantly better than in the general populace; the exclusion of APIs from such programs has already strained relations

between APIs and other minority groups on campus, and threatens serious consequences for the future of race relations, as these poorly developed students may carry this ignorance into their various careers. Among the student efforts described previously were student initiatives to improve understanding between APIs and other minority groups. Rather than students bearing the burden of such progressive cross-cultural action, however, OMSA should function as a role model and encourage cooperation and understanding among all communities of color.

Inclusion of API students in the OMSA mandate would involve the creation and support of targeted-group programs for API students (such as the Asian / Asian American Mentorship Program), support for API commemoration events such as the *PanAsia* series, the inclusion of the API population in programming that seeks to facilitate a sense of community among people of color on campus, outreach to API students regarding minority-specific opportunities that have been made available to APIs, and outreach to API students in general. The addition of an API staff member to the Office would also facilitate the inclusion of API students and contribute to the Office's work in general. Awareness-building efforts among current OMSA staff should also be undertaken to facilitate the new inclusion of APIs; as minority students will inevitably inquire OMSA staff about the change and ask why API students should be included despite their apparent "over-representation," OMSA staff should be able to respond knowledgeably in support of API students.

Culturally aware staff in all student service offices is also urgently required; the frequency of inadequate, insensitive, or outright discriminatory service to API students must be addressed as soon as possible. API students may face a variety of special or unique issues such as family and social pressures, racial identity questions, cultural conflicts, racial and gender-based discrimination, feelings of alienation, socioeconomic disadvantage, and difficulties surrounding choice of academic and professional paths. Staff members should be aware of these and other issues facing API students and should be able to provide service in a culturally sensitive manner. In order to assist the availability of culturally aware staff and increase the number of non-traditional role models on campus, hiring APIs must be made a priority in student service areas where they are under-represented.

Though it may not fall squarely in the area of student services, the Office of Admissions would also improve the situation for APIs on campus by disaggregating the "Asian-American / Asian" racial category on its forms. As other institutions have done, the racial category should be broken down into smaller ethnic groupings that reflect broad socioeconomic trends or immigration histories. The more specific ethnic-level data that could be gathered from this disaggregation would provide student services administrators with much more accurate demographic information on which to base policies and decisions. Disaggregation would also provide the data to verify the claims of narrow API ethnic representation made in this report. In a related area, efforts should also be made to improve outreach and recruitment among these under-represented or under-privileged APA communities.

VI. CONCLUSION

This report was created to respond to the two most common claims made by administrators in explaining the lack of institutional support for API students – that the number of API students attending the University indicates a healthy community without need for targeted services and programming, and that there is insufficient knowledge regarding the circumstances facing API students and their special needs. The authors sincerely hope that this report has adequately responded to both of these claims by demonstrating that aggregated statistics create a false sense of diversity, that many factors contribute to healthy statistics but a less-than-healthy student population, and that API students face a plethora of issues that may require professional guidance and support from the University.

In so doing, the authors hope that this report will prompt immediate action by University administrators and officers to address the various needs of a minority group that is the fastest-growing population of color on campus. Although not all sectors of the API population can be described as under-represented, the argument stands that under-representation should not be the sole criterion for assessments of need. The student needs described in this report are not made moot by the matriculation of more API students; if anything, increasing matriculation numbers ferment an increased level of resentment against the “Asian invasion.” Moreover, the criterion of under-representation makes no consideration for the fact that APIs in this country continue to face extremely critical social, political, and economic issues as a minority, and to ignore those issues in this crucial stage of API students’ educational and personal development reflects poorly on an institution that claims to create a nurturing and safe educational environment.

On the other hand, positive, productive action based on the facts presented in this report – as well as in-depth research that continues where this report leaves off – will bring the University significantly closer to realizing an atmosphere where students can all comfortably take part in the life of the mind, benefit the most from the highly prestigious education available at the University, and grow into mature members of society, making invaluable contributions to their own communities, the broader campus community, and an increasingly global mosaic.

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