

ASIAN AMERICANS AT A WESTERN UNIVERSITY:
AN INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS

by

Gena Lew Gong

B.A. (University of California, San Diego) 1989

M.A. (Duke University) 1991

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Gena Lew Gong
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Abstract

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (APIs) challenge our nation's dominant Black-White racial paradigm. With varied ethnic, socioeconomic, and historical backgrounds, APIs do not align neatly with this simplistic, bimodal model. The lack of research on APIs has further contributed to enduring mischaracterizations of this population, including the prevailing "model minority" stereotype. Given the limitations of our nation's ability to confront its racist history and acknowledge its impacts, the distinct experiences of diverse APIs call into question our ways of contending with current inequities.

For this dissertation study, I conducted an institutional analysis at Western University (pseudonym) that is also a designated Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI) to examine the educational experiences of its Asian American students; because of confidentiality concerns and sheer small number, Pacific Islander students were necessarily excluded from this study. By analyzing socioeconomic and academic achievement data for a cohort of first-time freshmen who entered the university between 2010-2013, I tracked differences between the 10 most prevalent Asian ethnic subgroups contained within this sample. I also performed an environmental scan to identify resources in the campus environment that targeted API student success.

Findings from this institutional analysis revealed Asian American students at the university are at a significant disadvantage. Because the university largely serves first generation, low-income minority students from the surrounding communities, the Asian American students contradict the myth of the “model minority.” Yet, because they are subsumed in the Asian racial category, the aggregated data fail to identify disparities, their needs remain obscured, and misperceptions linger. Findings from the environmental scan uncovered a long history of past and present efforts led by caring individuals committed to addressing inequities impacting Asian American students. However, as they are largely dependent on volunteer leadership, most of these piecemeal efforts have been temporary and unsustainable.

Taken together, the results of this study demonstrate the urgent need for a comprehensive and sustained institutional strategy to address the educational needs of Western University’s Asian American students. As an AANAPISI and the leading university in its region, Western University has an obligation to serve all of its students, particularly underserved Asian Americans who have long been marginalized due to persistent institutionalized discrimination.

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California State University, Fresno
Kremen School of Education and Human Development
Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

This dissertation was presented
by

Gena Lew Gong

It was defended on
April 30, 2020
and approved by:

Juliet Wahleithner, Co-Chair
Literacy, Early, Bilingual, and Special Education

Christian Wandeler, Co-Chair
Curriculum and Instruction

Malisa Lee
Enrollment Management

Yoshiko Takahashi
College of Social Science

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When I began my doctoral journey, little did I know the CODEL program (Collaborative Online Doctorate in Educational Leadership, a partnership between CSU Fresno and CSU Channel Islands) in which I had enrolled would soon be defunct, a global pandemic would disrupt life as we knew it, anti-Asian xenophobia and racism would surge due to fearmongering about the pandemic's origins, and the Black Lives Matter movement would gain national momentum. I also could not have anticipated my own health challenges, culminating in brain surgery on January 30, 2020, exactly 3 months prior to the date I would eventually defend my completed dissertation.

Although the pandemic is still raging and the nation is still grappling with race relations, I am at least able to breathe a sigh of relief that my health has improved and my doctoral journey as a Fresno State student is complete. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who supported me along the way.

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Life is not what you alone make it. Life is the input of everyone who touched your life and every experience that entered it. We are all part of one another.

Yuri Kochiyama
(1921-2014)

You don't choose the times you live in, but you do choose who you want to be.
And you do choose how you think.

Grace Lee Boggs
(1915-2015)

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the public health threat known as the COVID-19 virus also unexpectedly brought a “dialogue of reckoning what it means to be Asian American” (Shashtri, 2020). The virus, believed to have originated in China, has exposed Americans’ unaddressed xenophobia directed toward anyone who appears to be Asian. After President Trump repeatedly referred to COVID-19 as the “Chinese virus” and members of his administration referred to it as the “Kung Flu,” nearly 1,500 incidents of anti-Asian harassment were reported within the first month of a new online tool called Stop AAPI Hate, 42% of which came from within California (Wenus, 2020). Further, a recent survey reveals “more than 30 percent of Americans have witnessed someone blaming Asian people for the coronavirus pandemic” (Ellerbeck, 2020, para. 1). To put these numbers into perspective, in 2017 only 200 reports of discrimination were registered on a website started by the organization Asian Americans Advancing Justice (Magsaysay, 2020).

Racism directed against Asians is part of a centuries-old pattern. Though the United States has long associated immigrant groups with disease, European immigrants have been able to assimilate as White Americans whereas people with Asian ancestry continue to find their status as Americans questioned (Ellerbeck, 2020). Asian Americans have long been this nation’s scapegoats, bearing the brunt of America’s frustrations with immigration, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the war in Vietnam, economic downturns, and the 9/11 attacks. As a visibly distinct minority group, individuals with Asian ancestry often find their appearance at odds with common assumptions of what American citizens should resemble. In an interview with *The New York Times* (2020), actor Daniel Dae Kim who narrated a

newly released PBS 5-part documentary chronicling the history of the Asian American community, spoke about why such a project has never existed until now:

I think it speaks to our place in American society and how we've been perceived up until today and including today. We have been part of the fabric of this country, and yet we've been overlooked relative to other minorities. Though we have worked really hard to assimilate collectively, events that are depicted in this documentary, as well as in the news today, show us that we really aren't considered as American as most others. (Yu, 2020, para. 7)

In the throes of the current COVID-19 pandemic, Asian Americans are being reminded once again that their belonging as Americans is conditional. As the actor John Cho wrote in an Op-Ed in the *Los Angeles Times*, “One moment we are Americans, the next we are all foreigners, who ‘brought’ the virus here” (Cho, 2020, para. 9). This concern over the perception of Asians as “perpetual foreigners” was previously raised by Michael Luo, an editor at *The New York Times*. As Luo wrote, he was “stunned” when a “well-dressed woman on the Upper East Side” hurled these hateful words at him and his family: “*Go back to China... go back to your f---ing country!*” (2016a). He tweeted about this experience using the hashtag, #thisis2016, and also penned a response, “An Open Letter to the Woman Who Told My Family to Go Back to China,” which appeared on the front page of *The New York Times* (Luo, 2016a). In his open letter addressed to the anonymous woman, Luo wrote:

Maybe you don't know this, but the insults you hurled at my family get to the heart of the Asian-American experience. It's this persistent sense of otherness that a lot of us struggle with every day. That no matter what we do, how successful we are, what friends we make, we don't belong. We're foreign. We're not American. (2016a, para. 10)

Luo's tweet and article quickly received an “avalanche” of replies from people recounting their own experiences (Luo, 2016b). Twenty-four Asian

Americans shared stories of their own racist moments in an 8-minute video, entitled, “#thisis2016: Asian-Americans Respond” and posted on *The New York Times* website a few days later (Woo & Al-Hlou, 2016). Even his 7-year-old daughter asked, “Why did she say, ‘Go back to China?’ We’re not from China” (Luo, 2016b, para. 15). Given the flood of responses, Luo realized he had “tapped into a deep reservoir of emotions held by many Asian Americans about the racial prejudice they have experienced and a hunger for it to be recognized more broadly” (Luo, 2016b, para. 3).

Although the United States was founded on principles such as “all men are created equal” and that they possess “certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,” Thomas Jefferson and the fellow framers of the Declaration of Independence did not believe these words applied to people who were not White men like them. Jefferson and his fellow White male colonists “knew that black people were human beings, but they created a network of laws and customs, astounding for both their precision and cruelty, that ensured that enslaved people would never be treated as such” (Hannah-Jones, 2019, para. 16). As Hannah-Jones (2019) astutely observed later in this same article, “This nation’s White founders set up a decidedly undemocratic Constitution that excluded women, Native Americans and black people, and did not provide the vote or equality for most Americans” (para. 45).

Similarly, as Asian American historian Ronald Takaki (1989) described in *Strangers From a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, when the first Chinese began arriving *en masse* to the United States in the mid-1800s, these decidedly foreign aliens were not seen as human beings who deserved equal rights as White men. However, unlike Black people who were brought to be traded and owned like chattel until the 13th Amendment outlawed slavery in 1865, the

Chinese were immigrants who came on their own volition. As such, the Chinese occupied an “othered” status. The media labeled them “celestials,” as a nod to China as the “Celestial Empire,” and White labor unions referred to them as “heathen Chinees” who should not be allowed to attain US citizenship, but rather be relegated to “a unique, transnational industrial reserve army of migrant laborers forced to be foreigners forever” (Takaki, 1989, p. 99).

Fast-forward to today, more than 160 years after the first major wave of Chinese immigrants arrived on our shores. Asian Americans continue to hear racist taunts and ethnic slurs daily, regardless of whether their ancestors arrived in the mid-1800s or in the 21st century. The Asian American experience is unfortunately full of these encounters and countless more, as evident in *The New York Times*’ #thisis2016 video (Luo, 2016b). As Luo (2016b) highlighted throughout this video, most Americans still associate an Asian face with immigrant status, have internalized many stereotypes about Asian people, and are largely ignorant about the breadth and diversity of the various ethnicities that comprise this population.

Because national research centers have reported Asian Americans as having higher incomes and higher academic test scores over the past few decades, many regard Asian Americans as being on par with Whites or even as “Outwhiting the Whites” (Suzuki, 1989, p. 13). While these data may be factually correct, the Asian American population is actually bifurcated, meaning that while there are a number of “haves” on the high end of the socioeconomic spectrum, there are also significant numbers of “have nots” on the low end of the spectrum.

This breadth and diversity contributes to confusion and misconceptions around Asian Americans. In the U.S., where the dominant racial paradigm is defined along a White-Black continuum, Asian Americans cannot be easily

defined and pigeon-holed into a certain position. Yet, because this country was founded and built on this White-Black racial paradigm, our government, systems, and institutions continue to reflect this outdated, but omnipresent, underlying philosophy (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Poon et al., 2016).

As a result, our institutions and systems are constantly reviewing and revising themselves in order to accommodate individuals who do not fit the dominant paradigm. With the arrival of each new immigrant or refugee group, institutions struggle to place them into a certain category – or create new categories, as needed. Our government data systems remain severely behind the times in accurately reflecting the diversity of the American people, particularly so for Asian Americans, the fastest-growing racial group in the nation (Budiman, Cilluffo, & Ruiz, 2019). The United States Census Bureau, the nation's leading provider of data about the nation's people and economy, collects data on race and ethnicity; likewise, "the census form has reflected changes in society and shifts that have occurred in the way the Census Bureau classifies race and ethnicity" (United States Census Bureau, 2017, para. 1). One of the key challenges of the census is accurately reflecting Americans' constantly evolving views of race and ethnicity, particularly when growing groups of people do not understand the race and ethnic categories or they do not see their own specific group reflected on the census form (United States Census Bureau, 2017).

For new immigrants from countries in Asia, their American journey often begins by the startling realization that they are considered "Asian" by the United States, as defined by the check boxes available to them on government forms, rather than by their specific country of origin. Their identity as Chinese, Indian,

Pakistani, Filipino, Vietnamese, Hmong, or Korean no longer matters; in the U.S., they are now simply “Asian” (Plata, 2016).

Complicating the situation further, in 1980, the U.S. Census Bureau created the category “Asian Pacific Islander” which grouped people of Asian ancestry with people of Pacific Islander ancestry (F.K. Wang, 2019). According to F.K. Wang (2019), scholars critiqued this aggregation, arguing that the term did not accurately “reflect the experience of Pacific Islanders who have and continue to experience a unique set of struggles relating to sovereignty and decolonization” (para. 5). In 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau split this category into two separate racial categories of “Asian” and “Pacific Islander” (F.K. Wang, 2019). As such, data for these two racial populations are available from 2000 to present, but were combined from 1980 to 2000.

For Asian Americans, in particular, the lack of consistent racial categories as well as the overall lack of disaggregated ethnicity data is especially harmful because of their tremendous amount of diversity (e.g. ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, historical, socioeconomic). Simply viewing aggregate data presents an overly simplistic and inaccurate picture that depicts Asians as a uniformly high-achieving group, ranking above all Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics with respect to educational attainment (Crandall, 2017). Yet, examining ethnic subgroup data reveals striking differences within the pan-Asian category; while 34% of Korean and 26% of Chinese students earn college degrees, only 11% of Laotians and 13% of Cambodians do so (Crandall, 2017).

In socioeconomic terms, Asian American ethnic groups are also wildly divergent, yet aggregate data also masks these disparities. While Asians overall rank as the highest earning racial group in the U.S., poverty rates among specific subgroups such as Hmong (27%) and Cambodians (22%) exceed the national

average poverty rate of 15% (Crandall, 2017). In fact, a recent Pew Research Center analysis of government data found that “Asians have displaced blacks as the most economically divided racial or ethnic group in the U.S.” (Kochhar & Cilluffo, 2018, para. 3). The study found over the past 50 years, the pattern of inequality among Asians radically transformed from being one of the most equal in 1970 to being notably greater than that of Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics, with the top 10% of Asians presently earning 10.7 times more than Asians in the bottom 10% (Kochhar & Cilluffo, 2018).

This increase in income inequality is crucial for Asian Americans because of the potential for social and economic consequences. For this population, the fact that Asians out-earn Whites at the top and middle-income levels has overshadowed the widening economic gap within the Asian population (Kochhar & Cilluffo, 2018). Because the Asian experience with inequality is intimately linked to U.S. immigration policies, education and income differentials are closely tied to ethnicity, country of origin, and the economic and political conditions under which immigrants were allowed to enter. For example, the Immigration Act of 1990 coincided with a boom in the technology sector and sought to increase the inflow of highly educated, highly skilled immigrants (Kochhar & Cilluffo, 2018). A new wave of highly educated immigrants arrived, many from India (Kochhar & Cilluffo, 2018). These immigrants have undoubtedly fueled the dramatic increase in the higher income levels of the Asian population, whereas refugees fleeing political turmoil in Bhutan in the 1990s and Burma in the early 2000s are likely part of the Asian ethnic groups at the lowest income levels (Kochhar & Cilluffo, 2018).

Yet, our nation’s education policies and systems have been created and shaped over time using data systems that rely on aggregated Asian data.

Aggregated data is particularly problematic for Asian Americans because it treats all Asian Americans as one monolithic race. While this outdated data aggregation may have sufficed in 1970 when the income distribution among the Asian Americans was fairly equal, using the same aggregation today is clearly insufficient to accurately depict the extraordinary economic gap that characterizes the current Asian American population.

The policy implications of relying on aggregate data is the near-complete erasure of Asians as an underserved minority group, particularly with respect to their outsized participation and achievements in higher education. Despite comprising only 5.6% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), Asian Americans are widely portrayed as being overrepresented on American college campuses (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education [CARE], 2008). In fact, such characterizations not only exaggerate the presence of Asian Americans in higher education, but they only focus narrowly on one sector of higher education (CARE, 2008). In fact, as the CARE report (2008) pointed out, “In 2000, two out of three Asian American and Pacific Islander students attended only 200 higher education institutions located in just eight states” and “Nearly half of all Asian American and Pacific Islander students attended college in California, New York, and Texas” (p. 6). This skewed distribution across a small number of institutions is rarely mentioned in media depictions and is “nearly always overlooked in research and policy considerations” (CARE, 2008, p. 6). In an example of how this aggregate data are used by policymakers to equate Asian American students with White students, a U.S. Department of Education (2016) report, “Persistence and Attainment of 2003-04 Beginning Postsecondary Students: After Three Years,” repeatedly compares disparities by race and ethnicity by citing differences between Whites and Asian

students at one end of the spectrum against black and Hispanic students at the other end. This report includes numerous such dichotomous statements, including: “White and Asian students enroll more often in four-year colleges than black and Hispanic students immediately after high school,” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 20); “More than 70% of black students and 60% of Hispanic students enroll in at least one remedial course, compared with just over 50% of white and Asian students” (p. 21); and “Fewer Hispanic and black undergraduate and graduate students are enrolled full-time than white and Asian students” (p. 22).

And yet, as evident in the onslaught of anti-Asian harassment, discrimination, and hate crimes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as in the video compilation published in *The New York Times* (Luo, 2016b), Asian Americans are definitely not considered White nor are they afforded equal social status and privileges as Whites. Rather, as writer Cathy Park Hong wrote, “The coronavirus at least burned away any illusions that East Asians are almost white” (Hong, 2020, para. 32). Hong (2020) further discussed her shock at the sudden virulence of outright racism directed toward anyone with an Asian appearance:

I’ve been conditioned to think my second-class citizenry was low on the scale of oppression and therefore not worth bringing up even though every single Asian-American I know has stories of being emasculated, fetishized, humiliated, underpaid, fired or demoted because of our racial identities” a certain kind of unspoken racism. This pandemic has unmasked how vicious it really is. (para. 16)

This study discussed the overall plight of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in higher education in this country, but focused specifically on one large, public university in a state that is home to the nation’s largest population of Asian Americans and second-largest population of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2013). This university was used as a case study to more closely examine how misperceptions and

stereotypes are manifested in educational policies and practices, and the impact of these institutionalized forms of discrimination impact the diverse ethnic subgroups that comprise the Asian Americans and Pacific Islander student population on a large, public university campus.

Definition and Use of Terms

In this section, I will define the major terms and acronyms used in this study, including Asian American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (NHOP), and Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI). I will also discuss why I intentionally used each of these distinct terms for various purposes whenever possible, but also how and why the etiologies of these terms have also shaped research and discourse on these populations. Generally, when discussing the populations and the issues implicated by this study, I will use “Asian Americans” because my study did not include Pacific Islanders. When discussing previous research findings, I will use “Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders” or “AAPI” if that was how these findings were reported. As previously discussed, because of the aggregation of Asian and Pacific Islander data from 1980 to 2000, many research findings based on these data necessarily used “AAPI” terminology in discussing their findings. I will also define other terms and acronyms, such as model minority myth (MMM) and Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) that are interconnected to – and, in some ways, were produced by – the aforementioned pan-ethnic terminology.

Asian American

The term Asian American was borne in 1968 as a conscientiously crafted, “radical label of self-determination that indicated a political agenda of equality, anti-racism and anti-imperialism” (Kandil, 2018, para. 1). The term’s origins have

been traced to two University of California, Berkeley students, Yuji Ichioka and Emma Gee, who “founded the Asian American Political Alliance as a way to unite Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino American students on campus” (Kandil, 2018, para. 7). As an identity that was deliberately chosen, the term Asian American expressed the concepts of unity and political progress.

Still, this term was not a natural fit to describe a population that identified primarily with their ethnic group and did not see commonalities with each another (Kandil, 2018). Though it took decades for the term to take root, Asian Americans across the nation began to realize that they shared the common experience of being targets of racism based purely on their outward “Asian” appearance. As quoted by Kandil (2018), Daryl Maeda, a professor of Asian American studies, summarizes how the term finally caught on:

People of Asian ancestry continue to face discrimination, harassment and prejudice, and just as it’s been over the past century-and-a-half, we exist in a society that sees us all as one, as all looking the same, as all being the same. And given that that’s the case, it’s even more incumbent upon us to come together to fight for social justice. (Kandil, 2018, para. 38-39)

For this study, I used “Asian American” to describe the populations I studied and for whom my recommendations are intended to benefit.

Oriental

With origins in the Latin word for east, the term “Oriental” was long used as the blanket term for Asians (Y. Wang, 2016). Popularized by the American academic Edward Said in his 1978 text, “Orientalism,” the image of the “Oriental peoples” was one of “exoticized caricatures” (Y. Wang, 2016, para. 4). However, Said’s work was highly influential and shaped Western views of people of Asian ancestry.

The “Oriental” label was further legitimized by the U.S. government as it was used in the language of federal laws. These laws were only recently amended in 2016 when an Asian American legislator, Hon. Grace Meng (D-New York) introduced a bill to replace this term with “Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders.” In introducing this bill, Hon. Meng stated, “The word ‘Oriental’ is a derogatory and antiquated term and the passage of this legislation will soon force the United States government to finally stop using it” (Meng, 2016, para. 3). Indeed, one of the primary motivators of the students who started the movement to adopt the Asian American term was to reject the term Oriental as a pejorative, Eurocentric label (Kandil, 2018).

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), Asian American/Pacific Islander (AA/PI), Asian Pacific Islander (API), Asian Pacific American (APA)

The racial category of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) is an official government classification “based on key and salient commonalities in the history of how different groups have been incorporated into American society” (Ramakrishnan & Ahmad, 2014, p. 1). The history of this terminology is important to acknowledge because many Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders primarily identify with their particular ethnicity, or with either the Asian American or Pacific Islander group, but not necessarily as a merged AAPI identity.

Historically, the United States Census has collected data on race since 1790, but the first Asian response category to appear was “Chinese” in 1860 (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2012). Over the next 120 years, additional Asian response categories were added: Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese (Hoeffel et al., 2012). The 1990 Census was the first to classify Asians together as a single racial group “when it included 10 groups under

the category of Asian or Pacific Islander, or API” (Ramakrishnan & Ahmad, 2014, p. 11).

The AAPI category has since been labeled in a variety of permutations by various organizations, each with its own acronym: Asian Pacific Islander (API), Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), Asian American/Pacific Islander (AA/PI), and Asian Pacific American (APA). Whichever label was used, the net impact was the same: Pacific Islanders were effectively rendered invisible when their numbers were commingled with the numerically dominant Asian American populations. As a very small minority within an already marginalized minority, the distinct needs and challenges of Pacific Islanders was overshadowed by the much larger Asian American groups. As a result, Pacific Islander community leaders led the call for disaggregating this race category.

Still, because of the shifting nature of these categories and their labels, much confusion remains around the preferred use of “Asian American” or “Asian American and Pacific Islander.” The proliferation of organizations, programs, and services that serve these populations over the past several decades contributes to the confusion; some use Asian American while others use AAPI in their monikers and descriptions, regardless of whether or not they make specific attempts to include Pacific Islanders. This lack of specificity makes it difficult to distinguish when organizations, programs, and services – and the research based upon these resources – actually include, or intend to include, Pacific Islanders.

As I state in chapter 3, because of the extremely small numbers of Pacific Islanders in the selected cohort that forms the basis for this study, I was unable to include them in my research findings. I have, therefore, avoided making reference to AAPIs wherever possible, even though much of the available research continues to use this term.

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

The term Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, known as NHPI or NHOPI, was created out of community advocacy efforts to be disaggregated from the larger Asian American category (Ramakrishnan & Ahmad, 2014). In the 1990s, community organizations advocated for a separate racial category based on the argument that the colonial history of Pacific Islanders in the U.S. shaped their experiences in markedly different ways than those of Asian Americans (Ramakrishnan & Ahmad, 2014). Additionally, their much smaller size relative to the Asian American population meant that their needs and challenges were effectively masked when lumped into the larger API category (Ramakrishnan & Ahmad, 2014). Since 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau has recognized NHPI as a separate and distinct racial category.

AAPI Regional Subgroups

While there are no official or standard categorizations for AAPI subgroups or their labels, many higher education researchers, practitioners, and policy makers use the following conventions to describe segments of the AAPI population in the U.S. as described by CARE (2016):

- East Asian: Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese
- Southeast Asian: Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, Vietnamese
- South Asian: Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan
- Filipino: Filipino
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (NHPI): Native Hawaiian, Chamorro, Marshallese, Samoan, Tongan

Although these categorizations are loosely based on geography, they are also based on historical, sociopolitical, and racialization experiences that define

and distinguish their immigration experience to the U.S. from the other regional groups (CARE, 2016).

Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI)

The federal designation, “Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution” or “AANAPISI,” was “created in response to a history of invisibility among AAPI students in higher education” (Kurland et al., 2019, p. 1). Further, according to Kurland et al., (2019), because this invisibility was “exacerbated by a monolithic image of the AAPI racial group held by administrators, policy makers and educators, and has historically denied resources to support the needs of AAPI students” (p. 1), AANAPISIs were officially recognized in 2007 as the newest classification of Minority-Serving Institution (MSI).

The AANAPISI program is currently a competitive grant process for institutions that have successfully applied for and received Designation of Eligibility by the U.S. Department of Education. Eligible institutions must enroll at least 10% AAPI undergraduate student enrollment and at least 50% of its total student population receive financial assistance through federal grant and/or loan programs (United States Department of Education, n.d.-b).

Model Minority Myth

The myth of the “model minority” is a stereotype that defines AAPIs, especially Asian Americans, as a monolithic racial group who have succeeded due to their tireless work ethic and aspirational pursuit of socioeconomic and educational achievements (Chou & Feagin, 2008). First coined by sociologist William Petersen in a 1966 *New York Times Magazine* article, the term “model

minority” was and continues to be used as a racial wedge to draw comparisons of Asian Americans’ success against the presumed failures of other racial minorities to distract attention from the deeper-rooted problems of institutionalized racism and discrimination (Chow, 2017).

Asian & Pacific Islander Diversity: What’s in a Name?

The widely used terms *Asian American*, *Pacific Islander*, and *Asian American and Pacific Islander*, do not encompass the same populations, nor are they interchangeable. Not only are these demographic categories distinct, but they have “emerged from complex, politically contested social processes that construct meanings of race and ethnicity” (Poon et al., 2016, p. 471). They have also been created at different times, for different purposes, and with different intentions for their application.

Breaking down this term into its two basic components, “Asian Americans” and “Pacific Islander” is problematic in itself. Scholars have argued that using the term Asian American to group dozens of distinct ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic groups with unique and oftentimes fractious histories is emblematic of the dominant Western culture that ignores inherent differences and assumes a common identity. For example, in her formative work, *Asian American Panethnicity*, scholar Yen Le Espiritu (1992) questioned how and to what extent Asian Americans are able to put aside their differences in order to assume a common pan-Asian identity. She also argued that the term Asian American was itself borne out of the racist discourse that suggests Asians are a monolithic group (Espiritu, 1992). Other scholars share the viewpoint that using one term to encompass all of these subgroups implies that all of the people encompassed by that term share common physical and/or cultural characteristics (Perez, 2002). For

example, the citizens of one Asian country that has endured centuries of wars, colonization, and victimization at the hands of another neighboring Asian country may not appreciate being referred to in same demographic category as those of the conquering nation; to these first generation immigrants, to be lumped into the same racial identity with one another may not only feel incongruous, it might also be deeply offensive and hurtful.

Still, it is important to understand the origins of the term “Asian American.” This term was not derived from the U.S. Census, but was deliberately chosen by politically progressive Asian American student activists influenced by the civil rights movement in the late-1960s (Chou & Feagin, 2018). Prior to this time, people of Asian ancestry identified only with their ethnic group and oftentimes actively sought to distance themselves from other Asian groups, particularly when certain groups were treated unjustly by the dominant society (Kandil, 2018). Given these realities, “Asian American” was more of an aspirational term. Nonetheless, the student activists, Yuji Ichioka and Emma Gee, purposefully chose the moniker “Asian American” to push back against the derogatory, Eurocentric term, “Oriental,” and replace it with a pan-ethnic term that could serve as a “symbol of unified resistance to racial discrimination by whites” (Chou & Feagin, 2018, p. x).

Pacific Islanders, on the other hand, have a completely different immigration history and experience with race relations from Asian Americans. Because of their subjugation under U.S. territorial expansion in the late 1800s, “Pacific Islanders on the U.S. mainland find themselves historically and socially situated in ambivalence in the context of U.S. territorial relations, colonialism, and race relations” (Perez, 2002, p. 1). As a term, “Pacific Islanders” already describes a pan-ethnic group unto itself and the people under this umbrella term have

experienced a unique form of colonized oppression that is typically not recognized by most racial and ethnic studies frameworks (Kauanui, 2005; Perez, 2002). Also, because of their small numbers on the U.S. mainland, particularly in relation to Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders are often overlooked or completely ignored. More research is needed to accurately document the breadth and scope of the diverse histories and experiences of specific Pacific Islander ethnic groups, but their sheer size limits their inclusion in data on these populations.

Federal Race Standards

As the nation's leading provider of data about the American people and economy, the United States Census Bureau plays a major role in shaping how Americans view and discuss race and ethnicity. Along those lines, the census form has also changed to reflect "changes in society and shifts that have occurred in the way the Census Bureau classifies race and ethnicity" (United States Census Bureau, 2017, para. 1). This race and ethnic data follow guidelines set forth by the United States Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and "these data are based upon self-identification" (United States Census Bureau, 2017, para. 1).

The Census Bureau cites one of its current challenges is keeping up with how the ever-changing American population views race and ethnicity, particularly because they have found "a growing number of people who do not identify with any of the official OMB race categories, and this means that an increasing number of respondents have been racially classified as 'Some Other Race'" (United States Census Bureau, 2017, para. 2). Census Bureau researchers address this challenge by exploring strategies for both improving respondent comprehension of the census form questionnaire and, consequently, improving the accuracy of the race and ethnicity data they collect (United States Census Bureau, 2017).

The official race and ethnicity categories used today are based on OMB's 1997 *Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity* (Hoeffel et al., 2012). According to OMB, the definition of "Asian" used in the 2010 Census "refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam" (Hoeffel et al., 2012, p. 2).

However, as an example of the limited ability of the federal government to accurately keep up with tracking the fast-growing and fast-diversifying Asian American populations, the 1980, 1990, and 2000 Census forms included only six detailed Asian response categories: Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese (Hoeffel et al., 2012), all while the populations of other unaccounted-for Asian ethnic groups were arriving and establishing communities across the nation during these three decades.

Further, both the 1980 and 1990 Census forms grouped persons of Asian and Pacific Islander ancestry into the monolithic category, "Asian Pacific Islander (API)," despite vast ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and geographic dissimilarities (F.K. Wang, 2019). Arbitrarily grouping these dissimilar populations together in an API racial category was a fabrication unique to the United States, constructed for the purposes of government accountability. According to Teranishi, Nguyen, and Alcantar (2014):

[T]he Federal Interagency Committee on Education initiative a government-wide racial classification standard that resulted in the 1977 US Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Statistical Directive 15. OMB Directive 15 classified four major racial categories (American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, and White) and one ethnic category (Hispanic) as the streamlined options for all government statistical reporting purposes. (p. 30)

This uncritical demographic grouping of Asian Americans with Pacific Islanders created a false racial narrative that had wide-ranging ramifications – for individuals who bore the arbitrary AAPI label, for the ethnic subgroups this label was intended to comprise, and for all others who have a role in the U.S. racial hierarchy.

In 1997, largely in response to community advocacy OMB revised its Statistical Policy Directive No. 15, “Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting,” and separated the “Asian and Pacific Islander” category into two groups: “Asian” and “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander” (White House Initiative on Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders, n.d.). Also starting in 1997, OMB began to “require federal agencies to use a minimum of five race categories: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander” (Hoeffel et al., 2012, p. 2). OMB also approved the Census Bureau to include a sixth category, “Some Other Race” on the Census 2000 and 2010 Census questionnaires (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

The 2000 Census marked the first time the “Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander” population was classified separately from the Asian population, though only three detailed groups, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, and Guamanian or Chamorro, were listed as checkbox response options (Hixson, Hepler, & Kim 2012). In a reflection of the ongoing tinkering of these racial and ethnic categories, the 2010 Census represented the debut of the OMB’s definition of “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander,” or “NHOPI,” stating that this term “refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands” (Hixson et al., 2012, p. 2).

Today, the federal government continues to recognize Asian Americans and Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders as separate racial categories and includes not only subgroup check boxes for the largest Asian American and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities, but also includes a write-in box where smaller subgroups can self-identify (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2017). However, the central problem in the U.S. Census Bureau's 20-year decision to lump AAPIs together as a homogeneous racial group requires a critical examination that goes deeper than the U.S. government and OMB Directive 15. Rather, the underlying issue is how the concept of race itself continues to be framed. Given the fact that race and racism is an indelible aspect of American society, racial minorities are continually sidelined when they do not align with the interests of the dominant White majority.

For Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, two pan-ethnic groups that have been combined into one "racial" category for government convenience, scholars such as Espiritu (1992) question how effectively can a pan-ethnic identity be forged from groups of diverse national origins. Poon et al. (2016) took this point one step further, arguing that such racial classification policies are a reflection of the system of institutionalized racism endemic to this country: "The state-determined racial consolidation of Pacific Islanders with Asian Americans in the United States for population inventories is just one example of how diverse populations have been structurally marginalized by the state" (p. 471).

From the perspective of Pacific Islanders, who constitute a very small minority within the broader Asian Pacific Islander category, their demographic inclusion alongside Asian Americans is even more flawed. Ignacio (1976) stated, "There is no such group as 'Asian Americans and Pacific Island Peoples.' There are different ethnic groups under the general term" (p. 84). Because Pacific

Islanders are vastly outnumbered by Asian Americans and because Asian American scholars are not well-versed in Pacific Islander studies, their identities, interests, and experiences are rendered invisible. As Kauanui (2005) pointedly declared, “Pacific Islanders are perhaps one of the most invisible pan-ethnic groups in the United States” (p. 126). In contrast to most Asian Americans who personally or whose ancestors voluntarily immigrated to the U.S., most Pacific Islanders became unwilling U.S. citizens when the U.S. overthrew, colonized, and annexed their island nations.

In the larger framework of U.S. race relations and identity politics, Pacific Islanders are consistently overlooked and are negated by the arbitrarily named Asian Pacific Islander category. As a result, “homogenization and racialization are therefore detrimental to indigenous self-determination – a central issue among Pacific Islanders” (Perez, 2002, p. 469). Other than sharing homelands in countries with borders in the Pacific Ocean, these vastly incongruent groups have virtually nothing in common. Grouping these disparate groups together under one label thus makes little sense historically, culturally, linguistically, or even geographically.

The inconsistency with which these populations have been labelled reveals problems in the very construction of these categories, as their utility largely depends on who is collecting, maintaining, and reporting the data and for what purposes. As stated above, I recognize the problems, limitations, and inaccuracies in using the term Asian American and Pacific Islander or AAPI, however, much of the available research on these populations uses these terms, either because it uses aggregated data or because it references resources that were created based on this aggregated data category. Wherever possible, I use descriptions and accurate terminology, but because both terms are prevalent in previous literature, it is not always possible nor practical to consistently break out and discuss each population

as separate and distinct in every instance. In general, when I introduced the background context that has impacted the broader population, I used AAPI. However, from this point forward, because I discuss trends or issues that are more specific to this study that does not include Pacific Islanders, I attempt to confine my discussion to Asian Americans. Still, there are some instances, such as when citations refer to AAPIs, where using AAPI is unavoidable.

Asian Americans in Higher Education

Asian Americans challenge our nation's dominant Black-White racial paradigm. With such varied ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and historical backgrounds, Asian Americans do not align neatly with this simplistic, bimodal model. As Teranishi and Nguyen (2011) succinctly summarized, "the AAPI population is unlike any major racial group with regard to its heterogeneity" (p. 20). The U.S. Census Bureau now reports data on 23 distinct Asian American ethnic groups (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2013). Not only are these groups highly varied with respect to immigration history, culture, religion, and language, but they also "occupy positions along the full range of the socioeconomic spectrum, from the poor and underprivileged to the affluent and highly skilled" (Teranishi & Nguyen, 2011, p. 20). Given the limitations of our nation's ability to confront its racist history and acknowledge that this history continues to disparately impact different racial and ethnic groups, the diverse experiences of Asian Americans challenge our ways of thinking about and contending with inequities.

Budiman et al. (2019) reported that 85% of all Asian Americans as of 2015 were from only six origin groups: Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese. Because these groups comprise the majority of all Asian Americans, they largely shape the overall demographic characteristics of this population.

Budiman et al. (2019) added that the remaining 13 origin groups each made up 2% or less of the national Asian American population, but “have a variety of characteristics that can differ greatly from the largest groups” (para. 4). These remaining origin groups include Pakistani, Cambodian, Hmong, Thai, and Laotian, each comprising between 1-2% of the total Asian American population, as well as several other groups that each comprise less than 1% of the total (Budiman et al., 2019). Because of their small size relative to the overall Asian American population, any unique characteristics of these minority subgroups were overshadowed by the dominant six subgroups.

With respect to educational attainment and socioeconomic status, the data for the Asian American population were quite impressive, but a closer examination revealed critical disparities between ethnic subgroups. Budiman et al. (2019) reported that “about half of Asians in the U.S. ages 25 and older had a bachelor’s degree or more in 2015, a higher share than other races and ethnicities,” but that “this share varies greatly by origin group” (para. 5). For example, in 2015, 72% of Indians held a bachelor’s degree or higher, while “fewer than 20% of Cambodians, Hmong, Laotians, and Bhutanese had a bachelor’s degree or more” (Budiman et al., para. 5). Likewise, there are wide disparities in income among Asian origin groups. Overall, Asian households reported higher median annual income (\$73,060) than the U.S. average of \$53,600 (Budiman et al., 2019). But a closer examination revealed that only four Asian origin groups actually had household incomes that exceeded the overall Asian American income median – Indians, Filipinos, Sri Lankans, and Japanese – while most of the other 15 subgroups had household incomes that were well below the national median (Budiman et al., 2019). These are just a few examples of how the higher rates of educational attainment and higher-than-average household incomes of a few larger

subgroups can effectively overshadow the challenges of the numerous smaller subgroups within the Asian American racial group.

Acknowledging the existence of wide disparities among Asian subgroups is critical when using educational outcomes to craft policies designed to address inequities. In California, home to the nation's largest Asian American population, considerable social and economic diversity exists among the diverse Asian ethnic subgroups (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2013). According to California data from the 2010 Census, the state's Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, and Hmong American adults have the lowest educational attainment of Asian American ethnic groups statewide; all are less likely to have a high school diploma than the average California adult (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2013). These same Southeast Asian groups are also less likely to have a college degree when compared to the average California adult, whereas NHPI adults across all ethnic groups are less likely to have a college degree than the total AAPI population overall (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2013).

These seemingly contradictory data findings indicate large educational disparities exist within the broad category of Asian Americans. Clearly, education levels vary widely between specific Asian ethnic subgroups. While some Asian subgroups – including those defined by their periods of immigration – are more likely than other racial groups to have college degrees, many others fare far worse. Many of these subgroups with lower educational attainment levels actually exhibit educational attainment rates on par with or below those of African Americans and Latinos, racial groups that are more commonly associated with “minority” status (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2013).

Policy Implications of Terminology

With the ever-changing nature of the nation's demography, OMB has revisited its standards of data collection and reporting several times since it enacted its Statistical Directive 15 in 1977. This government-determined consolidation then separation of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders has not only produced inaccurate assessments of this diverse population's educational experiences, it has also obscured how AAPIs are affected by racism in education (Poon et al., 2016). Furthermore, the aggregation of these populations has caused considerable confusion and perpetuated misperceptions that have resulted in policies with inequitable impacts.

One example of an inequitable policy is the general exclusion of Asian Americans from the simplistic, yet widely used, label of "underrepresented minorities" or "URMs" in higher education. A search of the U.S. Department of Education website failed to uncover a uniform federal policy directive defining URM and detailing how it should be used; instead, this term is interpreted and applied differently in a variety of institutional settings. Depending on the area of focus, the racial and ethnic composition of the institution, and the racial and ethnic composition of the general field for the institution or program in question, the URM criteria fluctuates. Generally speaking, however, African American or Black and Hispanic or Latino students qualify as URMs, as do Native American students and Alaska Natives. In the definition used by the state university system to which Western University (pseudonym) belongs, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders (NHOPI) are included in the definition of URM, while Asian Americans are not. The inclusion of NHOPI as URMs, it is worth noting, is only possible because of the federal policy decision to separate them from the Asian American racial category.

In fact, a recent study highlighted the need to redefine underrepresented minority students in public universities (Mukherji, Neuwirth, & Limonic, 2017). According to Mukherji et al. (2017), “much of the terminology that continues to be used in the context of higher education to describe diversity in the student populations are anachronistic and serves actually to occlude true diversity” (p. 1). In specifically addressing the “problematic” use of the term URM, Mukherji et al. (2017) reported this term “often translates as the broad categories of Black and Hispanic students when discussing issues of recruitment, funding, and support of students in specific curricular areas such as the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields in postsecondary education” (p. 2). The researchers also pointed out that many public educational institutions collect data only within the five OMB racial categories, which necessarily aggregates diversity into those restrictive terms (Mukherji et al., 2017, p. 2). Yet, the researchers found that in many instances, “the data are actually further aggregated rather than disaggregated... the widely used category of URM is a case in point, which aggregated together Black and Hispanic categories” (Mukherji et al., 2017, p. 2).

An online search for whether Asian Americans were uniformly excluded as a monolithic racial group from the URM definition revealed general agreement among several colleges and universities that Asian Americans are considered to be racial minorities, though they are not *underrepresented* minorities. In an example of the contortions made by educational institutions to acknowledge Asian Americans as a racial minority, yet exclude them from URM status, the College of Agricultural Sciences at Penn State lists several definitions on its “Diversity Resources” website (n.d.). This website includes the institution’s working definitions for “diversity,” “minority,” and “underrepresented minority (URM)” (Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences [Penn State], n.d.). On this website,

the college defines a racial/ethnic minority, defined as “a person whose race or ethnicity is a non-dominant race within the group... In the United States, racial/ethnic minorities are generally considered to include Hispanic/Latinos, African Americans, Asians, Native Americans, Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, and those of two or more races” (Penn State, n.d., para. 5). However, in defining underrepresented minority, Penn State (n.d.) admits that this definition “is far from being crystal clear” while also stating that “the URM designation is relatively consistent among schools” (Penn State, n.d., para. 6). The college continues to define URM in the following terms:

Underrepresented Minority can be defined as a group whose percentage of the population in a given group is lower than their percentage of the population in the country. At Penn State, as well as many colleges and universities, underrepresented minorities are generally considered to include: Hispanic/Latinos, African Americans, Native Americans, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, and those of two or more races. (Penn State, n.d., para. 6)

In another example, Dartmouth College’s Pre-Health Advising website cites the Association of American Medical Colleges definition of the term, “Underrepresented in Medicine,” as referring to “those racial and ethnic populations that are underrepresented in the medical profession relative to their numbers in the general population” (Dartmouth College Pre-Health Advising [Dartmouth], n.d., para. 1). The definition is further detailed, stating,

This lens currently includes students who identify as African Americans and/or Black, Hispanic/Latino, Native American (American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians), Pacific Islander, and mainland Puerto Rican. The definition also refers to students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. (Dartmouth, n.d., para. 1)

Although the inclusion of “students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds” may arguably include some Asian Americans, it is clear that Asian Americans are excluded from the standard categories of racial minorities.

In an example from a California educational institution, the website for the Caltech Center for Inclusion & Diversity states simply,

At Caltech our working definition of an underrepresented minority (URM) is someone whose racial or ethnic makeup is from one of the following: African American/Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Two or more races, when one or more are from the preceding racial and ethnic categories in this list.” (Caltech Center for Inclusion & Diversity 2020, para. 1).

Conversely, the website for the Office of Diversity and Outreach of University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), defines URM as follows:

At UCSF, our working definition of an underrepresented minority (URM) is someone whose racial or ethnic makeup is from one of the following: African American/Black; Asian: Filipino, Hmong, or Vietnamese only; Hispanic/Latinx; Native American/Alaskan Native; Two or more races, when one or more are from the preceding racial and ethnic categories in this list. (UCSF, n.d., para. 1)

It is puzzling that this definition includes only Filipino, Hmong, and Vietnamese under the Asian category, despite the asterisked note that immediately follows the definition and clarifies, “Hmong is not an explicit option on the UC employment forms at this time” (UCSF, n.d., para. 1). The first three examples cited above reveal general agreement that URM does not include Asian Americans. The fourth example, UCSF, clearly acknowledges the ethnic diversity of the Asian American racial category, but, curiously, only identifies three specific Asian ethnicities that would qualify as URMs. With the exception of UCSF, the net effect of policy decisions to exclude all Asian Americans from URM consideration is that Asian Americans are the only racial minority group to be considered Non-URM, alongside Whites. Considering the fact that the conglomeration of Asians as a singular racial group was determined by a 1977 federal policy, it is difficult to reconcile the injustice of this near-wholesale exclusion of Asian American students, many of whom share the same

demographic characteristics of the underserved minorities these policies are intended to serve.

Using race as the only criterion on which to determine “underserved” status is an overly simplistic, one-dimensional approach to correcting historic inequalities. Further, relying solely on a URM/Non-URM dichotomy is not only extremely limited, it also completely overlooks other important intersectional considerations of diversity, including socioeconomic status, immigration status, gender, and sexuality to name a few.

For Asian Americans, their categorization as Non-URMs is significant, particularly for Asian ethnic subgroups from communities characterized by having low levels of socioeconomic status and educational attainment. Because college recruitment, admissions, and eligibility for special grants and/or scholarships are predicated on these definitions, underrepresented groups who fall under the broad Asian umbrella continue to be largely denied opportunities to access higher education.

The prevailing designation of Asian Americans as the only racial minority group in the Non-URM category is an urgent policy problem with wide-ranging ramifications. Despite research evidence (California State University, n.d.-b) that illuminates the distinct experiences and disparate education achievement levels of Asian origin subgroups, Asian Americans are still grouped by federal agencies and educational institutions as a single unit that is assumed to demonstrate uniformly high levels of achievement. As such, Asian Americans that need the most support are penalized by the national successes of their peers and are deemed ineligible for the types of support, assistance, and resources available to those who fit the URM definition by the simple virtue of a single determinant – their race.

Some evidence exists that at least some researchers are beginning to recognize the limitations of solely using the current URM/Non-URM dichotomy to accurately determine which students are underserved and which are not. The California State University (CSU) website touts its “commitment to diversity, inclusion and excellence [as a] stalwart advocate for student achievement, irrespective of background or life circumstances” (California State University, n.d.-a). The CSU acknowledges that it must strive to close equity and achievement gaps, as CSU data show first-generation, low-income, and students of color continue to graduate from college at lower rates than their peers (California State University, n.d.-a).)

Toward this end, the CSU website features a research study that examined the development of a new “Historically Underserved Student Construct” that would allow for more accurate classification of true equity gaps (California State University, n.d.-b). This study identified several factors related to college completion that should be considered in combination to more accurately understand which students may need additional support: first generation status, economic and financial challenges, college readiness, and coming from historically underserved communities. In a revealing finding, the researchers determined that “approximately 35% of Asian students who are currently classified as ‘non-underrepresented’ should be considered ‘underserved’ and provided with additional support to facilitate their path to a college degree” (California State University, n.d.-b, p. 2). This new construct presented by the CSU researchers acknowledges the limitations of the dichotomous URM/Non-URM model and provides evidence that clearly demonstrates that Asian American students are being marginalized by this limited model. Yet, there is no further

evidence on the CSU website that the CSU is actually moving to adopt this new construct.

The Need for Disaggregated Data

There is a growing movement among Asian American scholars who advocate for the data disaggregation of Asian Americans as a civil rights issue. As demonstrated above, the heterogeneity of the Asian American community challenges the current racial paradigm. Because Asian Americans do not fit neatly into neither the Black-White racial paradigm nor the URM/Non-URM dichotomy, this racial minority has been largely left out of larger discussions around addressing inequities.

When considering the 5.6 million Asian American residents in the state of California, having access to disaggregated data is crucial to guide policy decisions impacting the nation's largest and most diverse Asian American state population (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2013). According to 2010 Census data, California was home to 91,224 Hmong, the nation's largest concentration, more than one-third (31,771) of whom resided in the Fresno metro area (Pfeifer, Sullivan, Yang, & Yang, 2012).

In the Fresno metro area, Asian Americans numbered 101,134 in the 2010 Census, comprising 11% of the area's total population; Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders (NHPI) numbered 3,572, or 0.4% of the area's total population (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2013). Of the Asian American groups in the Fresno metro area, the Hmong population is the largest ethnic group, by far, numbering approximately 32,000 in 2010 and comprising more than 30% of the region's Asian American population. The next largest Asian American ethnic groups are Indian (18,255 or 18%), Filipino (14,581 or 14%), and Laotian (8,009 or almost 8%). Native Hawaiians are the largest Native Hawaiian or Pacific

Islander (NHPI) ethnic group in the Fresno metro area, numbering nearly 1,300 or 36% (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2013).

The Asian American data disaggregation movement seeks to reform data practices at federal, state, and institutional levels to reflect this high degree of diversity in Asian American communities. Researchers argue, “Disaggregated data is an essential tool for advocacy and social justice, shedding light on ways to mitigate disparities in educational outcomes and improve support for the most marginalized and vulnerable populations” (Teranishi et al., 2014, p. 27). In other words, the outsized educational achievements and economic success of the largest Asian American ethnic subgroups overshadows the needs of other Asian American subgroups at the other end of the spectrum.

For historically underserved Asian American subgroups such as Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders, the issue of data disaggregation is particularly critical. Because their needs are obscured in aggregate data, most educational institutions do not recognize a need to offer resources and/or services targeting Asian American students. Further, because Asian Americans are not considered URMs, they tend not to be proactively recruited for participation in URM-focused services and resources. While the exclusion of Asian Americans from these services and resources may not be intentional, the resulting outcome is an absence of Asian American participation in these spaces, further reinforcing the misperception that Asian Americans are problem-free minorities that do not require academic supports. Without a new model for collecting disaggregated data, these disparities will continue to remain hidden and the very real needs of the most marginalized and vulnerable Asian American populations will continue to be overlooked.

For example, the adult Asian American population nationally exhibits the highest rates of educational attainment when compared to Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). However, it is imperative to consider that these data include recent Asian immigrants, who skew even higher in educational attainment because of the preferences in U.S. immigration policy for highly skilled people who could work in science and technology-based fields.

When looking at educational attainment among Asian Americans, using disaggregated data is even more critical. For example, according to data from the 2010 Census, Asian American adults as a group were more likely than all other racial groups to have a college degree, yet the disaggregated subgroup data told a much different story (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2013). Disaggregated data on educational attainment revealed that Southeast Asian (Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese) adults not only had the lowest educational attainment among Asian Americans, but that they were also less likely to have a college degree than the overall state population (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2013).

In the Fresno metropolitan area, the disparities are even more striking. Nearly one-third of Fresno's Asian American adults had a college degree, the highest rate of college degree attainment among all racial groups (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2013). Yet, Fresno's Southeast Asian American adults had the lowest educational attainment, with just 13% of Hmong Americans, 11% of Laotian Americans, and 6% of Cambodian Americans holding college degrees – a rate on par with Latinos (7%) and trailing behind the 15% of Blacks with college degrees (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2013).

Western University has been collecting disaggregated data for its Asian American and Pacific Islander populations since 2010. The existence of these

disaggregated data were crucial to my ability to conduct this study, researching disparities between Asian American ethnic subgroups. Without disaggregated data for each Asian ethnic groups, this study and others like it, would not have been possible, which underscores the vital importance of educational institutions to disaggregate Asian American and Pacific Islander data.

The Model Minority Myth

The continued lack of uniform systems to collect and report disaggregated data for the Asian American population is a prime contributor to the persistence of the “model minority myth” (MMM). Despite increasing research by Asian American scholars challenging the MMM, a widespread perception persists that Asian Americans have overcome all barriers of racial discrimination and are more successful in this country than even Whites (Suzuki, 1989). As Suzuki (1989) observed in a seminal essay on the topic, “In recent years, articles have proliferated in news magazines and Sunday supplements, proclaiming that Asians are ‘Outwhiting the Whites,’ explaining ‘Why Asians are Going to the Head of the Class,’ and touting ‘The Triumph of Asian Americans’” (p. 13). U.S. Census data confirmed that Asian Americans as an aggregate group had median family incomes and educational levels higher than those of whites (Suzuki, 1989). Yet, using aggregate group data is inadequate to describe a population as heterogeneous as Asian Americans. In this way, the failures of federal and state governments to develop consistent data collection and reporting systems with respect to disaggregating Asian American ethnicities uphold the false narrative of the MMM.

But while the lack of disaggregated data certainly plays a fundamental role in perpetuating the MMM, it is crucial to recognize that the MMM has power because it exists within the broader context of the “white racist framing of society

[which] is now a centuries-old rationalizing of the racism systemic in this society” (Chou & Feagin, 2008, p. 4). As Chou and Feagin (2008) argued, our entire society is built on a “broad range of racialized realities: the all-encompassing white racial frame, extensive discriminatory habits and exploitative actions, and numerous racist institutions” (p. 5). Because of this fundamental framing, all immigrant and minority groups have been placed “somewhere in the racial hierarchy whites firmly control – that is, on a white-to-black continuum of status and privilege” (Chou & Feagin, 2008, p. 4). Asian Americans, some of whom can trace their family histories back to the 1800s, while many more have more recent immigration backgrounds and span a wide range of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, pose challenges to this simplistic racial hierarchy.

It is crucial to recognize that the MMM was created within this context of systemic racism. When news articles began appearing praising Asian Americans as a “‘model minority’ who had overcome racism and ‘made it’ in American society through hard work, uncomplaining perseverance, and quiet accommodation” (Suzuki, 1989, p. 14), many Asian Americans initially reacted positively. Yet, it is crucial to understand that this image and its interpretations rely on the assumption of an “assimilation lens, one similar to that used for assessing the adaptations of past and present European immigrants” (Chou & Feagin, 2008, p. 3). This lens is narrowly focused on whether and how well immigrants and other minority groups become fully integrated into white middle-class society (Chou & Feagin, 2008). In order to make their case, Chou and Feagin (2008) stated that most social science researchers “focus on Asian American progress in areas such as educational and income achievements [however] this limited definition of success in adaptation to the United States is mostly white-generated and ignores other important areas of Asian American lives” (p. 3). In

this way, it is important to realize the model minority myth is a product of the dominant white racial framing of this society.

Uncovering the history of how this stereotype emerged provides crucial insight into how it has been and continues to be used to maintain white dominance in a racialized society. The stereotype was constructed in the civil rights context of the mid-1960s, “largely in response to African American and Mexican American protests against discrimination” (Chou & Feagin, 2008, p. 13). White scholars, political leaders, and journalists responded by developing the MMM “in order to allege that all Americans of color could achieve the American dream” (Chou & Feagin, 2008, p. 13). The rosy image of quiet, uncomplaining Japanese and Chinese Americans was thus created “not by Asian Americans but by influential whites for their public ideological use” (Chou & Feagin, 2008, p. 13).

In the months preceding the 1966 unveiling of the MMM, a high-profile government report set the stage for the country’s rapid embrace of the MMM. In 1965, Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote a report on African American families (Geary, 2015). Moynihan wrote this report, entitled “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,” better known as “The Moynihan Report,” to convince President Lyndon Johnson to take decisive action in not only passing civil rights legislation, but also adopt new policies to alleviate race-based inequalities (Geary, 2015). However well-intentioned, The Moynihan Report sparked immediate debate upon its release, with the report’s focus on racial inequality as a by-product of African Americans’ family structure (Geary, 2015). The Moynihan Report remains relevant more than 50 years later because it shaped contemporary discourse about why racial inequality persists (Geary, 2015).

Set against this racially contentious backdrop, William Petersen, a sociologist at UC Berkeley, wrote an article that was published in 1966 in *The*

New York Times Magazine, headlined, “Success Story, Japanese American Style” (F.K. Wang, 2016). In his article, Petersen coined the term “model minority,” attributing the “apparent success of Japanese Americans only 20 years after their World War II incarceration in internment camps to cultural values, strong work ethic, family structure, and genetics” (as cited in F.K. Wang, 2016, para. 4). When contrasted to Moynihan’s characterization of culture and family structure as the root cause for African Americans’ socioeconomic problems, Petersen’s “‘model minority’ analysis also pitted Japanese Americans – and later, all Asian Americans – against so-called ‘problem minorities,’ which many say has distracted from charges of institutional racism” (F.K. Wang, 2016, para. 5). Both the Moynihan report and Petersen article were based on an assumed racial hierarchy that measured the progress of Asian Americans against that of other racial minorities toward achieving a narrow definition of success.

Yet both have shaped current interpretations of Asian Americans as a racial barometer of social progress, even more than half a century later. In a 2017 essay printed in *New York Magazine*, writer Andrew Sullivan mused on the topic of why Democrats feel sorry for Hillary Clinton, but curiously ended his essay by regurgitating the well-worn MMM as a rhetorical device to question the existence of white dominant systemic racism:

Asian-Americans, for example, have been subject to some of the most brutal oppression, racial hatred, and open discrimination over the years... Yet, today, Asian-Americans are among the most prosperous, well-educated, and successful ethnic groups in America. What gives? It couldn’t possibly be that they maintained solid two-parent family structures, had social networks that looked after one another, placed enormous emphasis on education and hard work, and thereby turned false, negative stereotypes into true, positive ones, could it? It couldn’t be that all whites are not racists or that the American dream still lives? (Sullivan, 2017, para. 10).

The MMM thus sustains a false narrative of racial competition between Asian Americans and other minoritized populations. While all immigrant and minority groups have certainly faced racism and discrimination, the key issues that the MMM conveniently overlooks are 1) Asian Americans as a group are not monolithic; 2) selective immigration policies favoring highly educated immigrants have played an essential role in measures of Asian American educational and socio-economic success; and 3) comparisons between Asian Americans and other minoritized groups minimize the role that racism plays in the very real struggles of these groups – particularly African Americans (Chow, 2017). Through this crucial omissions, the persistence of the MMM continues to tokenize Asian Americans and their “perceived collective success as a racial wedge” (Chow, 2017, para. 5).

As further evidence of the endurance of the model minority stereotype, in the first few months of 2020, an article in the *Los Angeles Times* states, “The hashtag #notyourmodelminority has been spreading across social media and into conversations around Asian identity on a mission to defy the limiting connotations that Asian Americans are a monolithic group” (Magsaysay, 2020, para. 16). Magsaysay (2020) uses this trending hashtag as an example of diverse Asian Americans speaking out against hate to fight against the role that Asian stereotypes like the MMM have played in perpetuating racism. In this latest iteration of their struggle for self-determination, Magsaysay notes that Asian Americans are once again uniting “in support of one another, defying stereotypes of passiveness that have long been associated with Asian culture” (para. 10).

Exclusion of Asian Americans from Underrepresented Minority (URM)

The persistence of and widespread acceptance of this stereotype plays out in other ways that may not be entirely intentional, yet effectively function to

marginalize Asian Americans. For example, the prevailing use of the “Underrepresented Minority (URM)/Non-URM” dichotomy by educational institutions might be seen as such an unintended consequence. The exclusion of Asian Americans from the URM category on the part of many universities and research institutions would seem to indicate this issue is a result of the lack of data disaggregation for this population. Because the achievements of the numerically dominant Asian Americans at the top end of the educational attainment spectrum have historically eclipsed the Asian Americans at the lower end, one might reasonably assume that Asian Americans on the whole are not an underrepresented minority group. When proportions of Asian American students at a given university, particularly those with very competitive admissions criteria, are compared to the representation of Asian Americans in the general population, it would appear that Asian Americans would not be considered underrepresented. A critical examination of the URM/Non-URM model from an Asian American perspective, however, might argue that its origins are rooted in a belief in the MMM that has both been an obstacle to data disaggregation and reinforced a false racial narrative that more often than not aligns Asian Americans with Whites as opposed to other racial and ethnic minorities.

Given the profound diversity of Asian Americans, the continued use of the dichotomous URM/Non-URM model to identify students who have not been afforded the same educational opportunities as their peers is both inaccurate and incomplete. The inherent diversity of Asian Americans clearly highlights the inadequacy of the most commonly used URM definition, yet, in the absence of another accepted metric, our institutions of higher learning continue to use this term to assess their progress toward diversity, inclusion, and equity. In the end, the Asian American ethnic groups who are the most vulnerable and in need of

educational supports are sidelined while being held to unreasonable standards set by society's limited capacity to construe the need for a new racial paradigm.

Asian American Students at Western University

At Western University, the only public, 4-year university in the area, Asian American students are the third largest racial group, accounting for 14.9% (or 3,504) of the total student population, trailing Hispanics at 40.6% and Whites at 26.1% (Gong, Kubo, & Takahashi, 2014). In a reflection of its surrounding communities, the majority (54.5% or 1,732) of Western University's Asian American student population are Southeast Asian: Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian, or Vietnamese (Gong et al., 2014). Of these four ethnic subgroups, Hmong students comprise by far the largest percentage contributing nearly half (44.7%) of the campus' total Asian American students in fall 2018 (Office of Institutional Effectiveness, n.d.-a). By comparison, Laotian students were 4.1%, Vietnamese students were 4.0%, and Cambodian students were 3.8%.

Further, the socioeconomic status of the Asian American student population at Western University is markedly lower than that of their peers. A 2019 report focusing on the campus' Hmong student population found that nearly two-thirds (62%) of Western University's Hmong students were from families with combined incomes of less than \$30,000/year, ranking Hmong students by far the most financially disadvantaged of all racial student groups (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019). Further, Takahashi and Nottbohm (2019) also note that 85% of Hmong students were first-generation students, 92% were full-time students, they were accepted into the university at higher rates (with an approximate 75% acceptance rate) than other students, and are more likely to enroll once they are admitted (65% enrollment rate). The researchers further note that from 2012 to 2018,

Hmong student enrollment at Western University has increased by 32% over this 6-year period (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019).

With Southeast Asian Americans comprising more than half of the Asian American student population – and Hmong Americans by far the largest Southeast Asian ethnic subgroup – Western University’s Asian American student profile is atypical of most institutions of higher education. However, this institution currently adheres to its systemwide definition of URM, however ill-suited this definition is in accurately describing the challenges of its local populations. According to the entry for “Underrepresented Minorities” in the Glossary of Terms used by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness at Western University, URM “include[s] African American, American Indian, Hispanic, and Pacific Islander” (Office of Institutional Effectiveness, n.d. b).

The university, however, is well aware of the limitations of the URM/Non-URM dichotomy and how this terminology inappropriately excludes underserved AAPIs. As noted by the university president in the foreword to Takahashi and Nottbohm (2019), “[The university] has one of the largest Hmong American communities in the United States... Six percent (6%) of Western University students are Hmong Americans, the highest proportion among all campuses [in the system]” (p. 3). Importantly, the president also acknowledged, “Hmong are not specifically classified as an underrepresented minority group by federal education codes, but their unique immigration history and experiences present barriers to success that are no less challenging than those facing underrepresented minority student groups” (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019, p. 3). The president’s message concluded by noting that not only do “Hmong students need institutional and community support for their educational success,” (p. 3), but also that this report “calls for strategies and actions to better assist Hmong students in their pursuit of a

college degree... and helps us to understand other Southeast Asian students who share similar cultural and immigration histories with Hmong” (p. 3).

Because of the demographic composition of Western University’s Asian American students, prevalent stereotypes about Asian Americans such as the MMM simply do not apply to this student population. Yet, because the MMM is so thoroughly ingrained into our systems and policies by virtue of aggregated national data, Asian Americans are oftentimes singularly excluded from consideration as a racial minority in matters of education policy. At Western University, this exclusion has unintended consequences for its entire population of Asian American students, the impact of which is the focus of this study.

Western University as an AANAPISI

The Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI) program was established by Congress as part of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act in 2007, and was authorized the following year under the Higher Education Opportunity Act (AANAPISI, n.d.). The AANAPISI program is one of eight federally-designated Minority Serving Institution (MSI) programs designed to provide “grants and related assistance to AANAPISIs to enable such institutions to improve and expand their capacity to serve Asian Americans and Native American Pacific Islanders and low-income individuals” (AANAPISI, n.d., para. 2).

Like other MSIs, AANAPISIs must qualify for their status. These requirements indicate that AANAPISIs “have fewer resources with which to serve their students and that the financial circumstances of the students [AANAPISIs] serve limit their ability to raise tuition and endowment revenue in the pursuit of institutional mission” (Espinosa, Turk, & Taylor, 2017). To be eligible for

AANAPISI status, an institution must have an undergraduate student enrollment that is:

at least 10% Asian American or Native American Pacific Islander students [and] at least 50% of the institution's degree-seeking students must receive federal financial assistance under one or more of the following programs: the Federal Pell Grant, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG), Federal Work Study (FWS), or the Federal Perkins Loan. (AANAPISI, n.d., para. 3)

AANAPISI-eligible institutions are wide-ranging and include community colleges, regional campuses, and 4-year institutions. Unsurprisingly, most are concentrated in states with high percentages of AAPIs, such as California, Hawaii, New York, Texas, Illinois, and Massachusetts, but are also located in American Samoa, Guam, Northern Marianas Islands, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau (AANAPISI, n.d.).

AANAPISI grants are awarded under Title III-A and Title III-F and “must be used to assist an institution in planning, developing, and carrying out activities that improve and expand the institution's capacity to serve Asian American and Native American Pacific Islanders (AANAPIs) and low-income individuals” (Hegji, 2017, p. 13). Grants are generally awarded for 5-year periods with average awards ranging from \$300,000-\$350,000 per year, with a maximum total award of \$1,750,000 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-b, para. 4-5). Institutions that receive funds from other Title III-A programs, Title III-B (Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities [HBCU] and Historically Black Graduate Institutions [HBGI] programs), or Title V (Hispanic Serving Institution [HSI] and Promoting Postbaccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans [PPOHA]) may not receive an AANAPISI grant under Title III-A in the same fiscal year (Hegji, 2017).

In the case of Western University, this dual designation as both an HSI and an AANAPISI is a tangible problem with far-reaching effects. Western University is a current recipient of a 5-year HSI Title III-A grant and, as such, is ineligible to apply for an AANAPISI Title III-A for the duration of the HSI Title III-A grant period. With a student body that is predominantly Latinx (53%), the university would be remiss if it did not prioritize the needs of these students. Given the federal government's limitations on receiving simultaneous grants under the HSI and AANAPISI programs, and considering the fact that HSI grants are much larger than AANAPISI grants, it is understandable that Western University has consistently gone after—and received—multi-year HSI grant funding each time it is eligible.

Thus, the long-standing success of Western University in securing multiple HSI Title III-A grants to benefit its Latinx students has had the concurrent effect of excluding from consideration the needs of its comparatively smaller Asian American student body (13%). Because the Title III-F grant program is currently suspended, pending Congressional approval of the H.R. 5363 Fostering Undergraduate Talent by Unlocking Resources for Education (FUTURE) Act (H.R. 5363) and a subsequent Presidential signature, future opportunities to obtain AANAPISI grant funding remain dubious. Still, even without federal grant funding, AANAPISI eligible campuses can, and should, provide services that address the needs of their AAPI students.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to demonstrate that Asian American students are an underserved population at Western University, yet culturally tailored academic supports are lacking for these students, the majority of whom are low-income, first-generation college students. Despite being the third largest ethnic student

population on the Western University campus, Asian American students are not well-connected to faculty, staff, or other students and they experience distinct cultural and academic challenges that inhibit or preclude them from accessing existing support services on campus (Gong, et al., 2014; Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019; Zelezny & Takahashi, 2016). As will be shown in the literature reviewed in the next chapter, these findings, though specific to Western University, are likely applicable to many other university campuses with significant numbers of low-income and/or first-generation Asian American students, given the host of misperceptions and challenges confronting this population.

To establish the existence of the challenges facing Asian American students at Western University, a previous study by Gong, et al. (2014) collected student demographic data, conducted a campus-wide student survey, and interviewed staff and faculty who worked directly with Asian American students. Because of the ethnic composition of the campus student body, this study's findings were necessarily tailored to Southeast Asians, who comprise the majority of Western University Asian Americans and the majority of the study's survey respondents. Among their survey findings were the following: a) Southeast Asian students came from much larger families with lower household income and parents with lower levels of education; b) Southeast Asian students have significantly more conflicting demands on their time (working for pay, housework, commuting, child care) than their peers; c) More Southeast Asian students reported living in home and neighborhood environments that are not supportive of their academic success than their peers; and d) Southeast Asian students are much less likely to engage with faculty members to discuss academic assignments and they perceive faculty to be less supportive of their overall success compared to their peers.

At the conclusion of their research study, Gong et al. (2014) considered the student demographics, student survey findings, and interview data and made the following general conclusions about the state of Southeast Asian students at Western University:

- 1) Most Southeast Asian students struggle with balancing family obligations against their own educational goals. (p. 5)
- 2) The majority of Southeast Asian students must overcome significant academic deficits, yet lack the necessary parental guidance to help them succeed in college. (p. 5)
- 3) Most Southeast Asian students welcome and are appreciative of existing academic support services on campus, yet are not fully benefiting from these services. (p. 5)
- 4) Some Southeast Asian students feel overlooked by programs that target other minorities and would welcome more proactive support by Asian and other faculty and administrators to help them achieve academic goals. (p. 5)

When compared to the variety of programs and resources available to support the success of the Latinx and (significantly smaller) African American student populations, the absence of any programs or resources underscores the reality that Asian American students have essentially been left in the margins at Western University.

Gong et al. (2014) also reported that in 2013, despite having a 4-year graduation rate of 8% and a 6-year graduation rate of 43%, there were no coordinated programs or services in existence on campus that specifically addressed Asian American students' cultural backgrounds, values, or targeted needs. While the Asian and Pacific Islander Programs and Services office within the Cross Cultural and Gender Center (CCGC) was established in 2015, it, along with the other student programs and services offices within CCGC, is primarily focused on student social and cultural activities. In 2019, there were still no

academic success programs that specifically targeted Asian American and/or Pacific Islander students.

On a larger scale, Asian Americans pose challenges to this nation's dominant Black-White racial paradigm and to education policy makers. In light of Asian American communities' evolving heterogeneity, our current data systems are inadequate to accurately track subgroup data. Because of their complex heterogeneity, educational institutions nationwide must grapple with the fact that the Asian American communities of today do not all fit neatly into the decades-old model minority stereotype. In fact, the tremendous diversity within the Asian American population poses challenges to national education policy terms such as underrepresented minorities or URMs. While there are exceptions – most notably to include Pacific Islanders as part of the URM population – the most commonly used URM definition excludes all Asian Americans, regardless of ethnicity and/or socioeconomic status. Because URM is still widely used, educational institutions must critically re-examine whether programs and policies that intend to promote student success, but are based on outdated and insufficient data collection systems, are, in fact, inclusive and equitable.

Research Rationale

This study focused on Western University (*pseudonym*), a large, 4-year institution that is part of a statewide public university system. Although its findings were specific to its campus, the study was intended to be generalizable to other educational institutions that serve Asian American students, particularly those that share the AANAPISI designation and serve large numbers of first-generation and low-income Asian Americans.

Because Pacific Islanders comprise only 1.1% of the AAPI student population at Western University, this study was necessarily limited to only Asian

Americans. With so few Pacific Islander students, there was a genuine concern of compromising student identity when presenting and analyzing ethnic subgroup data by cohort. Therefore, despite my desire at the outset to address the issue of perpetually underserved populations like Pacific Islanders, one major limitation of this study was the inability to include Pacific Islanders because of student privacy concerns.

By providing detailed information and analyses of ethnically diverse Asian American students who currently attend Western University, the goals of this study were to 1) Increase awareness of the diversity of the Asian American student population, including data on socioeconomic status and academic achievement; and 2) Document the range of campus- and community-based resources that support the success of Western University students. Although this study was specifically focused on Western University, the results of this study may be used to guide other colleges and universities – particularly those sharing the AANAPISI designation – to modify and/or develop diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies, particularly as they pertain to historically underserved AAPI student populations.

Research Questions

1. What is the historical context that shapes how Western University currently serves its Asian American students?
2. Socioeconomic demographics and academic achievement
 - 2.1 What are the socioeconomic profiles of the 10 largest Asian American ethnic groups enrolled at Western University? Socioeconomic variables examined included: first generation student status, Pell grant status, and parents' education level.
 - 2.2 What are the academic achievement profiles of the 10 largest Asian American ethnic groups enrolled at Western University? Academic

achievement variables examined included high school GPA, college GPA, 4-year graduation rates, and 6-year graduation rates.

3. How informative are the data when the 10 Asian American ethnic groups are combined into four subgroups: East Asian, Filipino, South Asian, and Southeast Asian?
4. How does Western University currently serve Asian American students as an AANAPISI?
 - 4.1 Academic Affairs: In which colleges are Asian American students primarily enrolled? What is the level of participation among Asian American students in the Asian American Studies courses and minor?
 - 4.2 Student Affairs: What programs, services, and organizations specifically aim to support the academic success of Asian American students?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it adds to the current racial discourse addressing the exclusion and misrepresentation of Asian Americans in higher education. More specifically, it is significant in its documentation of the socioeconomic status and academic performance of Asian Americans at a large, public university that serves a large first-generation, low-income student population and is a designated Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI). This focus on the relevance of Asian Americans in the college completion agenda is particularly noteworthy, given the focus of many institutions of higher education on improving retention and graduation rates over the next few years and the concomitant tendency to overlook Asian American students in programs targeting under-performing students.

Perhaps partly due to the pervasiveness and persistence of the model minority stereotype, a sizable amount of the existing literature on Asian

Americans in higher education has been focused on the model minority myth, particularly on attempts to debunk the myth. As detailed above, this stereotype is problematic not only in the manner in which it was created – as a tool of racial wedge politics – but also in the ways the stereotype has supported the advancement of a false racist ideology and agenda. As a population that does not fit neatly into the dominant Black-White racial paradigm, Asian Americans have been treated as a voiceless accomplice in our nation’s racial discourse whose position shifts according to the prevailing political agenda. This study was not interested in further legitimizing a Black-White racial paradigm and, consequently, the role of Asian Americans in this paradigm, by using the model minority myth as a narrative framework.

This study instead purported to challenge the dominant Black-White racial paradigm, and question the systems and policies that have been forged from this paradigm. By using Asian American students at Western University as a case study population, this study aimed to highlight how the uncritical acceptance of this dominant paradigm has resulted in the structural marginalization of Asian American students at Western University and beyond. Given Western University’s designation as an AANAPISI, this study’s findings are particularly informative for education leaders at this campus, as well as other AANAPISI campuses focused on improving retention and graduation rates of their Asian American students.

Summary

Misperceptions about Asian American students persist, largely due to the misunderstanding that Asian Americans, as “non-minorities,” do not have racialized or minoritized experiences and do not encounter discrimination. On college and university campuses, these misperceptions can result in equity gaps, particularly because Asian Americans are already marginalized as not White, yet

are also not an underrepresented minority (URM). With the added burden of the persistent model minority stereotype, Asian American students are further marginalized when academic support services and resources lack appropriate cultural relevance.

This study aimed to address the exclusion and misrepresentation of Asian Americans in the current racial discourse by focusing on the socioeconomic characteristics and academic achievement of Asian American students at Western University. By disaggregating socioeconomic status, academic achievement, and support services participation data by Asian American ethnic subgroup, this study directly addressed the issue of structural marginalization of Asian Americans, the third largest student racial population at Western University.

The results of this study are significant in its documentation of the socioeconomic characteristics and academic performance of Asian Americans at a large, public university that serves a large first-generation, low-income student population. Given Western University's designation as an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI), this study's findings are particularly informative not only for campus leadership, but also for other AANAPISI campuses nationwide. Moreover, given the recent focus on the college completion agenda, this study's findings may be instructive to education leaders focused on improving retention and graduation rates across all student groups.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this institutional analysis was to understand the degree to which Asian American students, despite encountering a campus environment that does not currently provide any culturally tailored support programs for Asian Americans, have successfully navigated, persisted, and succeeded at Western University. Following is a review of the literature about how Asian Americans have been misrepresented and misunderstood because of the dominant racialized framework of our society. As a result, much of the available literature on Asian Americans and AAPIs in higher education is overly focused on countering these misrepresentations, mostly centered around the model minority myth (MMM). Rather than adding to these counter-claims, this study instead viewed the subject matter through the theoretical frameworks provided by critical race theory, specifically through its derivative, Asian critical theory (Iftikar & Museus, 2018).

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) was borne around the late 1960s and early 1970s as a conceptual lens that recognizes that racism is ingrained in the fabric and system of American society. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2007), CRT was created as a fresh approach by lawyers and law profession to deal with the new types of racism that were developing, stalling and even rolling back the supposed gains achieved during the Civil Rights era. One of the key tenets of CRT is that “racism is ordinary, not exceptional – the usual way that society does business – and thus represents the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007, p. 136). Another key tenet of CRT is described as “interest convergence” and explained by Delgado and Stefancic (2007) in stating, “Because racism can advance the interests of both

White elites... as well as working-class people... large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it” (p. 136). Critically, a third principle of CRT addresses the idea of the social construction of race, specifically, the idea that “race and races are products of social thought” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007, p. 137). These three broad principles provide a critical framework for viewing the myriad ways in which the dominant society racializes minority groups in response to shifting needs and circumstances. Our system of laws and public policies are consequently shaped by these shifting views, pending societal circumstances, events, or national crises (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

Viewing existing power structures through a CRT lens recognizes that these structures were created based on the intrinsic assumption of White privilege and supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color. It is important to note that the use of the term *White supremacy* here is distinct from the mainstream use of the term and does not refer to the far-right extremist hate of White nationalists. Instead, White supremacy in the context of CRT refers to “the operation of much more subtle and extensive forces that saturate the everyday mundane actions and policies that shape the world in the interests of White people” (Gillborn, 2015, p. 278). This concept is crucial to understanding the CRT framework and how CRT scholars challenge common assumptions about our society. For example, Gillborn (2015) explained, “White-ness, in this sense, refers to a set of assumptions, beliefs, and practices that place the interests and perspectives of White people at the center of what is considered normal and everyday” (p. 278). Gillborn makes the point that because racism, specifically White supremacy, is so ingrained into our society, the assumptions, beliefs, and practices that society typically considers “normal” are centered around the experiences of White people. CRT instead demands that we instead center the

experiences of people of color to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of how racism has shaped their everyday lives.

Asian Americans, a minority within the larger population of racial minorities in the U.S., have rarely been centered in research examining issues of race and racism. Rather, Asian Americans have been subjected to various racialized depictions over the past 150 years. At various times in our nation's history, guided by our nation's shifting needs, priorities, and/or current events, Asians have been racialized as uncivilized and unwanted foreigners, demonized as a labor threat and/or enemy aliens ("Yellow Peril"), and upheld as "model minorities." Analyzing these portrayals through a CRT lens recognizes that these are socially constructed identities that served the interests of the dominant group at a particular point in time.

Applying a CRT lens is useful, then, in analyzing issues in higher education because it challenges the normative framing of educational equity and focuses on the often-overlooked needs of marginalized populations. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) suggested that the inequalities experienced by students of color "are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized" (p. 47). By centering race and racism in relation to other forms of oppression, CRT provides the conceptual tools through which to analyze current inequities faced by various students today. Delgado and Stefancic (2007) concluded their article by summarizing their views of the usefulness of CRT, stating that it "provides a new and different lens and way of systematizing the search for knowledge... asks us to attend to the material factors underlying race and racism, and challenges us to go beyond the ordinariness of racist action and treatment" (pp. 144-145). In so doing, CRT is particularly useful to challenge the ways that Asian Americans have been framed

as a monolithic racial group and urge more critical analyses of how this framing has created inequities that remain largely invisible and unaddressed.

In recent years, critical race theorists have splintered into various racial groups to inject the different ways in which each racial group has experienced racism. Black scholars launched BlackCrit, Latino scholars launched LatCrit, and Asian American scholars launched AsianCrit, each organizing their own conferences and lines of scholarship (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit)

While CRT has been successfully utilized to understand the ways in which White supremacy has shaped educational systems, it is limited in its ability to fully understand how race and racism impact and shape Asian Americans' diverse experiences (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). To aid in analyzing the role of racism in a range of Asian American experiences, Museus and Iftikar (2013) developed an Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit) framework. The AsianCrit framework is thus grounded in both CRT as well as the experiences and voices of Asian Americans, and is intended to demonstrate how White supremacy has shaped the racialized experiences of Asian Americans in society and higher education.

AsianCrit is “informed by Asian American Studies scholarship and therefore specifically tailored to Asian American experiences, issues, and concerns” (Iftikar & Museus, 2018, p. 939). Grounded in CRT, AsianCrit is a relatively new framework that centers the voices and experiences of Asian Americans to specifically address how these populations have been shaped and influenced by systems of race and racial inequalities. It is not intended to replace CRT, but rather to adapt CRT to create spaces to critically analyze Asian American experiences within the broader CRT framework.

In their 2018 article, Iftikar and Museus (2018) revisit their AsianCrit framework and detail how its seven interrelated tenets were created and “can be used to understand how White supremacy shapes the experiences of Asian Americans” (p. 940). The following is a brief summary of Iftikar and Museus’ (2018) description of the seven tenets of AsianCrit:

1) *Asianization* describes how people within the U.S. only become ‘Asian’ because of White supremacy and the racialization processes it engenders. Because Asian Americans are racialized as stereotypes, these constructions perpetuate systems of White dominance that dehumanize and exclude Asian Americans.

2) *Transnational contexts* critically analyze the ways that past and present global economic, social, and political processes shape the conditions of – and how racism influences – Asian American experiences.

3) *(Re)constructive history* recognizes that Asian Americans are typically invisible and voiceless in U.S. history and focuses on creating a collective Asian American historical narrative that incorporates the contributions of Asian Americans.

4) *Strategic (anti)essentialism* argues that race is a social construction that is shaped (and reshaped) by economic, political, and social forces in society and that Asian Americans can and do actively participate in the racialization process.

5) *Intersectionality* is the idea that White supremacy and other systems of oppression (imperialism, colonialism, sexism, heterosexism, etc.) intersect to shape the conditions in which Asian Americans draw their identities and experiences.

6) *Story, theory, and praxis* emphasize the value of stories and the important connections between story, theory, and practice as three interconnected elements in analysis and advocacy.

7) *Commitment to social justice* highlights the principles of advocating for ending all forms of oppression and exploitation.

Iftikar and Museus (2018) contend the AsianCrit framework is purposefully pan-ethnic for two main reasons: 1) because society racializes Asian Americans as a monolithic group, diverse Asian American ethnic groups go through similar experiences, including racial isolation and marginalization, racial hostility, pressure to racially segregate, racial silencing, pressure to assimilate to dominant White values and norms, and observation of racism directed toward others; and 2) focusing on race rather than ethnicity emphasizes the impact of White supremacy and systemic racism on shaping Asian American lives. Iftikar and Museus (2018) also encourage scholars to use the AsianCrit framework to “center critical race analyses on new questions and help generate deeper insights into the ways in which White Supremacy shapes the experiences and resistance of Asian Americans within U.S. education” (p. 941).

Because AsianCrit provides a lens through which to view inclusion, understanding, and empowerment toward social justice, it is useful in providing a theoretical background for exploring whether and how Asian American students translate cultural capital into academic success. However, given the diversity of experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander ethnic subgroups, one might question whether AsianCrit is a useful framework that would allow meaningful analysis of the range of experiences across different AAPI subgroups. Indeed, the name itself excludes Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPIs), whose histories and experiences in the US, as discussed previously, are distinct from that of most Asian American ethnic groups. As there are already a small group of South Asian scholars who have discussed South Asian American critical race studies using the name “DesiCrit” (Gnanadass, 2013; Harpalani, 2013), the results

of this study may point to the future exploration and development of new companion study fields, such as Southeast American critical race studies and NHPI critical race studies.

AsianCrit and the Model Minority Myth

Much has been written about the model minority myth (MMM) and the racial framing and perceptions of AAPIs. In fact, Poon et al. (2016) wrote a well-researched critical review of the MMM in selected literature on AAPIs in U.S. higher education. This thorough review included 112 texts that the researchers initially organized into six topical categories: contexts and implications of studying AAPIs in higher education; college access, admission, and college choice; undergraduate students; graduate students and faculty; student affairs staff and institutional leadership; and AAPIs in the curriculum (Poon et al., 2016, p. 478). However, what the researchers observed from their initial analysis was that certain patterns and themes emerged in “how the MMM was defined and discussed in relation to AAPIs” (Poon et al., 2016, p. 478). Based on this observation, the researchers regrouped the texts into three thematic categories depending on whether and how well the texts critically defined the MMM (Poon et al., 2016, p. 478). Their research found that a majority of those works “engaged in a sustained project of countering the model minority myth (MMM)” and suggest that “the well-established counter-MMM scholarly project is fundamentally flawed in its ability to humanistically reframe and advance research on AAPIs” (Poon et al., 2016, p. 469).

This study, therefore did not attempt to counter the model minority myth. Instead, this study acknowledged the presence and prevalence of the MMM and uses the frameworks of CRT and AsianCrit to analyze how the MMM has shaped perceptions and treatment of AAPI students.

Given its recent development, AsianCrit has not yet been used extensively to analyze the impact of the MMM on both Asian American and Pacific Islander student outcomes. While a wealth of research exists that discusses the MMM relative to Asian Americans, there is no such literature on Pacific Islanders that even mentions the stereotype (Benham, as cited in Poon et al., 2016). Poon et al. (2016) determined that this distinction suggests that the MMM bears little relevance for Pacific Islanders.

Viewing how AAPIs experience race and racism in the context of the MMM through a CRT lens provides a different perspective of the White-dominated racial paradigm. According to Poon et al. (2016),

Because a key tenet of CRT is to combat ahistoricism in analyzing how White dominance operates and is reproduced, a critical race definition of the MMM must acknowledge how it aligns with the middleman minority thesis and consequently global structures of racial domination (p. 473).

Poon et al. (2016) went on to state that the concept of Asian Americans as a middleman minority “is a tool that exploits Asian Americans, placing them in a racial bind between Whites and other people of color” (Poon et al, 2016, p. 473). The significance of this exploitation is that Asian Americans have been used – and continue to be used – as pawns in a repeating, centuries-old pattern of racism that uses their race as a bargaining chip (Shashtri, 2020). As Shashtri (2020) points out in discussing the latest wave of COVID-19-related anti-Asian racism, “Asian Americans lie at the center of a paradox, regarded as the ‘forever foreigner’ while simultaneously being christened a ‘model minority’” (para. 8). This duality of stereotypes places Asian Americans in the middleman status wedged between Whites at the top and other people of color at the bottom. The net effect of this paradoxical status is that the Asian American “middleman” position diffuses hostility directed upward toward Whites while simultaneously allows Asian

Americans to be a convenient scapegoat when White hostility is directed downward toward people of color during times of crisis (Shashtri, 2020).

Kim (1999) presented a “theory of racial triangulation” to explain the middleman minority’s role in maintaining systemic White supremacy. According to this theory, Asian Americans are presented as an example of success, yet are racially minoritized and, as such, are limited in the political and civic voice in order to preserve White supremacy. As its core, it is “a patronizing practice that maintains White dominance by disregarding the lived experiences of one group to shame another group” (Poon et al., 2016, p. 474).

Another CRT interpretation of the MMM is that it is an “insidious racial device used to uphold a global system of racial hierarchies and White supremacy” (Poon et al., 2016, p. 474). By glorifying the oversimplified perceptions of Asian Americans’ success, the MMM encourages cultural racism by discrediting other racial groups’ experiences with discrimination and structural barriers to their advancement. In so doing, the MMM conveniently deflects attention away from the problem of racial hierarchies, while also working to reinforce White dominance (Poon et al., 2016).

Thus, CRT illuminates two interrelated elements of the how the MMM has been used to uphold White supremacy: 1) Asian Americans are strategically presented as a model of self-sufficient minority success; and 2) the stereotype of successful, hard-working Asian Americans is used to blame other minority groups – particularly African Americans – for their struggles, thus perpetuating the deficit thinking model (Poon et al. 2016). Rather than adding to this body of literature, scholars such as Poon et al. (2016) encourage scholars to let go of centering the MMM and instead study “how the unique racial experiences of AAPIs related to higher education offer a different and important, yet often obscured, dimension of

research knowledge and critical perspectives on race and racism in higher education” (p. 491).

As Poon et al. (2016) concluded, “conducting research through a CRT lens that privileges the voices and perspectives of AAPIs in higher education is one approach to transforming the dominant racial framing of this diverse population” (p. 491). Additionally, Poon et al. (2016) recommend “increased research on AAPIs in higher education that fundamentally reframes the way this population and their experiences are conceptualized” (p. 492).

For this study, CRT and AsianCrit provided the necessary theoretical frameworks through which to view and analyze the inequities AAPI students currently face at Western University. Because CRT and AsianCrit center race and racism in relation to other areas of oppression, using these lenses through which to view the present status of AAPI students at Western University revealed a population that has been unwittingly shaped by the institutional fallout from the campus’s fractious history, the lingering effects of the model minority myth, and the dramatic shift in its ethnic composition and size.

This research thus postulated that the causes of many of the inequities experienced by Western University AAPI students were historically situated and systemic in nature. Using CRT and AsianCrit to examine AAPI educational experiences and outcomes at Western University eschewed the deficit-oriented framing or institutional finger-pointing that can unintentionally result when analyzing data without first placing these outcomes within a CRT or AsianCrit context. This study attempted to provide a deeper analysis of these inequities by contextualizing the institutional data within the CRT framework. By emphasizing the viewpoint that current AAPI inequities are a by-product of larger, unresolved systemic issues, this study advanced the idea that developing a critical race

consciousness that considers historical, sociopolitical, and intersectional factors will provide a nuanced understanding of how and why Western University AAPI students have been marginalized and will lead to broad-scale institutional change.

Research on Race and AAPIs in Higher Education

Unfortunately, much of what is known about AAPI students by the general public has been heavily influenced by dated stereotypes and false perceptions. The dominant narrative about AAPIs in higher education is still that they are a model minority. Due to the AAPI community's small size relative to the overall population, internal diversity, and lack of a visible and cohesive policy presence, this longstanding but misleading narrative has continued to persist. As a consequence, much of the policy research addressing underrepresented or disadvantaged students focuses on "non-Asian" minorities and omits any reference to AAPI students altogether. As summarized by Teranishi and Nguyen (2011), "AAPIs are, in many ways, invisible in policy considerations not only at the federal, state, and local levels, but in the development of campus services and programs as well" (p. 18). Most student data collection systems are based on previous policy research and therefore lack the ability to collect the appropriate data that would provide more accurate representations of the inequities facing ethnically diverse AAPI students.

Because this research study is focused on equity gaps faced by AAPI college students, this literature review includes research that 1) documents AAPI inequities, including educational disparities as well as issues that contribute to these disparities, 2) explores policy and institutional responses to address these inequities, and 3) discusses AAPI students' experiences, particularly with respect to persistence and success in higher education.

Research Documenting AAPI Inequities

The first challenge in addressing a problem is establishing the very existence of the problem. For AAPIs in higher education, recognizing that inequities even exist is a major hurdle given the perception of AAPIs as a monolithic racial group and the prevalence of the model minority stereotype. Countering these perceptions is a major theme in much of the research focusing on AAPIs in higher education, as demonstrated by Poon et al. (2016). Because this study already recognizes that widespread acceptance of the MMM leads to the inequitable treatment of AAPIs, this literature review does not delve into this area of research. Instead, this review focused on research that provided empirical evidence of the rapidly growing and shifting demography of the AAPI college-going population and the institutional inequities many confront.

Disparities in Educational Attainment. Concurrent with the exponential growth and rapid diversification of the nation's AAPI population, AAPI college enrollment also skyrocketed over the past few decades. From 1979 to 2009, the number of AAPI college students grew from 235,000 to 1.3 million (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Moreover, while all college enrollment is projected to increase across all racial groups, AAPIs will experience “a particularly high proportional increase of 30 percent between 2009 and 2019” (Teranishi & Nguyen, 2011, p. 21). These trends indicate that higher education policy and reform efforts must be prepared to embrace equity and diversity with respect to AAPIs.

College participation and educational attainment are critical to equity and diversity reform efforts, yet are often misunderstood with respect to AAPIs. With numbers of AAPI college students at peak levels of and enrollment rates outpacing other major racial groups in higher education, it becomes crucial to deconstruct

this population (Teranishi & Nguyen, 2011). By looking at AAPI ethnic subgroup data at all levels of postsecondary education, Teranishi and Nguyen (2011) found:

While more than four out of five East Asians (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) and South Asians (Asian Indian and Pakistani) who entered college earned at least a bachelor's degree, large proportions of other AAPI subgroups are attending college but not earning a degree. (p. 24)

Teranishi and Nguyen (2011) also found that “33.7% of Vietnamese, 42.9% of Laotians, and 47.5% of Hmong adults [25 years or older] reported having attended college but not earning a degree” (p. 24). Southeast Asians were also more likely to hold an associate's degree as their highest level of education, in contrast to East Asians and South Asians, both of whom were more likely to hold a bachelor's degree or higher (Teranishi & Nguyen, 2011). These data indicate significant disparities among the Asian American population, with persistent challenges that exist among marginalized Asian subgroups.

In its policy report, *A Community of Contrasts: Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders in California* (2013), the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice highlights educational disparities across AAPI ethnic subgroups in California. This report found that Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, and Hmong American adults “are less likely than the average Californian adult to have a high school diploma” and “just under one-fifth of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) adults are college graduates, a rate similar to African Americans” (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2013, p. 18).

In a related study, S. Xiong and Lee (2011) found that in 2010, nearly 50% of all Asian American adults aged 25 or older held a bachelor's degree, but that the degree attainment rate among Hmong adults was only 11.3%. Further, this study also reported data from 2008-2019 revealed nearly 40% of Hmong adults possessed less than a high school diploma (S. Xiong & Lee, 2011). Among their

findings, S. Xiong and Lee (2011) reported that most Hmong students are first generation college students who lack the necessary skills and family support to excel academically, and that academic support programs at postsecondary institutions have not adequately addressed these limitations. Despite a growing trend of college enrollment – Hmong American college enrollment nationwide more than doubled from 11.8% to 23.7% from 2001 to 2010 (S. Xiong & Joubert, 2012) – Hmong American degree completion rates (14%) are still disproportionately lower than the national population and all other racial/ethnic groups at 28% (Museus, 2013). Taken together, these findings suggest that systematic challenges facing Hmong Americans have not been adequately addressed (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019). Given their similarly low rates of degree attainment, the same conclusion can be reasonably inferred for other Southeast Asian and NHPI student groups.

Issues contributing to educational disparities. Given the extent to which assumptions and stereotypes have shaped how AAPIs are perceived and treated, CRT is an “effective tool for critically examining the position of AAPIs in higher education policy and practice” (Teranishi, Behringer, Grey, & Parker, 2009, p. 58). By providing an alternative frame through which to view AAPIs’ unique racialized status, CRT challenges the normative, dichotomous framing that is often assumed when problems related to race in the U.S. are discussed. This normative frame has historically created a racial spectrum, with Blacks and Latinos at one end and AAPIs and Whites on the other (Teranishi et al., 2009). This pervasive Black-White paradigm has severely limited how AAPIs are perceived within the educational environment. As a result, AAPIs are effectively silenced and marginalized when their experiences and outcomes do not fit neatly within the agenda served by this normative framework.

This very marginalization and exclusion of AAPI students in higher education research and discourse on racial issues is one of the key issues contributing to their educational disparities. Museus and Park (2015) found that research examining the experiences of Asian American students in higher education are sparse, reporting “five of the most widely read peer-reviewed academic journals in the field of higher education... revealed that less than 1% of articles published within the decade preceding this review gave explicit attention to Asian Americans” (p. 551). This paucity of research not only contributes to misperceptions about AAPIs, but also “masks challenges that this population encounters in college, such as racial prejudice and discrimination, cultural conflict, and pressure from racial stereotypes (Museus & Park, 2015, p. 551).

In fact, research in other disciplines, including ethnic studies, psychology, and sociology, suggest that AAPIs face institutional, cultural, and individual forms of racism in U.S. society (Museus & Park, 2015). For AAPI college students, these forms of racism are manifested in various ways, including racial exclusion from co-curricular campus life or misperceptions of Asian cultural values of silence and reflection as “an indicator that an individual is uninterested, disengaged, and inattentive in college classroom settings” (Museus & Park, 2015, p. 552). AAPIs may experience individual racism in overt forms such as hate crimes, but also in more subtle forms, including microaggressive statements such as “all Asians look alike,” “you people always do well in school,” and “Asians are the new Whites and do not face discrimination” (Museus & Park, 2015, p. 552).

Policy and Institutional Responses to AAPI

Inequities

As detailed earlier, the AANAPISI program was authorized by the Higher Education Opportunity Act in 2009 to improve the ability of institutions to

enhance AAPI student success. AANAPISIs were formally added to the list of Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) in 2011. AANAPISI discretionary grants are funded by the U.S. Department of Education and average between \$300,000 and \$350,000 per year for 5 years (Postsecondary National Policy Institute [PNPI], 2019). In 2016, Western University applied for a Title III-F grant, but was not funded. That year, 25 AANAPISIs received funding, for a total distribution of just over \$8 million (PNPI, 2019). In February 2020, the U.S. Department of Education issued new guidelines pertaining to its Title III-A grants that allowed institutions to apply for funding if they could demonstrate a collaborative partnership with another educational institution. Western University also applied for this round of funding; at the time of this writing, Title III-A funding decision have not been made.

AANAPISI grant funds are used in different ways to support the success of AAPI students at each receiving institution. As a way of exploring the types of AANAPISI-supported programmatic initiatives at other campuses with AAPI student populations comparable to Western University's, the following section briefly describes AANAPISI-Part F-funded programs at three such campuses in 2016: San Francisco State University, California State University, East Bay, and Sacramento State University. The information in the following sections was gathered from project abstracts for FY 2016 published on the AANAPISI website through the U.S. Department of Education.

San Francisco State University. With more than one-third (or roughly 9,500) of their student body belonging to AAPI demographic groups, San Francisco State University (SFSU) served a large number and high percentage of high-need AAPI and low-income students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-a). SFSU received a 2016 AANAPISI-Part F grant to increase student engagement

and non-cognitive skill development, decrease academic probation, increase credits earned and fall- to fall persistence, and increase graduation rates.

According to its project abstract, it implemented the following comprehensive and complementary activities: 1) information dissemination and targeted support to high-need AAPIs; 2) learning communities with culturally relevant and community-responsive practices, linked courses, and peer mentors; and 3) faculty development and faculty learning communities.

California State University, East Bay. California State University, East Bay (CSUEB) is the only 4-year AANAPISI in the East Bay region of California (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-a). According to its project abstract, AAPIs comprised 24% of East Bay residents and 23% of CSUEB's student population, which made them the second largest racial/ethnic group on campus. CSUEB's AANAPISI-Part F grant targeted first-generation AAPI students who transfer from local community colleges to CSUEB, with particularly focus on students from under-represented AAPI subgroups, particularly Pacific Islanders, Southeast Asians, and Central/West Asians. Their grant activities included: 1) summer bridge and orientation program; 2) two-day intensive writing workshop that includes feedback, a mock writing exam, and an opportunity to fulfill the University Writing Skills Requirement (UWSR); and 3) and a yearlong learning community that connects three upper-division, API-themed General Education courses. Through these activities, CSUEB sought to address the bottleneck of transfer students who need to complete the UWSR, as well as to improve retention and graduation measures for students. The grant also included an in-service training program to strengthen faculty capacity to support AAPI students in their academic and career goals.

Sacramento State University. Similar to CSUEB, Sacramento State University aimed to increase graduation rates for low-income and first-generation AAPI students transferring to its campus from community college (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-a). According to its project abstract, its program goals were to: 1) double its existing Educational Opportunity Program Transfer Learning Community to increase the number of transfer students served to 200 annually, and expand the learning community from a one-semester to a two-semester program; 2) integrate a new College to Career certificate program into the curriculum; and 3) develop student leaders and peer mentors through the Career Ambassador Program. The program sought to create a new campus environment to support AAPI and other high-need transfer students by helping them to transition and persist through to graduation. As such, it was closely aligned with Sacramento State's commitment to improve graduation rates and reduce achievement gaps between various racial and ethnic groups.

Research on AAPI Student Experiences

Because of the lack of awareness around the role of race in the lives of AAPIs generally, there is a corresponding lack of research on how AAPI are impacted by issues of race and racism in higher education. For example, Teranishi et al. (2009) found that several major gaps exist within higher education policy and practice, citing "student development theories often ignore the role of race in the student experience... the impact of the campus racial climates on AAPIs is often overlooked, and research on racial climates focuses primarily on the experiences of whites and blacks" (p. 62). Museus and Park (2015) also found that although Asian American college students experience racism on a daily basis, research that focuses on their experiences remains sparse. Yet, there are a small

and growing number of studies that address how race and racism shape the experiences of AAPIs in higher education.

A small, but growing, number of studies are beginning to focus more specifically on how AAPIs generally and AAPI ethnic subgroups perceive their college-going experiences. One recent example is “The Racialized Experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander Students: An Examination of Campus Racial Climate at the University of California Los Angeles” (CARE, 2016). This study examines the experiences of AAPI students at UCLA, the largest campus of the University of California system and where AAPI students comprise 33.5% of the student body (CARE, 2016). This study confirmed that despite common misconceptions of having educational experiences aligned with Whites, AAPI students share parallel racialized experiences as Black and Latino students (CARE, 2016). Further, although AAPIs are the largest racial group on campus, their sense of belonging contrasts starkly with White students and, rather, closely aligns with their racial and ethnic minority counterparts (CARE, 2016). These findings confirm that regardless of the fact that they make up one-third of the total undergraduate population, AAPI students experience lower levels of sense of belonging and report similar racialized experiences as other minoritized groups (CARE, 2016).

In another study, Nguyen, Chan, Nguyen, and Teranishi (2018) studied UCLA AAPI students to examine how their undergraduate campus experiences were racialized and whether there were any differences across ethnic group. Because of the size and diversity of AAPI students at UCLA, this campus is a unique study site to understand AAPI experiences as a group, but also as smaller ethnic subgroups. Nguyen et al. (2018) found that although UCLA is a majority-minority school, with AAPIs as the largest racial group on campus, AAPI students

expressed a desire for more AAPI role models among the faculty, staff, and administration. AAPI students also reported much lower levels of sense of belonging on campus than White students and an inability to connect with peers. Further, many AAPI students discussed “finding their sense of community within ethnic spaces more so than in AAPI spaces,” (Nguyen et al., 2018, p. 490), a sentiment that was especially true for Southeast Asian, South Asian, and Pacific Islander students.

Research on AAPI ethnic subgroups within the area of higher education is another growing area of research. As Southeast Asian Americans are critically underrepresented in higher education and are often aggregated within the larger Asian American category, their experiences and challenges are often invisible to researchers, educators, and policymakers.

An important study by Maramba and Palmer (2014) examined the critical role of cultural validation on Southeast Asian American students’ college success. S. Xiong and Lee (2011) examined the effectiveness of academic support programs on Hmong American college students’ success. Chhuon and Hudley (2008) examined the experiences of Cambodian American students to understand what factors supported their successful adjustment. This study found that “participants generally perceived little social support upon their arrival at the university and linked their early academic struggles to an inability to access adequate support on campus” (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008, p. 19). More research studies such as these are needed to provide empirical data about how diverse AAPIs experience college so that we may better understand how to better support their academic success.

Prior Institutional Research

Research Brief: The Academic Challenges of Southeast Asians at Fresno State

In 2013, Western University's Asian Faculty & Staff Association (AFSA) sponsored an exploratory research study by Gong et al. (2014) to investigate the academic challenges of Southeast Asian American (Hmong, Lao, Cambodian, and Vietnamese) students on campus. A multi-disciplinary team of faculty collaboratively led this research effort. Each of the faculty, prompted by personal experience working directly with students at Western University, was motivated to learn more about the Southeast Asian American (SEAA) student population because of their large numbers and proportionate presence on campus relative to other AAPI ethnic subgroups. The researchers also recognized a unique opportunity to study the SEAA population in a large, public university setting, as very limited research existed on these students and their experiences in higher education at the time.

The research team of Gong et al. (2014) collected student data from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) at Western University to understand not only the ethnic and socioeconomic characteristics of the SEAA student population, but also to further investigate how these students' retention and graduation rates compare to that of the overall student population. The team also worked closely with OIE staff to design and administer a student survey to assess the impact of various factors on academic success. Lastly, one of the researchers conducted interviews with SEAA faculty, staff, and students to gather additional qualitative data to supplement the survey results (Gong et al., 2014).

In Spring 2014, Gong et al. administered the survey to the experimental group of SEAA students. To ensure a large enough sample, the researchers

oversampled SEAA students. They also administered the survey to randomly selected Western University undergraduates as a control group against which the team would compare the SEAA student responses to test for statistically significant differences in any of the factors impacting academic performance.

Gong et al.'s findings were reported in a 2014 research brief, titled, "The Academic Challenges of Southeast Asians at Fresno State." Some of their key findings were that SEAA students came from much larger families with lower household income and parents with lower levels of education; SEAA students had significantly more conflicting demands on their time than did non- SEAA students; SEAA students reported living in home and neighborhood environments that were not supportive of their academic success; SEAA students were much less likely to engage with faculty to discuss academic assignments; and SEAA students perceived faculty to be less supportive of their overall success as compared to all other students (Gong et al., 2014).

Action Research Project Report: Supporting Southeast Asian Student Success (SSASS) Program

Armed with the data from their previous research, the faculty research team of Gong, Kubo, and Takahashi worked with University Advancement to secure a 2015 grant from the CSU Chancellor's Office to launch an action research project with the goal of improving student success by expanding data-driven decision making. The project was followed by the theoretical framework of Action Research, meaning the researchers themselves operated as full collaborators in the project along with students of the organization being studied. Zelezny and Takahashi (2016) claimed, "The project allowed us to acquire a deep understanding of Southeast Asian students' challenges and success at Fresno State through careful examination of evidence from multiple perspectives" (p. 3).

Zelezny and Takahashi (2016) reported that the SSASS program was conceived by the researchers because of the paucity of research on SEAAAs. In addition to the lack of research, there was a significant lack of coordinated programs and services targeted for these students. When compared to the many support programs offered for its large Latinx student population and comparatively smaller African American student population, the absence of targeted programs for AAPI and/or SEAA students appeared to be a glaring and unjust omission. In fact, the OIE data and the Asian Faculty and Staff Association (AFSA) report indicated that “SEAA students had essentially been left in the margins” (Zelezny & Takahashi, 2016, p. 5).

As stated in Zelezny and Takahashi (2016), the purpose of the action research project was to test various approaches designed to enhance the overall success of Southeast Asian American students at Western University. Areas of concern were the SEAA students’ low retention and graduation rates, as well as the perceived lack of campus-student “fit” as revealed in Gong et al. (2014). The SSASS program offered tailored services and instruction to a cohort of 27 first-time SEAA freshmen in summer and fall 2015 and the researchers collected pre- and post-program data from the students to evaluate the program’s impact on students.

Zelezny and Takahashi (2016) reported that the major program components of the SSASS program included the following: a 3-day summer orientation facilitated by the project directors and featuring a training session on “Discovering Your Cultural Values,” interactive exercises designed to promote cohort bonding, guest speakers, and campus tours led by the peer navigators; a parent orientation workshop; a semester-long DISCOVERe writing course modeled after First-Year Experience curricula; three culturally tailored leadership and public speaking

workshops throughout the semester; peer navigators who met with three to four students weekly to help orient them to college life and organized social activities; and a culmination program at the end of the semester that brought together campus and community leaders and the students and their families. After the conclusion of the program, all of the peer navigators were invited to travel to the annual conference of Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education to present a workshop discussing the program and its perceived impact on both the cohort students and the student peer navigators

Report: The Role of Institutional Data: A Focus on Hmong American Student Success

In 2019, Western University released a report titled, “The Role of Institutional Data: A Focus on Hmong American Student Success,” with research conducted by Dr. Yoshiko Takahashi, Associate Professor and an OIE Faculty Fellow, and Alex Nottbohm, Research Analysis, OIE. Because Western University is an AANAPISI that serves the highest proportion (6%) of Hmong American students among all CSU campuses, this report was undertaken to provide a comprehensive analysis and narrative of Hmong American students’ success, challenges, and needs. The researchers presented this report with the stated aim of starting a conversation about how OIE can work in partnership with the campus and surrounding communities to promote Hmong American educational success at Western University.

As reported by Takahashi and Nottbohm (2019), the researchers used a two-pronged methodology to demonstrate how institutional research can be used with an equity-minded perspective to build an evidence-based collaborative system to support student success. The first section of their research involved analyzing institutional data to describe the demographics and academic progress

for Hmong students who have been admitted or transferred to Western University. This demographic and academic progress data collected on Hmong Western University students included total enrollment, first-generation status, household income, full- or part-time student status, high school GPA, admittance rate, enrollment rate, retention rate, 4-year graduation rate, and 6-year graduation rate. Takahashi and Nottbohm (2019) found that Hmong students, on average, “apply with higher-than-average high school GPAs and are admitted into the university at higher rates than other students, [yet Hmong first-time full-time freshmen] graduate at disproportionately lower rates than other students across all high school GPA groups” (p. 19). These findings led the researchers to surmise, “Hmong students may be facing systematic challenges not currently addressed by institutions of higher education” (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019, p. 19).

The second section of Takahashi and Nottbohm’s (2019) research involved a survey created by the researchers that discussed Hmong students’ distinct academic and personal challenges and areas where further institutional supports were needed. The researchers compared the Hmong students’ survey responses to those of a control group, which was selected using a case-control matching process to create groups with similar socioeconomic status and academic backgrounds, thus isolating ethnicity as the main difference between the two groups (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019). The survey was emailed in fall 2018 to the two groups of students: one group of Hmong students (the experimental group) and the other case-control-matched group of students of other ethnicities (the control group).

Takahashi and Nottbohm (2019) reported their survey findings revealed the following differences between Hmong student respondents and their non-Hmong peers: Hmong students experience distinct academic challenges (e.g., asking for

help, language, balancing family responsibilities); Hmong students are less certain about their academic readiness, progress, and success; Hmong students find some campus connections challenging; Hmong men and women share similar academic progress but experience distinct challenges unique to their gender; and Hmong students are unique in reporting romantic relationships issues as barriers to their academic success (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019).

Moreover, Takahashi and Nottbohm's (2019) survey findings also corroborated the survey findings of Gong et al. (2014) in that Hmong students in 2019 also reported: lower perceived capacity to graduate; lower perceived sense of institutional support; lower sense of belonging; and more likely to rely on advisors for information (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019).

Report recommendations. Takahashi and Nottbohm (2019) concluded their report with a set of recommendations that strongly influenced this study's methodology. Their recommendations were as follows:

Operate from an equity-minded perspective. The researchers emphasize the importance of using an equity lens whenever examining student success outcomes. Because Asian American students are not classified as URMs, even though some ethnic subgroups share many of the same social and economic characteristics as other URMs, the net impact is that these underrepresented subgroups lack opportunities or access to critically needed resources and supports. Yet, the researchers state, "more research is needed on the distinct experiences of those underrepresented students in higher education to not only dispel the model minority myth but also determine what best practice interventions can be implemented" (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019, p. 20). It is also essential, the researchers emphasize, to investigate discrete ethnic groups through an equity

lens, as well as examine how intersectionality plays a crucial role in students' campus experiences (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019).

Expand disaggregated data analysis. The researchers assert that using disaggregated data for AAPIs is essential to uncover differences between ethnic subgroups and, in particular, to expose inequities in academic outcomes. Institutions must continue to disaggregate racial and ethnic data to allow comparisons across ethnic and racial groups and to formulate culturally appropriate responses that are specifically tailored to meeting students' needs (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019).

Expand collection of qualitative data. The researchers acknowledge that while the quantitative data collected by offices of Institutional Research is important in understanding student success and academic outcomes, institutions typically lack adequate qualitative data. Qualitative data can provide crucial in-depth insights into *why* students demonstrate the outcomes revealed by quantitative data. Expanding the collection of qualitative data is essential “to better inform insights to student behavior and student success” (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019, p. 20).

Move towards proactive analytics. Lastly, because most research on student success occurs after students graduate or leave the university, the researchers urge institutions to “move away from solely conducting reactive analytics and include proactive analysis” (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019, p. 20). By taking a proactive view, institutions may identify key indicators of a student's likelihood to drop out or not graduate on time, thus allowing advisers an opportunity to intervene. Additionally, the researchers also accentuate the importance of building “culturally responsive models that recognize and respect

the diverse experiences of different subgroups” (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019, p. 20).

Summary

This literature review focused key equity issues affecting Asian Americans and Pacific Islander students in higher education, institutional and policy responses to address equity gaps, and AAPI students’ experiences in overcoming equity challenges. The scant literature on using race as a critical lens through which to view AAPI experiences in higher education is a challenging limitation, particularly with respect to individual AAPI subgroup experiences, which may differ significantly from one another.

Still, there is hope that the situation is changing. According to Pak, Maramba, and Hernandez (2014), “research on race as it relates to Asian Americans, within the multiracial fabric of U.S. society, has proliferated” (p. 8). They believe that this recent scholarship has “expanded how we have come to configure Asian Americans not only in the national discourse on race relations but also in its connections to education research” (Pak et al., 2014, p. 8). Changing the national discourse is a painfully slow process, but the recent growth in education research from race-focused AAPI scholars has already successfully influenced public policy decisions such as the creation of the AANAPISI program.

Scholars, educators, administrators, and policymakers must continue to push for educational institutions to use disaggregated demographic categories in order to provide a more accurate picture of how Asian American and Pacific Islander subgroups are experiencing college success. The paucity of research relevant to this rapidly growing student population highlights an important opportunity to add to the body of knowledge and shape future discourse about AAPIs in higher education.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students can provide valuable insights into the important role that culture and family backgrounds play in not only shaping attitudes toward academic success, but also how various factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status can intersect and differentially impact student success outcomes within and across ethnic categories. One of this study's foremost assertions was that AAPI students are worthy of deeper and more focused exploration because of the nuanced insights that may be gleaned from a comprehensive, yet disaggregated, analysis of the diverse ethnic groups that comprise the AAPI racial category. Further, because Western University's AAPI student population embodied a broad and rather unique demographic profile, the findings of this study may offer insights and connections in previously unexplored spaces.

However, in order to better understand the complex environment in which Western University's students, faculty, and staff operate, this institutional analysis also examined the historical context that has shaped how AAPI students are currently served. None of the programmatic efforts that currently serve AAPI students occurred in a vacuum, therefore, establishing an historical understanding of how the campus has evolved with respect to serving its AAPI students was critical to this analysis.

In spite of the goal of creating a comprehensive, disaggregated analysis of each ethnic group contained in the AAPI category, accomplishing this within the confines of a single university had its limitations. My original intention was to include Asians and Pacific Islanders, per their direct association with Western University's designation as an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-

Serving Institution (AANAPISI). However, the limited size of the Pacific Islander student population – in some ethnic groups, the sample numbered less than five – necessitated the difficult decision to exclude them from this institutional analysis for the sake of student privacy.

Considerable thought and reflection went into making this decision. Just as Asian Americans as a racial group are often neglected or relegated to “Other” status in national surveys because of their size relative to the overall U.S. population, Pacific Islanders are regularly overlooked in studies that focus on the overall AAPI population. As a minority within a minority, Pacific Islanders numbered 1,432,890 in 2013 according to population data by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, whereas Asian Americans numbered 19,397,080 for that same year (Ramakrishnan & Ahman, 2014). Prior to 2000, Pacific Islanders were lumped into the AAPI category, which made it extremely difficult to identify disparities between them and the much larger Asian American population.

For this study, because disaggregated data were available for Pacific Islander ethnic subgroups at Western University, I was willing to overlook statistical significance to include these students in my analysis. However, because of concerns regarding student confidentiality when presenting disaggregated data, particularly for extremely small populations in specific ethnic groups, I regretfully made the conscious decision to exclude Pacific Islanders and focused solely on the 10 most numerous Asian Americans ethnic groups on campus.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this institutional analysis was three-fold: 1) To provide historical context to the current campus environment with respect to Asian American students at Western University; 2) To reveal the breadth of diversity among Asian American students at Western University as well as identify any

shared or distinct characteristics across ethnic subgroups; and 3) To gain a clear understanding of whether and how Western University is fulfilling its designation as an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI) in supporting the success of its diverse AAPI students.

Research Questions

1. What is the historical context that shapes how Western University currently serves its Asian American students?
2. Socioeconomic demographics and academic achievement
 - 2.1 What are the socioeconomic profiles of the 10 largest Asian American ethnic groups enrolled at Western University? Socioeconomic variables examined included: first generation student status, Pell grant status, and parents' education level.
 - 2.2 What are the academic achievement profiles of the 10 largest Asian American ethnic groups enrolled at Western University? Academic achievement variables examined included high school GPA, college GPA, 4-year graduation rates, and 6-year graduation rates.
3. How informative are the data when the 10 Asian American ethnic groups are combined into four subgroups: East Asian, Filipino, South Asian, and Southeast Asian?
4. How does Western University currently serve Asian American students as an AANAPISI?
 - 4.1 Academic Affairs: In which colleges are Asian American students primarily enrolled? What is the level of participation among Asian American students in the Asian American Studies courses and minor?
 - 4.2 Student Affairs: What programs, services, and organizations specifically aim to support the academic success of Asian American students?

Research Site

Western University was founded in 1911 as a regional teachers' college, and is one of the oldest campuses in one of the state public university systems. In 1949, it began offering bachelor's degrees. In 1961, it became a charter institution of the state public university system and in 1972 the name was officially changed to reflect this new status. Today, it is a public, regional university in the state university system and serves a five-county area and is home to a highly diverse population comprising both urban and rural communities.

The university's mission is to boldly educate and empower students for success. Its vision is that students are prepared to become the next generation of leaders (Office of the President, n.d.). The university is also committed to the values of discovery, diversity, and distinction. In 2019, Western University was ranked third highest among public universities in the nation for graduation-rate performance by U.S. News and World Report's 2020 Best College rankings. Its overall graduation rates are 19.3% for 4-year, 42.8% for 5-year and 54% for 6-year (Office of Institutional Effectiveness, n.d.-a).

With a current enrollment of approximately 25,000 students, the university serves a high proportion of low-income and first-generation students. Over 66% of its undergraduates are first generation college students, and over 61% are Pell Grant eligible (Office of Institutional Effectiveness, n.d.-a). For the past 4 years, Western University has been ranked in *Washington Monthly's* top 25 colleges that best serve the community based on measures of social mobility, research, and service (Lee, 2019a).

Western University is also a minority-serving institution with dual designations by the U.S. Department of Education as both a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) and an AANAPISI. In a nod toward Western University's

commitment to diversity, Western University earned its sixth Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award from *INSIGHT Into Diversity* magazine (Lee, 2019b).

I selected Western University as the research site because of its stated commitment to diversity, its designation as an AANAPISI, and because of the unique demographic profile of its Asian American students. At most educational institutions, Southeast Asians are usually extremely underrepresented, typically comprising a minuscule percentage of the overall Asian American population. But at Western University, Southeast Asians are by far the leading majority among all Asian American students. Because of their prominent presence on campus, a rather uncommon phenomenon in higher education, Western University is an opportune setting to observe any similarities or differences between ethnically diverse Asian American students, particularly Southeast Asians.

With the university's focus on increasing its graduation rate by 2025, access to additional resources is needed to fund additional services to support student success. Research on minority-serving institutions indicates a "positive link between the amount of institutional resources and degree completion (Espinosa et al., 2017). Public investment in minority-serving institutions such as Western University is critical to help secure its capacity to serve an increasingly diverse student body. With its AANAPISI designation, it falls to reason that Western University should bear a distinct responsibility to actually *serving* its Asian American and Pacific Islander students, especially those who are considered low-income and/or first generation college students.

To provide an overview of racial breakdown of Western University's student population, Table 1 details the current racial composition of the total undergraduate enrollment. In fall 2019, Western University had a total

undergraduate population of 21,032, 89.4% of whom were enrolled full-time. (Office of Institutional Effectiveness, n.d.-a). Hispanics comprised the largest percentage of total undergraduates (54.8%), followed by Whites (17.9%), Asians (12.8%), African Americans (2.6%), American Indians (0.4%), and Pacific Islanders (0.2%). Students who reported “Non-Resident Alien” comprised 5.2%; those who did not respond were categorized as “Unknown” comprised 3.4%, while those who reported “Two or More” ethnicities comprised 2.6% (Office of Institutional Effectiveness, n.d.-a).

Table 1

Total Undergraduate Students, Fall 2019, By Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Number	% of Population
African American	557	2.6
American Indian	85	0.4
Asian	2,682	13.0
Hispanic	11,535	54.1
Non-Resident Alien	1,088	5.2
Pacific Islander	38	0.2
Two or More	555	2.6
Unknown	725	4.1
White	3,767	17.8
TOTAL	21,032	100

Note. Does not include international students.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

Population and Sample

The population from which this study was drawn was limited to four cohorts of first-time freshmen who entered Western University between fall 2010 and fall 2013. I selected these four cohorts to allow analysis of 4- and 6-year graduation rates. First-time freshmen were selected to eliminate the potential effects of other factors that may be introduced by transfer students. From fall 2010 through fall 2013, Western University enrolled a total of 12,029 first-time

freshmen undergraduates, averaging approximately 3,000 entering freshmen per year (see Table 2).

Table 2

First-Time Freshmen, Fall 2010 through Fall 2013, By Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total	%
African American	129	132	139	109	509	4.2
American Indian	6	8	9	14	37	0.3
Asian	479	531	565	547	2,122	17.6
Hispanic	1,114	1,316	1,529	1,617	5,576	46.3
Non-Resident Alien	53	60	66	134	313	2.6
Pacific Islander	8	7	8	7	30	0.2
Two or More	98	98	98	124	418	3.5
Unknown	116	109	108	109	442	3.7
White	697	664	617	604	2,582	21.5
TOTAL	2,700	2,925	3,139	3,265	12,029	100

Note. Does not include international students.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

The sample for this study was drawn from the population of first-time freshmen from fall 2010 through fall 2013, and included the subset of students who reported their race as Asian and specified one of the distinct Asian ethnicities. Students who indicated “Asian” or “Other Asian,” but did not specify a specific ethnic group were excluded, as were students who reported Asian and one or more other races, as there were too many unknown factors to reliably include this data. Therefore, this study was based on the analysis of the total sample population of 2,122 Asian American undergraduate students who entered as first-time freshmen from fall 2010 through fall 2013, averaging 530 per year.

Because this research concerned the specific ethnicities that comprise the aggregated “Asian” student populations at Western University, Table 3 presents data for the total enrollment of Asian first-time freshmen from fall 2010 through fall 2013, disaggregated by 16 distinct ethnic groups and listed in descending

order of size ($n = 2,122$). However, given the small size of some of the ethnic subgroups in individual cohort years, this dissertation will hereafter treat all four cohorts of students as one group so that student privacy will not be compromised.

Table 3

Asian American First-Time Freshmen, Fall 2010 through Fall 2013, By Ethnicity

Rank	Ethnicity	2010	2011	2012	2013	Subtotal	% of total
1	Hmong	257	321	338	329	1,245	58.67
2	Asian Indian	42	30	57	68	197	9.28
3	Filipino	50	40	47	37	174	8.20
4	Cambodian	21	37	15	24	97	4.57
5	Laotian	11	26	18	14	69	3.25
6	Chinese	16	10	20	14	60	2.83
7	Vietnamese	12	14	18	15	59	2.78
8	Japanese	15	7	12	9	43	2.03
9	Korean	6	4	7	2	19	.90
10	Pakistani	1	2	3	3	9	.42
11	Taiwanese	0	2	2	2	6	.28
12	Thai	0	0	3	1	4	.19
13	Indonesian	1	0	2	1	4	.19
14	Sri Lankan	1	0	0	1	2	.09
15	Malaysian	0	0	1	1	2	.09
16	Indo Chinese	0	0	0	1	1	.05
	<i>Asian</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>.05</i>
	<i>Other Asian</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>6.13</i>
	TOTAL	479	531	565	547	2,122	100

Note. Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other race/s.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

In this study, I was also interested in examining whether commonly used regional subgroupings of Asian Americans make sense in the context of students' socioeconomic backgrounds and academic performance. Table 4 shows the total count of the four regional subgroups of these students according to cohort year, subtotal, and the percentage each subgroup comprises of the total Asian American population.

Table 4

Asian American First-Time Freshmen, Fall 2010 through Fall 2013, By Subgroup

Rank	Ethnicity	2010	2011	2012	2013	Subtotal	% of total
1	E Asian	37	21	39	25	122	5.8
2	Filipino	50	40	47	37	174	8.2
3	S Asian	43	32	60	71	206	9.7
4	SE Asian	301	398	389	382	1,470	69.3
	<i>Asian</i>	1	0	0	0	1	0.05
	<i>Other Asian</i>	45	38	22	25	130	6.1
	<i>Non-categorized</i>	2	2	8	7	19	0.9
	TOTAL	479	529	557	540	2,122	100%

Note. Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other race/s.

Non-categorized refers to Asian Americans not included in the regional subgroups (Taiwanese, Thai, Indonesian, Sri Lankan, etc.)

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

Research Design

To first establish the historical context that shaped how Western University currently serves its Asian American students, I researched historical documents that discussed the university's fractious past when dealing with racial issues and campus tensions. I also interviewed individuals with firsthand knowledge of events that transpired during and after this period of campus unrest. To determine these interviewees, I used snowball sampling, beginning with the former, longtime director of the Asian American Studies program at Western University who had since retired. During this interview, he recommended that I contact two other individuals who were on campus during this period of campus tension; one as a student leader, and the other as a faculty adviser to the Asian American student organization.

Next, I used institutional data analysis to establish a broad foundational understanding of the socioeconomic characteristics of Asian American students at Western University. I also used institutional data analysis to establish a detailed understanding of the academic achievement of Western University's Asian

American students disaggregated by ethnicity for the 10 largest Asian ethnic groups on campus. I also sorted the academic achievement data into four ethnic subgroups to determine if these subgroupings were accurate and useful categories in which to present student academic achievement data.

Lastly, I conducted an environmental scan to identify and document the existence of past and present resources that specifically aim to support the success of Asian American students at Western University. To accomplish this scan, I emailed a list of questions requesting detailed information about individuals' knowledge of campus supports specifically targeting Asian American student success (see Appendix A). These emails were sent to 30 individuals who not only represented a broad cross-section of campus, but also had been involved in previous efforts to support Asian American students. I selected these individuals based on their prior involvement, as I reasoned they would possess the most knowledge of the range of campus supports that have been available to students, both past and present.

Analysis of Institutional Data

Western University OIE collects institutional and student data. OIE research staff provided valuable assistance in extracting anonymous student data relevant to each of the research questions.

For this study, I analyzed the demographic characteristics, academic achievement, enrollment patterns, and graduation rates of students in the top 10 most populous Asian American ethnic subgroups from four cohorts of first-time freshmen who entered Western University between Fall 2010 to Fall 2013. Again, I selected these cohorts so that 4- and 6-year graduation rates could be included in the analysis. The top 10 Asian ethnic subgroups present on campus during this time were as follows (listed in descending order of size): Hmong, Asian Indian,

Filipino, Cambodian, Laotian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese, Korean, and Pakistani.

To answer Research Question 1, I researched the history of Western University with a particular focus on how its Asian American Studies program first came to fruition, as well as the subsequent fragmentation of its ethnic studies department. To supplement the historical literature, I conducted semi-structured interviews with three individuals who were active participants in these historical events as Asian American students and faculty during this period of unrest (see Appendix A for interview protocol). I identified the first interviewee as he was the first director of the Asian American Studies program and whose tenure at Western University began around the time of this period of campus unrest and continued through the early 2010s. The first interviewee's responses led me to pursue subsequent interviews with two other individuals whom he stated were also on campus during this period of campus tension and could provide both student perspective, as well as a second faculty perspective.

To answer Research Question 2.1, I examined the following variables to create a demographic portrait of the diverse Asian American student population, disaggregated by ethnicity: first generation student status, parent education level, and Pell grant status.

To answer Research Question 2.2, I examined the following variables to create a portrait of the academic achievement levels of the disaggregated Asian American student populations: high school GPA, college GPA, number of units earned, number of units earned toward major, 4-year graduation rate, and 6-year graduation rate.

For Research Question 3, I merged the demographic and academic achievement data for the disaggregated ethnic groups according to three regional

subgroups. These subgroups were as follows: Southeast Asian – Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian, Vietnamese; South Asian – Asian Indian, Pakistani; East Asian – Chinese, Japanese, Korean. The Filipino population was left as its own subgroup because the unique history and characteristics of this population distinguish them from other commonly-used Asian subgroups. The purpose of exploring regionally aggregated subgroup data is to understand whether it is useful for Western University to use such subgroup designations. This was determined by exploring whether there were commonalities of demographic characteristics present within each regional subgroup, as well as whether there were marked differences across regional subgroups.

To address Research Question 4.1, I compared students' specific college enrollment to better understand in which fields Asian American students tend to be concentrated. Based on my own personal and professional background both working in the classroom and in the broader community, I speculated that students who want to learn about Asian American history and ethnic studies are more likely to become more engaged on campus and, consequently, more likely to be academically successful. Therefore, I took a close look at students who participated in the university's Asian American Studies (ASAM) program either by declaring an ASAM minor (Western University does not offer an ASAM major) or by enrolling in ASAM courses. Since a very limited number of ASAM courses were offered during the 2010-2014 period, I broadened the dataset for this variable to include enrollments over the 10-year period of 2010-2019. To better understand the profile of students most likely to participate in the ASAM program, I examined ASAM-enrolled students by race/ethnicity, by Asian ethnicity, and by Asian ethnic subgroup. I also examined the number of declared ASAM minors as

well as the overall enrollment in ASAM courses over the past decade (2010-2019) to investigate whether any trends exist in the popularity of this minor.

To answer Research Question 4.2, I documented the various ways in which Western University serves its Asian American students. Because these efforts have not been systematically tracked by any one office or individual, I decided it was important to catalog these efforts, both past and present, in order to assess how Western University has supported the success of its Asian American students. To accomplish this, I first identified campus networks that would have members who had knowledge of such efforts. Using my professional involvement as an adjunct faculty member and board member of the Asian Faculty and Staff Association (AFSA) since 2014, I compiled a list of 30 individuals who represented a broad cross-section of campus offices, departments, and programs and who had been previously involved in efforts to support Asian American student success. I selected these individuals based on their prior involvement, as I reasoned they would possess the most knowledge of the range of campus supports that have been available to students, both past and present.

Because of the limitations with a closed campus due to the COVID-19 pandemic from March through May 2020, I sent email requests for information to these 30 individuals (see Appendix B). From these 30 emails, I received 10 email responses. I then conducted semi-structured phone interviews with these 10 individuals, during each of which I took hand-written notes. The interview questions were designed to collect information about each program's level of funding, whether these resources were institutionalized vs. faculty, staff, or student-driven, and how student participation data was collected and maintained. This information was gathered to better understand not only how these efforts were used by students, but also how they were supported by the university. This

information was then compiled to create an environmental scan of campus-based resources that specifically aim to support Asian American students' academic success.

This strategy evolved from the overall lack of accessible information and data about programs and/or resources that specifically target Asian American students on campus. In this study, I had originally intended to survey and disaggregate Asian student participation rates among institutional programs and resources that support the academic success of Asian American and other minority/URM students. However, because Western University migrated its student affairs data collection functions to a new vendor in Fall 2018 and was still experiencing complications related to data consistency, this program-specific data was unavailable at the time of this study. Prior to this recent system migration, tracking and monitoring program data had been the responsibility of the office and/or staff administering each program. One of the reasons for migrating to this central data collection system was to develop ongoing and consistent reporting structures. In this new system, program data was not consistent nor reliable for the research variables of interest to this study. OIE is continuing to work with both program staff and the vendor to improve the consistency and reliability of student usage data.

Data Tables

Once I collected and analyzed the institutional data, I developed data tables for each research variable, denoting corresponding data for each of the 10 named Asian American ethnic subgroups relative to that variable. These tables are intended to provide a valuable data baseline to help administrators, faculty, staff, and students alike to better understand the inherent complexities of this student

population, including where some groups are similar and where they are dissimilar.

Procedures

I requested and received IRB approval to conduct the institutional data analysis in December 2019. I forwarded the IRB approval form to OIE in January 2020 and followed up with phone calls to OIE staff to request assistance in gathering the necessary institutional data. Throughout February and March 2020, I worked in close partnership with OIE staff to collect and compile the necessary datasets to create the student demographic information briefs. In March and April 2020, I collected information from emails and interviews.

To create the environmental scan, I created a list of faculty, staff, and administrators who had knowledge of programmatic efforts to support Asian American student success. This was made possible because of my active involvement with the Asian Faculty and Staff Association as a long-time board member, my nine-year history as a lecturer in Asian American Studies, as well as my own personal networks with key individuals on campus. I sent email inquiries to each person on this list; once I received a reply, I followed up with a personal phone call to gather more detailed information. This data collection method relied on the strength of these personal contacts to provide the requested data on the variables of interest. If accurate records were not available, I asked the contact person to simply provide their best recollection and/or estimates of funding and student participation levels. Wherever possible, I attempted to confirm the veracity of the data and information I collected by comparing the contacts' recollections and estimates against those of other faculty and staff who had knowledge of the program.

Researcher Positionality

As someone who returned to academia rather late in life after having served more than 25 years in nonprofit spaces primarily in the AAPI community and employed as a part-time adjunct faculty at Western University for the past 9 years, I have a well-grounded understanding of the transformational potential of research, particularly action research. With a master's degree in public policy and a bachelor's degree in psychology, I have a strong interest in understanding why humans behave the ways in which they do, and strategizing how organizations and systems can use this knowledge to address inequities to achieve social justice.

As a third-/fourth-generation Chinese/Japanese American who was raised in a predominantly White suburb of Los Angeles, but who has also lived in San Diego, Durham, Boston, the District of Columbia, and now, Fresno, I have long felt as if I occupy a “middleman” status in this nation's racial landscape. As an Asian American, I am neither part of the dominant White majority nor am I part of the Black/Brown minority. My physical appearance makes me appear to be a “foreigner” to mainstream America, yet my ancestors' deep roots in American history renders my experience foreign to the many in the immigrant-majority Asian American community.

In the AAPI communities to which I was exposed in my youth, my mixed East Asian heritage meant that I often had to straddle ethnic subcultures from childhood to adulthood. On Saturday mornings I was Chinese American at my Chinese language school, but Saturday evenings, I became Japanese American at our Japanese American community center. While I never felt as if I completely belonged in either world, at the same time, I usually felt more comfortable at these places than I did at the majority White public schools I attended.

This “pan-Asian American” identity, however, has had its benefits. As a research associate working for a national AAPI public policy institute, I was able to maintain a researcher’s objectivity to see policy issues from various ethnic communities’ perspectives. This experience also provided invaluable insights into Asian American and Pacific Islander racial and ethnic community dynamics, intra-community tensions, and the tremendous diversity within and across ethnic and regional communities. Being able to easily adapt and establish a rapport with these diverse communities was also a valuable skill that enabled me to effectively coordinate large-scale research projects with a wide range of AAPI individuals and organizations across the country.

In my current position as an adjunct faculty teaching Asian American Studies at Western University, as well as in my recent involvement leading a local, pan-Asian women’s organization, I often feel like I act as a bridge between longer-established Valley communities like Japanese- and Chinese Americans and more recently established Southeast Asian American communities. Further, when speaking in public, I recognize that because of my physical appearance and personal experience, I have a responsibility to act as a bridge between the general public and the marginalized AAPI community.

This same sense of personal responsibility led to my greater involvement in campus affairs in seeking equity on behalf of AAPIs. I have been involved as a board member of the Asian Faculty and Staff Association (AFSA) since 2013. In partnership with two other AFSA board members, I also led a groundbreaking research survey in 2014 to better understand the academic challenges of Southeast Asian American students at Western University. As an outgrowth of this research, our faculty-led research team received a CSU Chancellor’s Office grant to design and implement an Action Research Project, titled “Supporting Southeast Asian

Student Success (SSASS),” to test some of our strategies and recommendations in the 2014-2015 academic year.

While at Western University, I have also mentored several AAPI undergraduate and graduate students. One tangible outcome of a mentor relationship was the 2014 rebirth of Western University’s Asian American and Pacific Islander Commencement Celebration after having been defunct for the previous 13 years. Led by the advocacy efforts of myself and two graduate students, one of whom I was mentoring, a campus-wide committee coalesced to plan and implement the 2015 AAPI Commencement Celebration. As the de facto faculty coordinator of this planning committee, I facilitated weekly planning committee meetings throughout the spring 2015 semester. On May 9, 2015, we successfully re-launched the AAPI commencement celebration with the participation of President Castro, then-Provost Zelezny, Vice President Lamas, and several deans and other top administrators. Each year since then, the AAPI commencement celebration continues to grow in size and stature to the point where it is now a regular fixture in the Western University commencement celebrations.

For this study, my “pan-Asian American” identity and extensive work experience in the AAPI community was a unique and valuable strength that I bring to this project. I believe my pan-Asian American identity affords me the opportunity to transcend ethnic community politics and, instead, critically view issues from various perspectives. My many years of experience working and teaching about past and present issues impacting AAPIs has given me a solid base of knowledge and insights into how policies and institutions have impacted our communities. Most importantly, my commitment to ensuring that all AAPIs are treated equitably in society should make clear that my intentions with this study

are to add to the existing research on AAPIs in higher education in the hopes of enacting transformational institutional change.

Summary

This chapter presented the methodology of the research study. A review of institutional data will be utilized to establish a detailed, yet comprehensive, foundational understanding of the Asian American student population at Western University. This institutional data analysis will yield individual information briefs that provide a picture of the demographic characteristics of disaggregated Asian ethnic groups, as well as measures of their academic achievement. Analyses of demographic characteristics and academic achievement by aggregated regional subgroups (i.e. Southeast Asian, South Asian, East Asian) provide insights as to whether it is accurate and/or useful to continue to use these regional subgroup categories when discussing Western University's Asian American student population.

The results of an environmental scan will also be presented to illustrate existing programmatic offerings that specifically aim to support the academic success of Western University's Asian American students, as well as to understand how student participation data is being collected. The purpose of this scan is to: better understand the history and range of various campus-based efforts to support Asian American students, document the existence of these efforts to demonstrate what has been initiated to date, and examine the university's commitment to sustaining these programs – and, by extension, supporting the success of its Asian American students at an institutional level.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS/OUTCOMES

The findings from this study underscore the importance of not only disaggregating data for Asian American students to uncover disparities between subgroups, but also understanding the historical context of an educational institution grappling with the latent effects of unaddressed racial tensions.

Historical Context of Ethnic Studies/Asian American Studies at Western University

Western University is in many ways a typical example of a public teaching university that serves a diverse student population, many of whom are first-generation college students from low- to middle-income backgrounds. Although Western University is the site of this case study, the findings are meant to be representative of other public, 4-year institutions that also serve primarily low- to middle-income, first-generation students from diverse communities, including significant numbers of students from diverse AAPI communities. The history of Western University with respect to the emergence – and subsequent demise – of its ethnic studies program is instructive, particularly when evaluating the how the institutional culture has evolved and the comparative status of current versus previous AAPI student populations.

Located in the San Joaquin Valley, a region of California dominated by agriculture and agri-business interests, Western University was first established in 1911 as a teaching school. Western University began its transition into a full-fledged center of learning after World War II, when it started offering diverse courses in a full range of subjects. This timing and pattern of development was typical of other universities in the California university system (later known as the CSU), as well as throughout the nation, as chronicled by Kenneth Seib, an English

professor who arrived at Western University in 1968 in his book, *The Slow Death of Fresno State: A California Campus under Reagan and Brown* (Seib, 1979).

Understanding the campus's history is essential to fully understand and appreciate how the campus systems and its culture has developed and become institutionalized over time.

1960s Campus Unrest

According to Seib (1979), as the campus rapidly grew throughout the 1960s, an influx of new, young, and politically progressive scholars from outside the area arrived, creating a stir with the older members of the college. With diametrically opposed educational philosophies to the previous "Normal School" mentality and agri-business focus of the local communities, these new scholars were labeled "liberals" by the colleagues that opposed them and posed challenges to the "old guard" faculty and administration (Seib, 1979).

Western University students also began to discover they could use their collective voice to protest what they saw as the increased authoritarianism of the university's leadership to quell progressive faculty and student voices. Among the educational innovations of the time was an Ethnic Studies Program that was, according to Seib (1979), "made possible because of the leadership and dedication of Black and Chicano faculty and students who made enormous sacrifices to bring them into being" (p. 24). Of this period, Seib (1979) observed, "One of the interesting ironies of the events at [Western University] was that a student body that had little or no history of activism... became 'radicalized' precisely by administrative policies designed to quell radicalism" (p. 89). The burgeoning student activism of this era represented a significant turning point in the campus' development; for the first time in Western University's history, the younger

generation of students seeking social change were actively challenging the older generation of faculty and administration struggling to maintain the status quo.

As further evidence of the rampant campus tensions of this era, Western University was a subject of study of faculty-administrative consultation in campus governance (Deegan, 1970). In 1968, 3 years after adopting the report of the Committee on Academic Reorganization of the College, the chairman of Western University's Executive Committee of the Faculty Council approached the director of the Center for Research and Development in Higher Education, University of California, Berkeley, Dr. T. R. McConnell, to include Western University in an ongoing study of faculty government at three large, complex, public universities around the nation (Deegan, 1970). The purpose of the Western University investigation was "to identify the major problems which the college itself should resolve through established, or perhaps more effectively organized, processes of faculty-administrative consultation" (Deegan, 1970, p. 4). Among its detailed recommendations, the survey team's report concluded,

No matter how well they are drawn, the structures and forms of governance will not alone suffice to produce an academic community which can constructively resolve its differences over ends and means. The spirit with which the participants use the instruments of governance may be even more important than their structural framework. It is for this reason that the divisiveness and distrust which it found disturbed the survey team. The faculty is polarized and politicized, and there is more than a suggestion of factional struggles for power. In the team's judgment, the most pressing problem which the college faces is that of turning a society rent by factionalism into an academic political community democratically governed by the rule of reason. (Deegan, 1970, p. 95)

It is not clear to what extent Western University's leadership at the time adopted or embraced the recommendations offered by this report.

The Gutting of Ethnic Studies

The spring of 1970 was the time when “student unrest especially escalated due to what was seen by minorities as increased moves by the administration against the Ethnic Studies Program” (Pearl, 2014, para. 51). Beginning in February 1970, the administration abruptly terminated the dean of the School of Arts and Science, who was the chief supporter of Ethnic Studies Program. A long series of dismissals, harassments, and resignations of minority faculty and administrators followed, including the assistants to the Financial Aid Director, assistant to the Dean of Students (both Mexican-Americans), the majority of the remaining Ethnic Studies faculty, and the firing and attempted firing of two Black professors in other departments, among others (Seib, 1979).

In May of 1970, the administration issued a news release stating it would not rehire eight faculty members in the Ethnic Studies Program, effectively gutting the program (Pearl, 2014). The eight faculty whose contracts were terminated constituted 60% of the Black and Brown faculty on campus at the time (Seib, 1979). In a press conference immediately following the news release, three Ethnic Studies faculty members declared the black studies program “effectively destroyed” by this drastic, thinly veiled political maneuver by the new administration (Pearl, 2014, para. 60).

Following this turbulent time, the La Raza Studies Program (now known as the Department of Chicano and Latin American Studies) separated from the Ethnic Studies Program and was able to rally the support of students and community members who demanded a more inclusive and socially conscious curriculum (Seib, 1979). But whatever was left of the Ethnic Studies Program was gutted by Fall 1970. The lone director resigned in September 1970, citing his conflict with

the new president who refused to hire any Ethnic Studies faculty (Seib, 1979, p. 121).

Unfortunately, much of this history is unknown to today's students and faculty, the majority of whom likely have little or no knowledge that Ethnic Studies ever existed as a program at Western University, much less the politically-driven decisions that led to its destruction. A professor emeritus who taught at Western University from 1963-1989, is quoted in a *Daily Collegian* article commenting on the movement against liberal faculty and students by the conservative administration as not "considered academia as we know it or as we want it to be" (Pearl, 2014, para. 12). As a believer in the free exchange of ideas on universities, he believes the period must be remembered: "There is history here on this campus, and students and faculty ought to know what happened. And why is that? Because it could happen again" (Pearl, 2014, para. 67).

Ethnic Studies Today

Indeed, the 1970 breakup of Ethnic Studies Program has had long-lasting and far-reaching effects at Western University. Fifty years later, there is still no Ethnic Studies Program that promotes the interdisciplinary study of race and ethnicity. Instead, the former Ethnic Studies Program transitioned into the current Africana Studies Program and the remaining programs are siloed or subsumed under other departments scattered across campus: La Raza Studies is now the Department of Chicano and Latin American Studies; the Asian American Studies Program and American Indian Studies Minor were both housed in the Department of Anthropology until American Indian Studies moved in 2015 to the stand-alone Women's Studies Program. The Asian American Studies Program remains housed under in the Department of Anthropology.

With the recent campaign to require ethnic studies curricula in high schools gaining momentum in California and around the nation (Goldstein, 2019), Western University is ill-prepared to capitalize on a likely increase in students interested in pursuing advanced studies in an interdisciplinary Ethnic Studies Program. With each ethnic program siloed in different departments, faculty in those programs have few opportunities to cross-collaborate to advance a more unified, progressive Ethnic Studies agenda. One of the strengths Ethnic Studies Programs offer is the opportunity for students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum, while also being exposed to the experiences of others. Examining how Ethnic Studies at Western University came to be so fractured and its faculty so disconnected to one another is instructive when considering how and to what degree students of color engage – or do not engage – on campus.

The Establishment of Asian American Studies

Although it is unknown at this time whether any Asian American students were part of the student protests prior to the gutting of the Ethnic Studies Program, they were very closely involved in the push in the early 1970s to establish Asian American Studies at Western University. Inspired by the civil rights movement and the ongoing waves of student activism around the country, several Asian American students, aided by the leadership of a key Asian American adjunct faculty member, were instrumental in broadening the scope of Western University's Ethnic Studies Program to include Asian American Studies for the first time. Interviews with one of these students, the Asian American adjunct faculty member, and the first full-time, tenure-track faculty hired to direct the Asian American Studies Program provided this critical historical information.

Student perspective. D.T. (full name withheld for anonymity) was an undergraduate student at Western University from 1971-1975. A San Francisco

native, D.T. drew inspiration from the student activism in the Bay Area, particularly the Asian American student activists who had coined the term “Asian American” and waged strikes to establish ethnic studies and increase the number of students and faculty of color at San Francisco State and UC Berkeley (D.T., personal communication, August 5, 2019).

Eager to bring the Asian American movement to Fresno, in 1974 D.T. worked with other student leaders to create the university’s first pan-Asian American ethnic student organization at Western University. Guided by S.T. (full name withheld for anonymity), the lone adjunct faculty in Asian American Studies and the de facto advisor to the Asian American students, the students decided to name this organization “Amerasia Club” to reflect the fact that, “We identified as both Americans and Asians, but with the emphasis on ‘American’” (D.T., personal communication, August 5, 2019).

D.T. and her fellow student activists also pressured the administration to hire a full-time, tenure-track faculty position to coordinate the university’s Asian American Studies program. S.T., under facing pressure from a dean who was not supportive of Asian American Studies, was soon forced out of the university when the dean refused to renew his contract (S.T., personal communication, August 19, 2019). In response to his departure, D.T. and a contingent of Asian American students staged a sit-in at the dean’s office in the spring of 1974 to demand the college hire a tenure-track position in Asian American Studies to solidify the existence of the program at the university. Although the dean was dismissive of the students, he left the university shortly afterward and the university announced they would be hiring a tenure-track faculty position in Asian American Studies in the fall of 1974.

Faculty perspective. F.N. (full name withheld for anonymity) was a young scholar about to complete his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago when he received an invitation from Western University for a campus visit in the spring of 1975 (F.N., personal communication, August 9, 2019). He was unaware of the history and fragile status of the Ethnic Studies Program, but met with Asian American students, Asian American faculty from other departments, and a group of local Asian American community leaders during his visit. He also learned that the dean wanted to “professionalize” Ethnic Studies by bringing in an academic with reputable academic credentials as the program coordinator (F.N., personal communication, August 9, 2019).

Following his visit, F.N. received a job offer for a tenure-track position in Ethnic Studies beginning in Fall 1975 that included two programmatic areas of responsibility: coordinator of the Asian American Studies Program and coordinator (working with the existing director) of the Ethnic Studies Program, which housed Black Studies, Native American Studies, and Asian American Studies (F.N., personal communication, August 9, 2019). By this time, La Raza Studies had already separated from Ethnic Studies and was already established as a separate program.

Upon his arrival, he soon learned about the contentious relationship between Ethnic Studies and the university’s leadership and faced hostility from many faculty, staff, and community members who did not accept the idea of Ethnic Studies and did not see its value (F.N., personal communication, August 9, 2019). After his first 3 years on campus, F.N. decided he did not want to renew his position as coordinator of the Ethnic Studies Program, as he was growing weary of the constant battle to defend the legitimacy the program. In Fall 1978, he accepted the invitation of the chair of Anthropology to join this department, where they

would also welcome the addition of Asian American Studies Program. This meant that the Ethnic Studies Program would now consist only of Black/Africana Studies and Native American Studies and had only the director remaining as its only faculty (F.N., personal communication, August 9, 2019).

From the time when F.N. was hired in 1975 until his retirement in 2017, he alone was responsible for the Asian American Studies Program (F.N., personal communication, August 9, 2019). During this 40-year span, several adjunct faculty were hired on contract bases, but no other tenured faculty joined the program until his retirement (F.N., personal communication, August 9, 2019). In Fall 2016, the Anthropology department opened a search for a tenure-track position to replace him in Fall 2016, but only after having to garner community support (F.N., personal communication, August 9, 2019). In echoes of the past, the then-Dean of the College of Social Sciences was opposed to re-hiring F.N.'s position, as she was not convinced of the need for the Asian American Studies Program to continue (F.N., personal communication, August 9, 2019). To justify the position, the lone part-time Asian American Studies adjunct faculty reached out to local Asian American community leaders for support. In doing so, the Asian American communities learned not only of F.N.'s impending departure, but also the administration's apathy toward the Asian American Studies Program.

After several meetings with community leaders, several of whom were Western University alumni and had studied under F.N., the group coalesced into a partnership with the Southeast Asian Community Task Force (X.M., personal communication, April 16, 2020). The Task Force met with the newly-arrived university president to convey their strong support of the continuing need for Asian American Studies at Western University and of the Department of Anthropology's plans to conduct a national search for a tenure-track position with

primary responsibility in Asian American Studies (X.M., personal communication, April 16, 2020). In Spring 2017, the Anthropology department hired two tenure-track faculty to co-oversee the Asian American Studies Program, the first such hires since the mid-1980s.

This study included the above history of ethnic studies, Asian American Studies, and the voices of Asian American faculty and students because this complex history has played a critical role in producing the current campus environment at Western University. While overt racial tensions or discrimination are not daily campus realities, it would be naïve to believe the aforementioned socio-political and socio-historical realities had no effects on the campus' evolution. Instead, this study posits that the campus' leadership history with respect to quashing student activism and dissenting faculty voices has engendered an atmosphere of reluctance to acknowledge and address racialized undercurrents that may be a factor in continued inequities.

Socioeconomic Demographic Profiles

To better understand the characteristics of Western University's current Asian American students, I gathered data to create detailed demographic profiles of this diverse student population. Because inequities in socioeconomic backgrounds are particularly apparent when examining disaggregated data that would otherwise be hidden in an aggregated "Asian" dataset, I examined data for each of the 10 largest Asian American ethnic groups enrolled at Western University. In doing so, I was able to not only identify disparities that existed among the Asian American student population, but also track when these disparities consistently appeared across different variables.

I then assigned the 10 Asian individual ethnic groups into four subgroups: East Asian, Filipino, South Asian, and Southeast Asian. In doing so, I confirmed

that the differences between these four subgroups were generally consistent with what we might expect given what we already know about the overall Asian American population. These consistencies indicated that using these regional subgrouping definitions may be an appropriate way for institutions to address the needs of specific populations of students based on shared traits or background characteristics.

To understand key socioeconomic differences between the top 10 Asian American ethnic groups, I selected four variables to compare across each group: first generation student status, defined as a student whose parents both have less than a bachelor's degree; Pell grant status, defined as students who are eligible for the federal Pell Grant program; mother's education level, defined as the student's mother's education level as indicated at the time of application; and father's education level, defined as the student's father's education level as indicated at the time of application. Each of these variables is explained in this section, accompanied by a table listing the frequency of that variable exhibited among the total sample population across each of the top 10 Asian ethnicities enrolled as first-time freshmen at Western University in the fall 2010 through fall 2013 cohorts.

First generation status is one of the key indicators of traditionally underserved students. Navigating the college environment is difficult for all students, but particularly so for students lacking the support of a loved one who is familiar with the requirements needed to succeed. Among the population studied, over 90% of Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong students were first generation college students, followed by Vietnamese students at 81% (see Table 5). By comparison, two-thirds of Asian Indian students (68%) and half of Chinese students (51%) were first generation. In contrast, more than two-thirds of Japanese

(72%), Filipino (69%), and Korean (67%) students were considered “continuing,” meaning one or both parents had attended either a 2-year or 4-year college.

Table 5

First Generation Status, Asian American FTF, F2010-F2013, by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Continuing	%	First Gen	%	Total
Asian Indian	64	32.5	131	67.5	194
Cambodian	8	8.5	86	91.5	94
Chinese	27	49.1	28	50.9	55
Filipino	116	69.0	52	31.0	168
Hmong	117	9.7	1,088	90.3	1,205
Japanese	31	72.1	12	27.9	43
Korean	12	66.7	6	33.3	18
Laotian	6	9.0	61	91.0	67
Pakistani	5	55.6	4	44.4	9
Vietnamese	11	18.6	48	81.4	59
TOTAL	396	21	1,516	79	1,912
TOTAL Univ	3,355	29	8,384	71	11,739

Note. Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other races.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

Pakistani students reported a 44% rate of being first generation college students. It should be noted here and in other findings that only nine Pakistani students were reported in this sample, so caution should be exercised before making definitive statements about this population based on such a small sample.

When sorted into regional subgroups, it becomes quite clear which subgroups are predominantly first generation college students (see Table 6). In this sample, 90% of Southeast Asians are first generation, while only 31% of Filipinos and 40% of East Asians are in this category; the majority of both groups are considered “continuing generation.” Finally, 67% of South Asians were also first generation students, a ratio not nearly as extreme as the Southeast Asian subgroup, but still a significant majority.

Table 6

First Generation Status, Asian American FTF, F2010-F2013, by Subgroup

Subgroup	Continuing	%	First Gen	%	Total
East Asian	70	60.3	46	39.7	116
Filipino	116	69.0	52	31.0	168
South Asian	68	33.5	135	66.5	203
Southeast Asian	141	10.0	1,282	90.0	1,425
TOTAL AA	396	21	1,516	79	1,912
TOTAL Univ	3,355	29	8,384	71	11,739

Note Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other races.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

By comparison, the first generation status rate for the overall university population for the same cohort of 2010-2013 first-time freshmen was 71% and the continuing generation rate was 29%. The findings show that Filipinos and East Asians were much more likely to be “continuing” than their university peers (69% and 60%, respectively), while Southeast Asians were significantly more likely to be first generation students (90%) when compared to their university peers.

Pell grant status is a proxy indicator of family income level, since eligibility for federal Pell grants is determined by total household income; Pell-eligible students are typically from low-income households. Table 7 offers a detailed look at the Pell grant eligibility status among the 10 largest Asian ethnic groups at Western University. Of these groups, 97% of Cambodians, 96% of Hmong, and 91% of Laotians are Pell grant eligible; at 83%, Vietnamese were the only Southeast Asian group to have Pell eligibility rates under the 90% mark. A two-thirds majority of both Asian Indian and Pakistani students were also Pell eligible. In contrast, more than 76% of Japanese and 64% of Filipinos were not Pell grant eligible. Also, slightly more than half of Korean (53%) and Chinese (52%) were in the Pell ineligible category.

Table 7

Pell Grant Status, Asian American FTF, F2010-F2013, by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Not eligible	%	Pell eligible	%	Total
Asian Indian	65	33.0	132	67.0	197
Cambodian	3	3.1	94	96.9	97
Chinese	31	51.7	29	48.3	60
Filipino	112	64.4	62	35.6	174
Hmong	45	3.6	1,200	96.4	1,245
Japanese	33	76.7	10	23.3	43
Korean	10	52.6	9	47.4	19
Laotian	6	8.7	63	91.3	69
Pakistani	3	33.3	6	66.7	9
Vietnamese	10	16.9	49	83.1	59
TOTAL AA	318	16	1,654	84	1,972
TOTAL Univ	4,835	40	7,194	60	12,029

Note. Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other races.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

When the data on Pell grant status were sorted by Asian subgroup, the disparities between regional groupings are again evident (see Table 8) and are consistent with the disparities found among first generation status. While the vast majority (95%) of Southeast Asians are Pell grant eligible, nearly two-thirds of both East Asians (61%) and Filipinos (64%) are not. Again, South Asians lie somewhere between these two opposites, but are skewed toward the side of Southeast Asians, with two-thirds (67%) qualifying as Pell eligible.

By comparison, the Pell grant eligibility rate for the overall university population for the same cohort of 2010-2013 first-time freshmen was 60% and the ineligibility rate was 40%. On the whole, East Asians and Filipinos were much *less likely* to Pell-eligible (39% and 36%, respectively) while Southeast Asians were significantly *more likely* to be Pell grant eligible (96%) than their university peers.

Table 8

Pell Grant Status, Asian American FTF, F2010-F2013, by Subgroup

Subgroup	Not eligible	%	Pell eligible	%	Total
E Asian	76	60.7	48	39.3	122
Filipino	112	64.4	62	35.6	174
S Asian	68	33.0	138	67.0	206
SE Asian	64	4.4	1,406	95.6	1,470
TOTAL AA	318	16	1,654	84	1,972
TOTAL Univ	4,835	40	7,194	60	12,029

Note. Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other races.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

The data on the students' parental education level were broken out for each parent's education level, so the findings on this variable are also presented in accordance with the available data (see Table 9). The results for the mother's education level demonstrate that the four Southeast Asian student groups had the highest percentage of mothers possessing either "no school" or "some high school." Three of the four Southeast Asian groups showed rates of more than 50% when these two categories were combined. Seventy-one percent of Hmong students reported having mothers with little or no formal education, followed by Cambodian students (66%), and Vietnamese students (54%). Only Laotian students indicated that slightly less than half (45%) of their mothers had either no school or some high school. South Asian mothers showed the next highest frequencies of reporting either "no school" or "some high school." Asian Indian mothers had a 34% rate with little or no formal education, followed closely by Pakistani mothers with a combined rate of 33% and Chinese mothers with a rate of 32%.

Japanese, Korean, and Filipino mothers, on the other hand, were grouped at the opposite end of the educational spectrum. Both Japanese and Korean mothers showed 0% rates of having either no school or only some

Table 9

Mother's Education, Asian American FTF, F2010-F2013, by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	No school %	Some HS %	HS grad %	Some college %	2-yr degree %	4-yr degree %	Postgrad degree %	No reply %
Asian Indian	14	20	23	12	5	20	4	3
Cambodian	50	16	10	12	4	2	2	4
Chinese	15	17	10	10	2	27	12	8
Filipino	1	1	13	17	9	49	8	4
Hmong	61	10	12	6	3	4	0.4	4
Japanese	0	0	9	14	16	37	23	0
Korean	0	0	21	21	21	32	0	5
Laotian	36	9	10	20	15	3	1	6
Pakistani	33	0	0	22	11	11	22	0
Vietnamese	37	17	14	12	7	12	2	0
TOTAL	45.5	10.1	12.7	9.0	5.0	11.4	2.4	3.9

Note. Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other races.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

high school education while Filipino mothers had only a 2% rate for these same categories. At the high end of the education spectrum, Japanese mothers had the highest frequency with either a 4-year college or postgraduate degree (60%), followed by Filipinos (57%). Interestingly, Chinese mothers showed a rate of 39% possessing either a 4-year or postgraduate degree, nearly equivalent to the rate of mothers having either no school or some high school. Southeast Asian mothers exhibited the lowest rates of high educational attainment by far. Only 4% of Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian mothers had either a 4-year or postgraduate degree. With a rate of 14%, Vietnamese mothers had slightly higher rates of possessing higher education levels.

One-third (33%) of Pakistani mothers had either a 4-year or postgraduate degree, a rate equal to those with little or no formal education (33%). Again, however, because the sample contained only nine Pakistani

students, we should exercise caution about drawing definitive conclusions about this population based on such a small sample.

Looking at the data sorted by subgroup (see Table 10) shows that these groupings accurately reflect the data for the individual ethnicities contained within them. For example, the Southeast Asian subgroup clearly demonstrates the largest proportion of students (68%) who reported their mothers' as having either "no school" or "some high school" while having the lowest proportion of students (5%) with mothers having one of the two highest levels of educational attainment, "4-year degree" or "postgraduate degree." Conversely, Filipinos (2%) and East Asians (15%) reported the lowest rates of mothers having either "no school" or "some high school" and the highest rates of mothers having either 4-year or postgraduate degrees (57% and 45%, respectively). Again, South Asian mothers were somewhere in the middle, but skewed toward the lower end of the educational spectrum as Southeast Asians. South Asian students reported their mothers' as having either "no school" or "some high school" at a rate of 34%, while 23% of their mothers' had 4-year or postgraduate degrees.

Table 10

Mother's Education, Asian American FTF, F2010-F2013, by Subgroup

Ethnicity	No school %	Some HS %	HS grad %	Some college %	2-yr degree %	4-yr degree %	Postgrad degree %	No reply %
E Asian	7	8	12	13	10	31	14	5
Filipino	1	1	13	17	9	49	8	4
S Asian	15	19	22	12	5	20	3	2
SE Asian	58	10	12	7	4	4	1	4
TOTAL	45	10	13	9	5	11	2	4

Note. Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other races.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

The results for students' father's education level were fairly consistent with those for their mother's education level, although the fathers' education levels were slightly higher across the board (see Table 11). Again, the data demonstrate that the four Southeast Asian student groups reported the highest rates of fathers possessing either no school or some high school.

Table 11

Father's Education, Asian American FTF, F2010-F2013, by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	No school %	Some HS %	HS grad %	Some college %	2-yr degree %	4-yr degree %	Postgrad degree %	No reply %
Asian Indian	16	20	23	12	4	17	5	3
Cambodian	33	10	8	14	3	5	1	13
Chinese	7	17	15	17	3	17	13	12
Filipino	2	5	16	18	9	37	8	6
Hmong	49	9	14	10	6	6	1	5
Japanese	0	0	16	14	5	37	26	2
Korean	0	5	11	21	0	37	21	5
Laotian	32	9	7	22	6	4	0	20
Pakistani	11	0	11	22	0	11	44	0
Vietnamese	29	17	19	12	3	9	3	9
TOTAL	36.9	10.2	15.0	12.3	5.3	10.9	3.3	6.0

Note. Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other races.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

However, unlike in the previous section, where three of four Southeast Asian student groups reported a majority of their mothers had little or no formal education, only the Hmong students indicated the same for their fathers. Hmong students reported having fathers with “no school” or “some high school” at a rate of 58%, the highest rate of all Asian ethnic groups. Forty-six percent of Vietnamese, 43% of Cambodian, and 41% of Laotian students indicated their fathers were in these same categories of “no school” or “some high school.”

South Asian students showed the next highest frequencies of fathers with “no school” or “some high school.” Asian Indian students indicated a 36% rate of fathers with little or no formal education, followed by Pakistani students with a rate of 11% of fathers who had no schooling at all (0% of Pakistani fathers had only some high school).

Japanese students’ were the only ethnic group to report 0% of their fathers having little or no formal education, while Korean students reported only a 5% of fathers with “some high school” but 0% in the “no school” category. Filipino students’ were also quite low on this end of the educational spectrum with only 7% reporting their fathers with “no school” or “some high school.”

On the other end of the spectrum, Japanese and Korean students reported having the most highly educated fathers, with 63% of Japanese fathers and 58% of Korean fathers possessing either a 4-year or postgraduate degree. Forty-five percent of Filipino fathers and 30% of Chinese fathers were also in this highly educated category.

When examining students’ fathers in the highly educated category, Southeast Asian students’ fathers exhibited the lowest rates of educational attainment, by far. Only 4% of Laotian, 6% of Cambodian, and 7% of Hmong fathers had either a 4-year or postgraduate degree. With a rate of 12%, Vietnamese fathers had slightly higher rates with higher education levels.

Interestingly, Pakistani students’ fathers also had very high levels of educational attainment, with 55% possessing either 4-year or postgraduate degrees, and the majority (44%) in the postgraduate category. However, as mentioned earlier, these data may not be representative of the larger

Pakistani population given the small size of the Pakistani student sample in this study.

Looking at the data sorted by subgroup (see Table 12) shows that the data for the regional groupings are again consistent with data for individual ethnicities. For example, the Southeast Asian subgroup clearly demonstrated the largest proportion of fathers (57%) who had either “no school” or “some high school” and the lowest proportion of fathers (7%) with high educational attainment. This is consistent with the findings reported above for each of the Southeast Asian ethnic groups.

Table 12

Father's Education, Asian American FTF, F2010-F2013, by Subgroup

Ethnicity	No school %	Some HS %	HS grad %	Some college %	2-yr degree %	4-yr degree %	Postgrad degree %	No reply %
E Asian	3	9	15	16	3	27	19	7
Filipino	2	5	16	18	9	37	8	6
S Asian	16	19	23	13	4	17	7	2
SE Asian	47	10	14	11	5	6	1	7
TOTAL	37	10	15	12	5	11	3	6

Note. Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other races.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

Conversely, Filipinos and East Asians reported the lowest rates of fathers having either “no school” or “some high school” (7% and 12%, respectively). The fathers in these subgroups also had the highest rates of high educational attainment, with 46% of East Asian and 45% of Filipino fathers having 4-year or postgraduate degrees.

Again, South Asians were somewhere in the middle, but skewed toward the same end of the spectrum as Southeast Asians. Thirty-five

percent of South Asian fathers had “no school” or “some high school,” while 24% had 4-year or postgraduate degrees.

Academic Achievement Profiles

To understand differences in measures of academic achievement across the top 10 Asian American ethnic groups, I selected five variables for comparison: high school grade point average (GPA), college GPA (which is defined as the student’s cumulative GPA as of the most recent semester they were enrolled), number of units earned, 4-year graduation rates, and 6-year graduation rates. Each of these variables is explained in this section, accompanied by a table listing the variable’s frequency among the total sample population across each of the top 10 Asian ethnicities enrolled as first-time freshmen (FTF) at Western University in the Fall 2010 through Fall 2013 cohorts.

Table 13 illustrates the percentage of students with high school GPAs in the each of the five designated GPA ranges, disaggregated by ethnicity. Because university admission criteria requires at least a 2.0 high school GPA, the 2.0-2.49 range is the lowest range possible. As indicated in this table, the 3.0-3.49 range was the most common range for most of the ethnic student groups, with Chinese, Pakistani, and Vietnamese students the exception. For Chinese and Vietnamese students, the largest proportion of students were in the 3.5-3.99 range, with a difference of 4% between this range and the 3.0-3.49 range. For Pakistani students, a significantly larger proportion (56%) were in the 3.5-3.99 range compared to 22% in the 3.0-3.49 range. However, as noted earlier in this chapter, because only nine Pakistani students were reported in this sample, caution should be exercised before making definitive statements about this population based on such a small sample.

Table 13

High School GPA, Asian American FTF, F2010-F2013, by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	2.0-2.49	2.5-2.99 %	3.0-3.49 %	3.5-3.99 %	4.0+ %	Total (n-1,972)
	%					
Asian Indian	1.5	18	36	29	15	197
Cambodian	3	21	39	24	12	97
Chinese	0	17	33	37	13	60
Filipino	0.6	13	40	33	13	174
Hmong	0.6	17	42	32	8	1,245
Japanese	0	9	42	26	23	43
Korean	0	16	37	32	16	19
Laotian	1.4	23	36	33	6	69
Pakistani	0	22	22	56	0	9
Vietnamese	0	19	32	36	14	59
TOTAL AA	0.2	17	37	31	15	1,972
TOTAL Univ	2	22	41	28	7	12,020

Note. Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other races.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

When Asian American students are put into four regional subgroups, the results show that the 3.0-3.49 range was the most common across the board, erasing the minimal discrepancies as pointed out above in the specific cases of Chinese, Vietnamese, and Pakistani students (see Table 14).

Table 14

High School GPA, Asian American FTF, F2010-F2013, by Subgroup

Ethnicity	2.0-2.49	2.5-2.99	3.0-3.49	3.5-3.99	4.0+	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	(n-1,972)
E Asian	0	14	37	32	17	122
Filipino	0.6	13	40	33	13	174
S Asian	1.5	18	35	31	15	206
SE Asian	1	17	41	32	9	1,470
Total AA	1	17	40	32	10	1,972
TOTAL Univ	2	22	41	28	7	12,020

Note. Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other races.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

Looking at differences in students' cumulative college GPA (as of the most recent semester they were enrolled) across the 10 Asian ethnic students groups is more illuminating than comparing high school GPA (see Table 15). Overall, the majority of these Asian American students fell within the 2.5-3.5 GPA range, with slightly more in the 2.5-2.99 range. However, examining the data by ethnicity revealed that Vietnamese, Laotian, and Hmong students are more disproportionately concentrated in the 2.5-2.99 range than are other Asian American students. Further, Asian Indian, Cambodian, Chinese, and Pakistani students have the highest concentrations in the 3.0-3.49 range. Both Filipino and Korean students were fairly evenly spread across the 2.5-2.99, 3.0-3.49, and 3.5-3.99 ranges.

Table 15

College GPA, Asian American FTF, F2010-F2013, by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	< 1.0	1.0-1.49	1.50-1.99	2.0-2.49	2.5-2.99	3.0-3.49	3.5-4.0	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	(n-1,972)
Asian Indian	5	3	3	13	22	28	26	197
Cambodian	14	4	14	17	19	27	5	97
Chinese	5	0	3	12	20	30	30	60
Filipino	6	3	9	12	22	23	25	174
Hmong	13	8	11	15	25	20	8	1,245
Japanese	12	2	7	0	19	21	36	43
Korean	5	5	5	11	26	26	21	19
Laotian	15	6	10	16	30	19	4	69
Pakistani	11	0	0	0	22	44	22	9
Vietnamese	2	7	10	14	36	14	19	59
TOTAL AA	11%	6%	9%	14%	24%	22%	13%	1,972
TOTAL Univ	6%	5%	6%	13%	16%	26%	27%	11,932

Note. Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other races.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

The data for college GPA reflect the cumulative GPA for each student in the F2010-F2013 cohorts as of the most recent semester they were enrolled. This means that students who may have been disqualified within their first year because

they remained on academic probation for two consecutive semesters are likely to be included in the above data with GPAs below the 2.0 range. This also means that the GPA ranges shown in the table below may reflect students at different levels (freshman, sophomore, etc.), depending on how long the student was enrolled before either graduating, dropping out, or continuing their degree another semester.

When Asian American students are put into four regional subgroups, the results show that the 2.5-2.99 college GPA range is the most common across the board (see Table 16). In these groupings, however, it is clear that East Asians and South Asians are more concentrated in the 3.0-3.99 GPA ranges, while Southeast Asians are more concentrated in the 2.5-3.49 ranges. Filipinos are fairly evenly distributed across the 2.5-2.99, 3.0-3.49, and 3.5-3.99 ranges.

Table 16

<i>College GPA, Asian American FTF, F2010-F2013, by Subgroup</i>								
Ethnicity	< 1.0	1.0-1.49	1.50-1.99	2.0-2.49	2.5-2.99	3.0-3.49	3.5-3.99	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	(n-1,972)
E Asian	7	2	5	7	21	26	29	122
Filipino	6	3	9	12	22	23	24	174
S Asian	5	2	3	13	22	29	25	206
SE Asian	13	7	11	15	25	20	8	1,470
TOTAL AA	11%	6%	9%	14%	24%	22%	13%	1,972
TOTAL Univ	6%	5%	6%	13%	16%	26%	27%	11,932

Note. Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other races.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

By comparison, the overall cumulative end of term college GPA for the overall university population for the same cohort of 2010-2013 first-time freshmen was most highly grouped in the 3.5-4.0 range (27%) and in the 3.0-3.49 range (26%). On the whole, East Asians and South Asians were on par with their

university peers, while Filipinos were slightly behind and Southeast Asians were much farther behind their university-wide peers.

Given the above findings illustrating the distribution of college GPAs among Western University Asian American students, I also conducted a chi-square test of independence to examine whether there was a relationship between ethnic subgroup and college GPA. The test findings showed there is a significant relationship between Asian American subgroup and college GPA, $X^2(1, N = 1,972) = 165.2234, p < .001$. In other words, the difference between each subgroup's observed college GPA was different enough from the expected college GPA to be statistically significant.

Examining 4-year graduation rates across the 10 Asian American ethnic groups is also informative. While a solid majority of all Asian American students did not earn a college degree within 4 years, some ethnic groups performed far better than others (see Table 17). For example, 28% of Japanese and 26% of Korean students successfully earned degrees within 4 years. By contrast, 0% of Laotian, 1% of Cambodian, and only 3% of Hmong students successfully earned degrees within 4 years.

When examining the 4-year graduation rates across ethnic subgroups, noticeable differences emerged that were in alignment with previous findings (see Table 18). East Asians demonstrated the highest rates of 4-year graduation (22%), while Southeast Asians demonstrated the lowest rates (4%). Filipino and South Asian students fell in between, with South Asians graduating in four years at a rate of 18%, while Filipinos graduated in four years at a rate of 10%.

By comparison, the 4-year graduation rate for the overall university population for the same cohort of 2010-2013 first-time freshmen was 15.8%. The findings indicate that East Asians and South Asians exhibited higher 4-year

Table 17

4-year Graduation, Asian American FTF, F2010-F2013, by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Did not earn degree in 4 yrs	%	Earned degree in 4 yrs	%	Total (n=2,122)
Asian Indian	160	81	37	19	197
Cambodian	96	99	1	1	97
Chinese	50	83	10	17	60
Filipino	156	90	18	10	174
Hmong	1,203	97	42	3	1,245
Japanese	31	72	12	28	43
Korean	14	74	5	26	19
Laotian	69	100	0	0	69
Pakistani	8	89	1	11	9
Vietnamese	50	85	9	15	59
Other Asian	125	83	25	17	150
TOTAL AA	1962	92.5%	160	7.5%	2,122
TOTAL Univ	10,128	84.2%	1,900	15.8%	12,029

Note. Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other races.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

Table 18

4-year Graduation, Asian American FTF, F2010-F2013, by Subgroup

Ethnicity	Did not earn degree in 4 yrs	%	Earned degree in 4 yrs	%	Total (n=2,122)
E Asian	95	78	27	22	122
Filipino	156	90	18	10	174
S Asian	168	82	38	18	206
SE Asian	1,418	97	52	4	1,470
Other Asian	125	83	25	17	150
TOTAL AA	1962	92.5%	160	7.5%	2,122
TOTAL Univ	10,128	84.2%	1,900	15.8%	12,029

Note. Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other races.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

graduation rates than their peers (22% and 18%, respectively), but that Filipino and Southeast Asian American students exhibited lower 4-year graduation rates than their university-wide peers (10% and 4%, respectively).

Examining 6-year graduation rates across the 10 Asian American ethnic groups is also enlightening. Whereas the vast majority of Asian American students did not earn degrees within 4 years, 6-year graduation rates were much better (see Table 19). Still, significant differences were evident between specific ethnic groups.

Table 19

6-year Graduation, Asian American FTF, F2010-F2013, by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Did not earn degree in 6 yrs	%	Earned degree in 6 yrs	%	Total (n=2,122)
Asian Indian	64	33	133	68	197
Cambodian	52	54	45	46	97
Chinese	15	25	45	75	60
Filipino	80	46	94	54	174
Hmong	764	61	481	39	1245
Japanese	12	28	31	72	43
Korean	5	26	14	74	19
Laotian	44	64	25	36	69
Pakistani	2	22	7	78	9
Vietnamese	26	44	33	56	59
Other Asian	78	52	72	48	150
TOTAL AA	1142	53.8%	980	46.2%	2,122
TOTAL Univ	5,341	44.4%	6,688	55.6%	12,029

Note. Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other races.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

More than two-thirds of Pakistani (78%), Chinese (75%), Korean (74%), Japanese (72%), and Asian Indian (68%) students graduated within 6 years. Slightly more than half of Vietnamese (56%) and Filipino (54%) students also successfully completed their degrees within 6 years. However, less than half of

Cambodian (46%), Hmong (39%), and Laotian (36%) students successfully earned degrees within 6 years.

Similarly, when examining 6-year graduation rates across the four major Asian subgroups, the differences are striking (see Table 20). East Asians earned degrees within 6 years at the highest rate (74%), followed by South Asians (68%). Filipino students ranked a distant third with a 6-year graduation rate of 54%. Southeast Asians fell significantly behind, with only 40% of these students graduating within 6 years.

Table 20

6-year Graduation, Asian American FTF, F2010-F2013, by Subgroup

Ethnicity	Did not earn degree in 6 yrs	%	Earned degree in 6 yrs	%	Total (n=2,122)
E Asian	32	26	90	74	122
Filipino	80	46	94	54	174
S Asian	66	32	140	68	206
SE Asian	886	60	584	40	1,470
Other Asian	78	52	72	48	150
TOTAL AA	1,142	53.8%	980	46.2%	2,122
TOTAL Univ	5,341	44.4%	6,688	55.6%	12,029

Note. Does not include international students, Non-Resident Aliens, or those who responded Asian and one or more other races.

Adapted from Western University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

By comparison, the 6-year graduation rate for the overall university population for the same cohort of 2010-2013 first-time freshmen was 55.6%. The findings indicate that East Asians and South Asians exhibited higher 6-year graduation rates than their peers (74% and 68%, respectively) and Filipinos exhibited slightly lower rates than the university-wide average (54%). Southeast Asian American students exhibited considerably lower 6-year graduation rates than their university-wide peers (40%).

Academic Affairs

To understand the academic interests and enrollment trends among Western University's Asian American students, I compared their numbers in each of the university's eight colleges (Arts and Humanities, Health and Human Services, Science and Mathematics, Social Sciences, Business, Agricultural Science and Technology, Education, and Engineering) plus a ninth designation, Special Programs. The results indicated that Asian American students tended to be most highly concentrated in the College of Health and Human Services, enrolling a total of 590 (or 28%) of the Asian American first-time freshmen from cohort years 2010-2013 (see Figure 1). The College of Science and Mathematics and the College of Business placed a distant second and third, enrolling 329 (16%) and 318 (15%) of this population, respectively. Each of the remaining colleges had Asian American enrollment rates of between 6 to 8%.

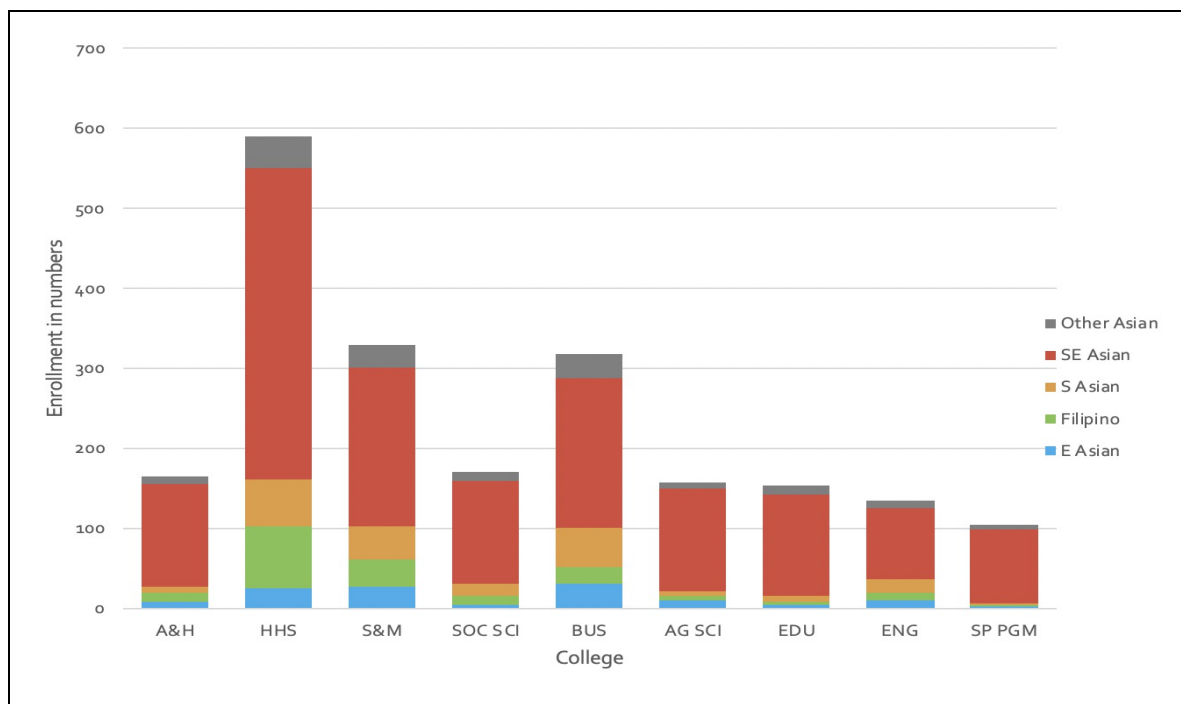


Figure 1. Last college enrolled, Asian American FTF, F2010-F2013, by subgroup.

Asian American Studies Program

The Asian American Studies Program (ASAM) at Western University has a 4-decade history in the Department of Anthropology within the College of Social Sciences. The ASAM program does not offer a major but does offer a minor focusing on the history and contemporary experience of Asians in the U.S.

To better understand the profile of students who participate in the ASAM program, I examined ASAM course enrollments by race/ethnicity, by Asian ethnicity, and by ethnic subgroup. To draw from a larger sample population, I used data for the overall enrollment in all ASAM and relevant Anthropology courses that count toward the ASAM minor for the 10-year period, 2010-2019. These course titles included the following: Introduction to Asian Americans; Asian American Communities; Asian American Women; Asian Americans in Popular Culture; Independent Study; Anthropology of Southeast Asia; and Anthropology of Japan and China.

Figure 2 illustrates the racial breakdown of all students who enrolled in these ASAM courses from 2010-2019. As this figure demonstrates, Asian American students comprise the dominant majority of enrollments in these courses (61%), Hispanics are the next largest group with 19%, followed by Whites (10%).

Looking more closely at the Asian category, I examined the breakdown of Asian students by subgroup over this same 10-year period. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of the four major Asian subgroups used in this study. The “Other Asian” category includes students who indicated “Asian” or “Other Asian” or belong to an ethnic group that is not defined as belonging to one of the regional subgroups. Given the demographic profile of the Asian American student population, it is not surprising that the majority (59%) of the Asian American students enrolled in ASAM courses were Southeast Asian. The next largest subgroup was “Other Asian” (22%), followed by East Asian (11%), Filipino (7%), and South Asian (2%).

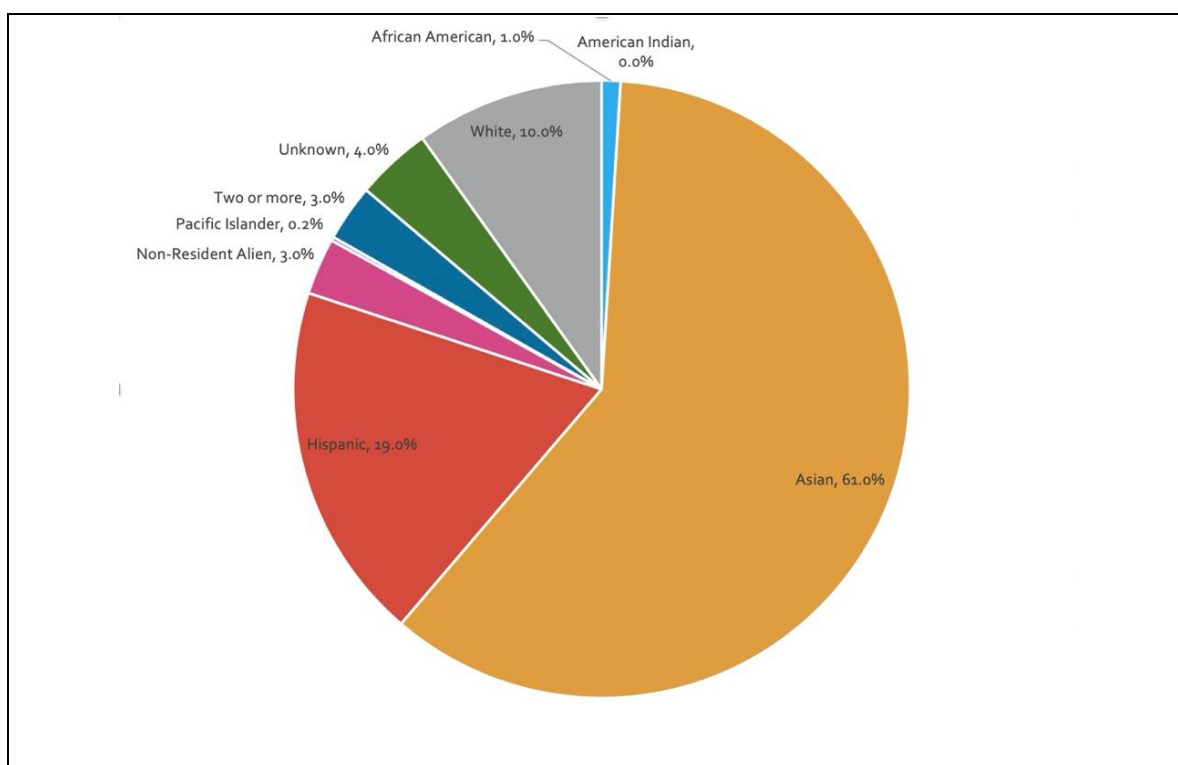


Figure 2. ASAM total enrollment, 2010-2019, race/ethnicity.

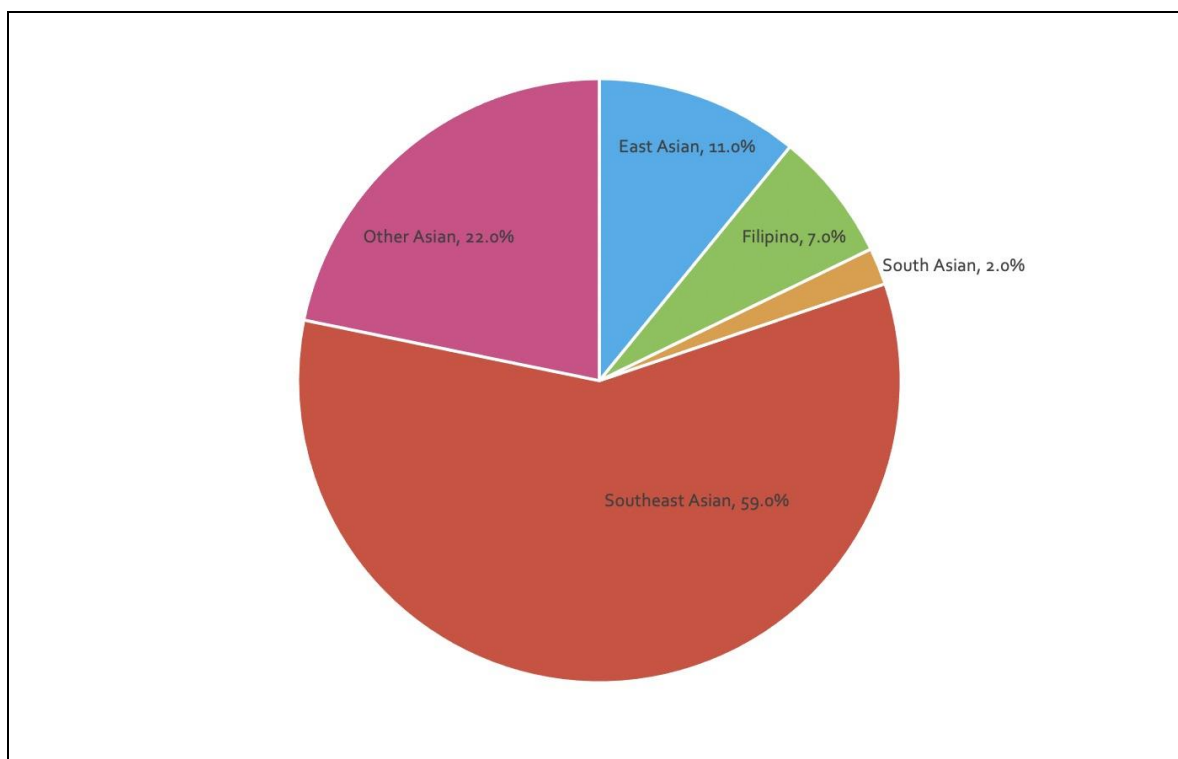


Figure 3. ASAM Asian enrollment, 2010-2019, Asian subgroups only.

To understand whether there was a trend in enrollment numbers over the 10-year period of 2010-2019, I examined the total ASAM enrollment by year, as well as the enrollment for each of the seven courses offered during this 10-year period (see Figure 4). Figure 4 indicates both the total enrollment for all classes combined (dark green line) as well as the enrollment for each separate course. Four of the courses show fairly steady enrollments of between 20-40 students per class, per semester; however, enrollment numbers for two of these four courses alternated between zero and 30-40 students, which indicates these courses were not consistently offered every semester. Three of the ASAM courses had no enrollments for several terms, indicating that they were not offered for most of the semesters in this 10-year period.

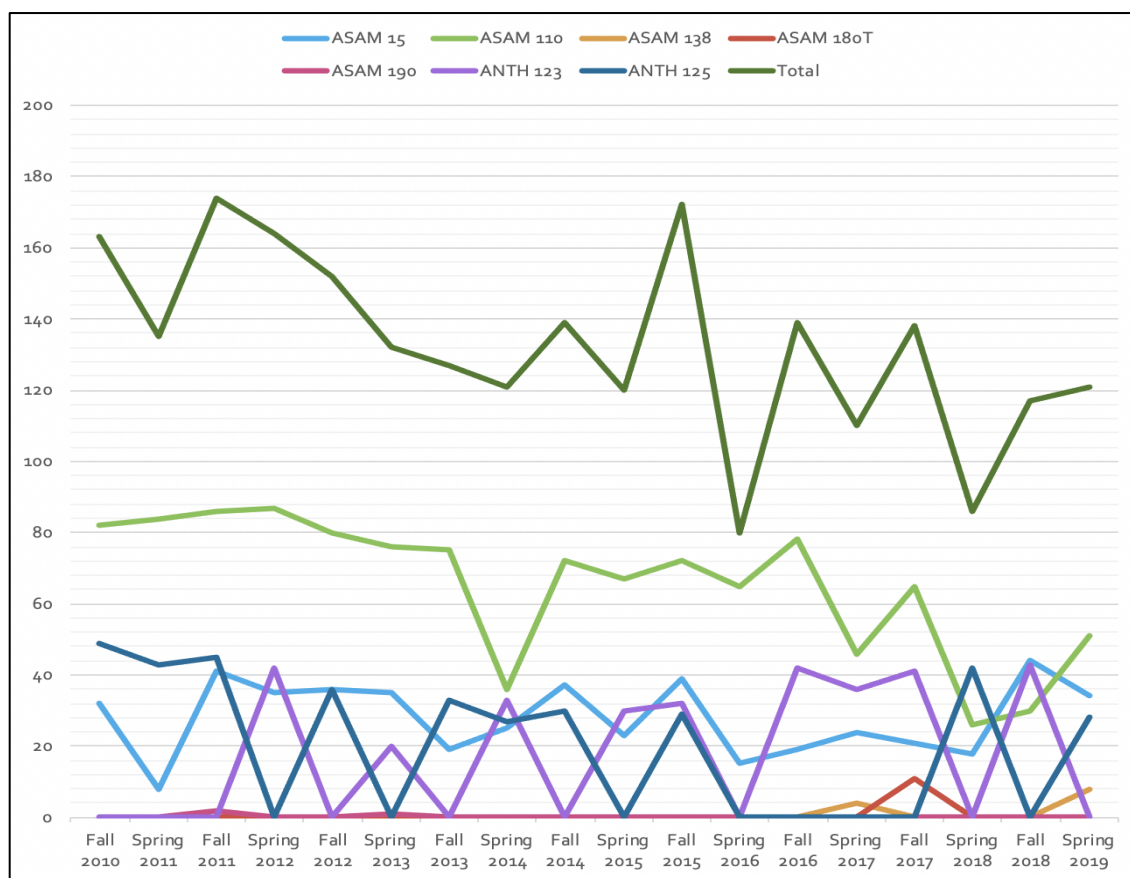


Figure 4. ASAM course enrollment trends, 2010-2019.

To again get a closer look at which Asian students were most likely to enroll in ASAM courses, I examined the breakdown of Asian students by ethnic subgroup. Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of the four major Asian subgroups (plus “Other Asian”) across the seven ASAM courses offered in the 2010-2019 period. Again, given the demographic profile of the Asian American student population, it is not surprising that the majority of the Asian American students enrolled in ASAM courses overall were Southeast Asian. However, a closer look at two courses, ANTH 123 and ANTH 125, reveals that although overall enrollments were much smaller, East Asians were actually the largest subgroup of students enrolled in these particular courses.

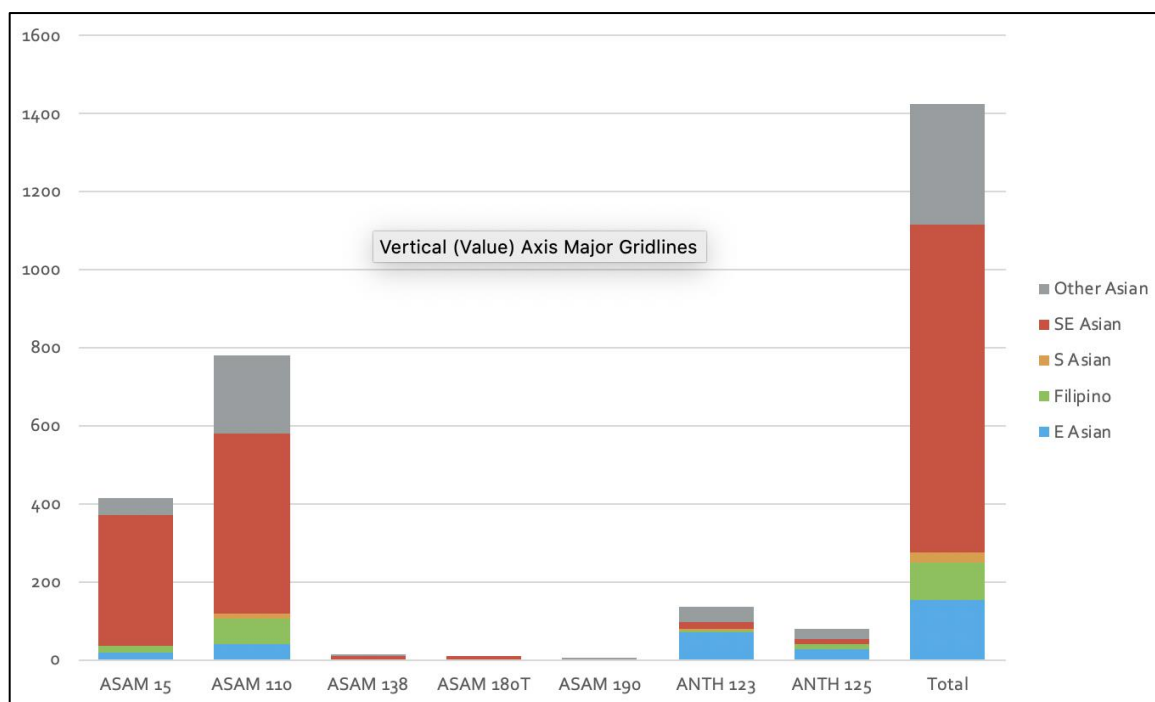


Figure 5. ASAM course enrollment, 2010-2019, Asian subgroups only.

To determine participation and engagement in the ASAM program, I also examined the number of students who declared ASAM minors, as well as those who graduated with ASAM minors during the 2010-2019 timeframe. From 2010

to 2019, only four students graduated with an ASAM minor on their diploma: one in 2015, one in 2018 and two in 2019. However, in this same time period, 13 students declared the ASAM minor, but only two of these students declared the minor prior to Spring 2019.

These numbers, although small, demonstrate a definite upward trend in students pursuing the ASAM minor, with most of the growth occurring only in the last couple of years. The period from 2010-2015 represent a time when there were no full-time faculty working in the ASAM program, whereas the period from 2016-2019 coincide with the hiring of two full-time, tenure track faculty in the ASAM program.

Efforts Supporting Asian American and Pacific

Islander Student Success

Because student success also falls within the purview of Student Affairs, I endeavored to document the ways Western University supported the academic success of its Asian American students. I intended to gather data on Asian American student participation in campus-based programs, services, and resources that target student success, particularly those that specifically serve minority, first-generation, and/or underserved students. However, once I began identifying the sources of this data, I discovered a major obstacle: there was a lack of consistent data documenting student participation in these programs and services. The vast majority of these programs and services rely on a central data collection system, however, in examining the datasets, I discovered that Western University had recently transferred its data collection system to a third party company.

When OIE staff attempted to gather the data from this third party, they discovered gaps and inconsistencies in the data. Specifically, OIE staff discovered a lack of uniformity in how student participation data were coded and entered,

resulting in redundant and inconsistent fields. Although OIE received assurances that the third party company was aware of these issues and was working to identify and correct them, it became clear that these corrections would not be completed in time for this data to be included in this study.

Therefore, I pivoted my strategy to instead conduct an environmental scan to gather information on programs, services, and/or resources that were specifically intended to support the academic success of Asian American students. Because multiple efforts have been implemented in the past while others continue to be proposed, cataloguing these efforts provides a chronological documentation of the collective history of struggles to support Asian American student success at Western University.

To gather this information, I identified 30 faculty, staff, and students who represented a broad cross-section of the university who had been involved in work supporting AAPI student success. These individuals were employed in positions in various offices and departments across campus, including the Office of the Provost, College of Health and Human Services, College of Science and Mathematics, College of Social Sciences, School of Education and Human Development, Library-Research Services, Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, Student Health and Counseling Center, Academic Support Services, and Admissions and Recruitment.

Each of the 30 individuals were selected because of their previously demonstrated interest and commitment to supporting Asian American students on campus either by virtue of their position or through their prior volunteer involvement in AFSA-sponsored campus events. I identified most of these individuals through the Asian Faculty and Staff Association (AFSA), a campus-wide affinity group for which I have been a board member for the past 5 years. I

also identified others through my own personal networks that I have developed through my campus experience as adjunct faculty for the past 9 years. Lastly, I identified two retired faculty who had been instrumental in initiating and influencing programs benefiting Asian American students in both academic affairs and student affairs over the past 4 decades.

Because of the campus closure caused by COVID-19, I relied primarily on email communications to gather initial information from these individuals, several of whom were only sporadically working from their campus offices. Toward that end, I sent personalized email requests for information to each of the 30 identified individuals in late-March 2020. In total, I received 10 emailed responses to my email inquiry. I conducted semi-structured phone interviews with each of these 10 respondents. Within these interviews, I asked questions about respondents' knowledge of any programs, services, organizations, or other resources that specifically aimed to support the academic success of Western University's Asian American students (see Appendix C). Interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes. During each interview, I recorded hand-written notes, as audio recordings were not technologically possible as I used a landline phone for these interviews.

The information presented in this section summarizes the responses gathered from these personal contacts. These findings are presented in chronological order to show the numerous efforts that have been made – and continue to be made today – by various individuals who care deeply about supporting the success of Western University's Asian American students. These findings include both on-campus supports and resources, as well as off-campus/community-based resources that were noted by respondents as also being key contributors to supporting Asian American student success.

On-Campus Supports for Asian American and Pacific Islander Student Success

The following section describes the results of my research inquiries into past and present efforts that have been launched at Western University to support Asian American and Pacific Islander student success. While some have been discontinued due to lack of funding and/or leadership, others continue to serve students today. These efforts are presented chronologically in the order they were first launched and are identified as an organization, program, project, event, or research. Efforts launched by an organization are listed directly beneath the organization.

Organization: Educational Opportunity Program (1967–)

The findings about the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) at Western University were obtained through emails and subsequent interviews with individuals with both historical and current knowledge of this program. The following section reflects the information gathered from these sources, which was compiled from multiple perspectives, as these stakeholders had both direct and indirect relationships with the program.

EOP began at a critical point in the history of the Central Valley. This program emerged from a July 1967 conversation between three faculty members who were concerned about the racial tensions brewing around the country and in Fresno. These faculty were particularly concerned about the limited number of minority – particularly Latinx – students enrolled at Western University and wanted the institution to play a more active role in reducing racial incidents which had given rise to violence both on campus and in the community. As a result, they

met with a group of faculty and administrators and planted the seeds for what they called the “Spontaneous Project.”

As it was first conceived, the brand new EOP at Western University recruited disadvantaged youth local schools who demonstrated the potential to succeed in college. Financial aid and other necessary assistance and guidance were included in the program to help support students’ success. In Fall of 1967, 20 Black and Mexican American students were admitted to Western University as the first students in this program; of these 20, 17 enrolled, thus the program became known as “Project 17.”

The planning committee was reorganized in the spring of 1968 and officially adopted the name Educational Opportunity Program Committee and was made a subcommittee of the Academic Senate’s Academic Planning and Policy Committee. The Educational Opportunity Program enrolled its first class in fall of 1968. In addition, the first summer orientation program was implemented in 1968 with 75 EOP students. This was the birth of the Summer Institute which is now known systemwide as the Summer Bridge Program. In 1969, EOP was officially adopted throughout the state university system to which Western University belonged.

Today, EOP provides an array of services to support first-generation, historically low-income, and educationally disadvantaged college students. Through the success of the EOP model, several new programs have been created that co-exist alongside EOP under the heading of “Special Initiatives.” These initiatives were created to address the particular needs of specific populations of underserved students to help them achieve academic success: the Renaissance Scholars Program serves foster youth, the Dream Success Center serves undocumented students, and the Office of Black Student Success serves African

American students. There is no program under the EOP and Special Initiatives umbrella that addresses the needs of Asian American or Pacific Islander students.

Because EOP was rooted in the activism of Black and Latino leaders prior to the arrival of major waves of Asian immigrants and Southeast Asian refugees, Asian Americans did not likely figure into early discussions of minority students who needed support. Consequently, EOP was originally envisioned as an effort to increase the college enrollment of African Americans and Latinx, the primary racial minority groups needing educational support in the late 1960s in the geographic area served by Western University. As the numbers of Asian Americans began to grow in the late 1960s and continued through the 1980s, so too did the myth of the “model minority.” As this myth became a widely accepted societal stereotype, Asian Americans were not likely regarded as students who needed the support of minority-serving programs like EOP.

As a program that first began as a high school outreach program, EOP has transitioned into a system-wide program that focuses exclusively on college retention. Because of this change in focus, EOP at Western University ceased its outreach and recruitment efforts and instead relied on other university programs who hired college student recruiters to help market the program – as well as several other campus programs – to prospective students. Crucially, the EOP application process changed in 2017 to a more open and transparent process where all students who apply for admission to the university are now able to self-identify as a prospective EOP candidate and are automatically led through the EOP application. According to Interviewee A, “This change streamlined the application process so now everybody has the opportunity to apply for EOP, which means EOP is definitely more visible to students.”

According to Interviewee B, the change in the application process has resulted in a larger and more diverse pool of students who apply for entrance into EOP. Currently, about 30% of Western University's EOP students are Asian American or Pacific Islander, with Hmong students comprising the majority.

Organization/Program: Southeast Asian Student Services (1986–2003)

The findings about Southeast Asian Student Services (SEASS) at Western University were obtained through an email and subsequent interview with the former director of this program. This information was also validated by another interview with a retired faculty member who was on campus during the time of the SEASS program. The following section, including the subsection on the SEASS Graduation Celebration, reflects the information gathered from these two sources.

Besides the establishment of the Amerasia student organization and the Asian American Studies program in the 1970s, SEASS was the first concerted, staff-led effort to address the needs of Asian American students at Western University. The arrival of refugees from Southeast Asia in the local area beginning in the mid- to late-1970s precipitated the influx of students to Western University in the early 1980s.

At first, most of these students were of Vietnamese descent and were largely concentrated in the engineering department. It soon became apparent that these students were not adequately prepared to withstand the rigors of the academic environment, as many began to fail despite faculty attempts to assist them. The engineering faculty were the first to raise the alarm about the need for the institution to do something to help these students. As Hmong, Lao, Mien, and Cambodian students subsequently began arriving on campus, each experienced

similar challenges as the Vietnamese students and the teaching faculty remained perplexed as to how to effectively teach them.

In response to the large influx of Southeast Asian students, in February 1986, the administration appointed the Ad Hoc Committee on Southeast Asian Refugees to investigate the educational needs of these students. The committee studied the status of these students and concluded that “the campus community was not adequately prepared to give support to this student population” (University Archives, 2003, p. 2). With no other programs on campus equipped to work with these students, the committee resolved that International Student Services and Programs should take the lead in serving this new student population.

The institution thus supported an initiative that came to be known as Southeast Asian Student Services (SEASS). SEASS was designed to “provide assistance and support to resident students whose families originated from Southeast Asia” (University Archives, 2003, p. 2). To help students make a successful transition into the university, SEASS included such services as new student orientation, leadership development, peer mentoring, academic planning and advising, personal counseling, and financial aid advising (University Archives, 2003). It was an innovative program that, in the words of the director, “trained Southeast Asian students to function effectively in both mainstream university and community life, while also honoring their cultural traditions and beliefs” (K.H., 2020). The SEASS training not only provided leadership training to students, involving them as peer advisers and mentors to other Southeast Asian students, but also developed tailored curricula to address first-generation student success strategies and issues of cultural diversity.

SEASS was the first program of its kind systemwide, eventually gaining the support of the Chancellor’s Office. SEASS was first financially supported solely

by the Western University president's office, then later received support from the systemwide Chancellor's office. By this time, the program director had made it clear that these students needed to be trained as Americans, not as international students. As such, the program was moved out of international programs and into the student union where it continued until it was dismantled in May 2003.

According to Interviewee C, the decision was made to dismantle the program as a result of state budget shortfalls and systemwide budget cuts. In response to a question about losing the momentum that had been built by operating SEASS for the previous 17 years, Interviewee C said,

By this time, our students were not having obvious difficulties any longer, so now the university was focusing on other newcomers. The administration told us that our students should be able to integrate themselves into the mainstream and into programs like EOP.

Program: Southeast Asian student services graduation celebration/Asian American and Pacific Islander commencement (1998–2002). One notable outgrowth of the SEASS program was the creation of the Southeast Asian Student Graduation. First launched in 1998, this celebration was initially launched by the SEASS program director to recognize the successes of the Southeast Asian students who had participated in the SEASS program. By 2000, this celebration grew large enough to warrant moving it into a much larger venue and its name was broadened to encompass all Asian American and Pacific Islander students at the university, but was still mainly coordinated by the SEASS program director. As the newly named Asian American and Pacific Islander Commencement, this event became the third ethnic commencement ceremony at Western University, joining the long-established Latino and African American commencements. However, when the SEASS program was dismantled in May of 2003, the program director's position was also eliminated. With no faculty or staff

assigned to coordinate this event, the last Asian American and Pacific Islander Commencement was held in May of 2002 until it was later reinstated in May 2015.

Project: Hmong & Southeast Asian Resource and Information (1990s/early-2000s–)

The findings about Hmong & Southeast Asian Resource and Information at Western University were obtained through the university's website. I attempted to confirm with various individuals on campus whether they had any knowledge about this project and whether it was still in existence, but was unable to identify a contact person.

On Western University's website, there is a page within the Division of Academic Affairs, "Hmong & Southeast Asian Resource and Information (HSARI)." None of the interviewees could confirm a specific launch date, but most seemed to agree that this endeavor was launched in the late 1990s or early 2000s. This endeavor was supported by university leadership as a way to consolidate research, data, and other resources about the Southeast Asian populations. The website contains resource links, reports, and, at one time, listed events and activities pertaining to the local Southeast Asian communities. It also identifies not only campus-based clubs and organizations such as Hmong Student Association, Lao Student Association, Cambodian Collegiate Association, and Southeast Asian Teachers, but also local and regional community-based organizations that serve the Southeast Asian populations. However, one of the people listed as a contact stated that she was no longer actively administering this site as her responsibilities shifted a number of years ago. Also, since the most recent report links are from 2011 and the last recorded page update was November

6, 2018, the information on this site is neither actively monitored nor regularly updated.

Organization: Center for Southeast Asian Studies
(1995–)

The findings about the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Western University were obtained through the university's website. I attempted to confirm the current status of the center with the chair of the Department of Anthropology, as the center is listed on the department's website, but the chair did not have any knowledge.

Established in Spring of 1995, the Center for Southeast Asian Studies is “a multi-disciplinary unit designed to help foster a greater awareness of Southeast Asia” (Department of Anthropology, n.d.). The department in which this center is housed also offers a Certificate in Southeast Asian Studies in addition to the Asian American Studies minor. However, this center likely exists in name only, as there are no known research or program activities associated with this entity, nor are there any names listed as affiliated with the center.

Organization: Asian Faculty and Staff Association
(2008–)

The findings about the Asian Faculty and Staff Association at Western University were obtained through a faculty member who was one of the organization's founding board members, as well as a former chair of the organization. The following section, including the subsections on the AFSA Book Awards and the Raising the Bar Student Symposium, reflects the information gathered from these sources.

The Asian Faculty and Staff Association (AFSA) was founded in December 2008 as an affinity group to promote a diverse campus climate, provide activities and leadership programs, promote a sense of community, and build strong linkages between the university and Asian American communities. AFSA is governed by a board of directors and draws its membership from annual appeals across campus. With a small annual funding budget from the university, AFSA is able to support faculty and staff to participate in leadership and professional development trainings and conferences. AFSA also uses portions of its budget to coordinate, convene, and sponsor various faculty, staff, and student-led projects and events. Perhaps most importantly, AFSA provides a space for API faculty, staff, and administrators to network and discuss issues of common interest. Because of its support from the university, AFSA can provide important access to university leadership to elevate student, faculty, and/or staff issues and concerns.

Program: AFSA book awards (2008 – present). As one of its major programmatic undertakings, AFSA raises funds from membership dues and requests outside grants to support its annual Book Awards program. This program annually honors and provides monetary support to selected Western University undergraduate, graduate, or credential students who demonstrate leadership, service, and/or contributions to the Asian American and Pacific Islander community.

Event: Raising the Bar student symposium (2018). Hosted by AFSA, this symposium disseminated research focused on AAPI student success conducted at Western University to students and the campus community. By highlighting the voices of diverse AAPI students and alumni, the symposium raised awareness of the challenges and successes of these mostly first-generation

college students. The symposium also provided a forum where students could learn about on-campus resources for academic support.

Project: Southeast Asian Youth (2012)

The findings about the Southeast Asian Youth Project at Western University were obtained through the university's website. I attempted to confirm with two individuals affiliated with the College of Health and Human Services whether they had any knowledge about this project, but was unable to obtain a response.

Another project listed on the website of the College of Health & Human Services is simply titled "Southeast Asian Youth" and it appeared to be a one-time project of the Central California Children's Institute. This "youth data improvement project" was supported by a grant from the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health to "enhance our capacity to better understand education, health, socioeconomic and safety disparities among Southeast Asian youth ages 5-18 years in Fresno County (Central California Children's Institute, n.d.). This project was launched because in 2010 Fresno Unified School District (FUSD) began collecting disaggregated enrollment data for nine Asian American ethnic subgroups, making it possible for the first time to analyze disparities between these distinct Asian subpopulations. This project culminated in a final report, "Demystifying the model minority: The importance of disaggregating subgroup data to promote success for Southeast Asian youth," that underscored the need for ongoing collection of Asian ethnic subgroup data (Xiong & Joubert, 2012).

**Project/Research: The Academic Challenges of
Southeast Asians (2013–2014)**

The findings on The Academic Challenges of Southeast Asians at Western University were largely obtained through my own involvement as one of the three directors of this project. My recollections were supplemented with project planning documents and the final research brief that we submitted to OIE for publication on their website.

In Fall 2013, what began as a casual conversation between colleagues grew into an original research survey project that proved groundbreaking in its focus on the voices and experiences of Southeast Asian American students at Western University, a population that had been largely overlooked since the dismantling of the Southeast Asian Student Services (SEASS) program in 2003.

Triggered by an article in the campus newspaper that showed Asian Americans ranked third out of the four major racial groups on campus in their 4-year graduation rates, my two faculty colleagues and I decided to design and implement an original research survey to identify the specific challenges that prevented Asian American students from achieving academic success. Because we felt we needed institutional support for such an ambitious undertaking with potential campus-wide impact, we requested and were granted the sponsorship of the Asian Faculty & Staff Association (AFSA).

We then requested the support of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) to help us to administer our survey. With OIE's assistance, the survey was emailed in Spring 2014 to a randomly selected sample of Western University Southeast Asian American (SEAA) students and a corresponding control group comprised of students from all racial backgrounds. One of my colleagues took the lead on the survey, another took the lead on doing a literature review. For my part,

I conducted interviews with SEAA faculty, staff, and students to gather additional qualitative data to supplement the survey results.

The research findings were reported in a 2014 research brief, titled, “The Academic Challenges of Southeast Asians at Fresno State” (Gong et al., 2014). Among the statistically significant findings were that SEAA students: came from much larger families with lower household income and had parents with lower levels of education; they had significantly more conflicting demands on their time than did non- SEAA students; they reported living in home and neighborhood environments that were not supportive of their academic success; they were much less likely to engage with faculty to discuss academic assignments; and they perceived faculty to be less supportive of their overall success as compared to all other students (Gong et al., 2014). Following the report’s release, the research team presented our findings at several convenings on campus, in the community, and academic conferences throughout the state.

Project/Research: Supporting Southeast Asian

Student Success (2014-2015)

Again, the findings on the Supporting Southeast Asian Student Success action research project were largely obtained through my direct involvement as one of the three project directors. My recollections were supplemented with project documents as well as the final grant report that was submitted by the principal investigator and research director to the Chancellor’s Office.

Armed with the data from our previous research on the academic challenges of Southeast Asians, my faculty colleagues and I worked with University Advancement in Fall 2014 to secure a 2015 grant from the CSU Chancellor’s Office to launch an action research project. Because of the restrictions of the Chancellor’s Office grant, I also worked with a local corporate philanthropic

representative to secure an external grant to cover the remaining portions of the project budget.

Informed by the findings of our recent research survey and supplemented by our knowledge of the 1986-2003 SEASS program, the goal of the project was to test various approaches designed to enhance the overall success of Southeast Asian American students at Western University. Particular areas of concern were SEAA students' low retention and graduation rates, as well as a perceived lack of campus-student "fit" or sense of belonging. Further, in addition to the lack of research on SEAA students, there were no coordinated programs and services for Asian American students and existing outreach and recruiting for other campus success programs did not specifically target this student population.

The planning and design of the SSASS pilot project began in January 2015 and continued throughout the spring semester. The faculty research team divided the work amongst ourselves and we met weekly to ensure we were making progress according to our project timeline. The SSASS project had three major components: 1) Student outreach/recruitment and curriculum design/delivery; 2) Peer navigator recruitment, hiring, and training; and 3) Data collection via pre- and post-surveys for both the students and peer navigators. Each of the three faculty research team members took responsibility over one major component. By the end of the Spring 2015 semester, our project team had hired seven peer navigators – all of whom were of SEAA descent, developed the student curriculum, and drafted the survey instruments.

Once students had matriculated in May 2015, we began our outreach and recruitment of the SSASS cohort. With the help of OIE, we sent invitation letters to all Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese first-time freshmen entering Western University in Fall 2015. These letters described the SSASS project and

asked for their voluntary participation with the project's mandatory components, which would begin that August, one week prior to the first day of the semester, and conclude at the end of the Fall 2015 semester. Approximately 60-70 students of a fairly diverse range of SEAA backgrounds responded and expressed their interest in participating in SSASS.

However, when the program began with the start of the 3-day summer orientation in August, less than half of the students who indicated interest actually attended. In all, the SSASS cohort was comprised of 27 first-time freshmen, the majority of whom were of Hmong descent. All but one of the 27 students in the cohort completed the program; one student dropped out of school in the middle of the fall semester due to personal issues.

The major SSASS project curriculum components included: a 3-day summer orientation focused on introducing students to the campus and SSASS, as well as team building with the cohort and peer navigators; a parent workshop conducted in Hmong; a semester-long university writing course modeled after First-Year Experience curricula; and culturally relevant leadership workshops. Perhaps the most important component of the SSASS project were the peer navigators. As upper classmen who had already demonstrated their ability to succeed in college, these students were selected for their ability to connect with the cohort students and help them navigate the challenges of making the transition to university life. Each peer navigator was matched with three to four students and met with each student weekly as a peer mentor/adviser. The peer navigators also met regularly as a group and organized extra-curricular social activities to promote a sense of belonging and group cohesion.

In December 2015, we held a culmination program to commemorate the end of the SSASS project. Campus leaders, including the university president, vice

president of student affairs, provost, and others joined several community leaders in recognizing the SSASS students, peer navigators, and their families.

In April 2015, the project directors invited all seven of the peer navigators to present a workshop about the SSASS project at the annual conference of Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education. We learned from the peer navigators at this conference that both the navigators' experience in the SSASS project and the experience of participating in this conference had a profound impact. As further evidence of this impact, of the seven peer navigators, four went on to enroll in graduate programs in education, social work, or counseling, two graduated and are now working for community-based organizations, and one chose to study and work abroad.

In May 2015, the project directors and provost submitted a final report to the Chancellor's Office detailing the impact of the program on the student cohort and peer navigators. One of the major – and unforeseen – findings was that the peer navigators appeared to have gained greater benefits from their participation in the program than did the students in the freshmen cohort. One peer navigator reported that his participation in this program changed his career goal from initially pursuing a career in law enforcement to one that actively worked to prevent individuals from going into prison. This former peer navigator is now a coach/counselor for an organization that mentors underserved youth.

**Program/Annual Event: Asian American and
Pacific Islander Commencement Celebration
(2015–)**

The findings on The Asian American and Pacific Islander Commencement Celebration at Western University were partially obtained through my own involvement as the lead facilitator of the 2014-15 planning committee, and

partially through an interview with one of the graduate students who spearheaded this effort. My recollections were supplemented with program planning documents, as well as subsequent interviews with two other individuals involved in subsequent program planning efforts.

In Fall of 2014, at the same time as the SSASS project was underway, two graduate students from the College of Education approached the AFSA board to express their desire to revitalize the Asian American and Pacific Islander Commencement Celebration (APICC) and to request AFSA's support in their efforts. They received mixed reactions from the AFSA board members, some of whom had previously attempted to bring back the APICC in 2010 and 2011, but were unsuccessful because of a lack of student participation. After this meeting, the students met with me to request my help with their efforts, as I was the only AFSA board member who appeared to be openly supportive of their efforts to revitalize the APICC.

The two students and I met with the former director of the Southeast Asian Student Services, as she was the last person to oversee the APICC before it was discontinued in 2003. The director was happy to hear about the students' efforts and encouraged them to meet with the newly-arrived university president to gain his support as a crucial first step. The president enthusiastically agreed to support the event and promised to do his part to guarantee members of his cabinet and other AAPI campus leaders would also participate.

With this verbal commitment by the university president, the students and I formed an ad hoc API graduation planning committee. We developed a project timeline and began recruiting committee members representing various offices and departments across campus, including the former SEASS director. I served as the primary facilitator and convener of these planning meetings, ensuring that we were

fully transparent about our efforts and communications. When it was clear that the ad hoc planning committee was intent on reviving the APICC and were preparing for a May 2015 event, other campus faculty and staff, including several AFSA board members who had previously been decidedly lukewarm at the students' initial proposal, joined in our planning efforts. As it turned out, the organizational support of AFSA was critical, as some of the long-standing AFSA board members were instrumental in garnering the support and financial commitments of the various colleges, administrators, and community organizations.

Through this campus-wide team effort, the APICC was re-introduced in May 2015, after a 13-year dormancy. Approximately 40 students participated in this first ceremony that brought together more than 200 family and friends as spectators, demonstrating the eagerness of the Asian American community to take part in an event that celebrated the success of their students and allowed each student to recognize their family's support while honoring their culture.

The success of the APICC heralded the beginnings of a cultural shift for AAPI students, faculty, and staff at Western University. The ceremony continues to grow each year with nearly 100 students participating in May 2019, supported by approximately 500-600 family and friends, and is now a regular fixture in Western University's graduation celebrations.

Organization: Asian American and Pacific Islander

Task Force (2014–2017)

The findings about Asian American and Pacific Islander Task Force were obtained through an email and subsequent interview with one of the individuals representing Western University on this entity. The following section, including the subsection on Journey to Success, reflects the information gathered from this source.

This system-wide task force was part of a statewide effort to increase access and educational opportunities for underserved Asian Americans and Pacific Islander students to attend college. Because Western University enrolls a significant number of Asian Americans, two faculty members were selected to serve on this task force in 2014. To support these efforts, the Chancellor's Office provided funds for campuses to implement programs in support of the task force's goals. After the first 2 years, however, campuses who did not have representatives on the task force raised objections and questioned how funding decisions were being made. These concerns led to a diluting of the task force's purpose and it was subsequently dissolved in 2017.

Program/Annual Event: Journey to Success (2015–). The findings about the Journey to Success program were obtained through interviews with two of the individuals that direct this annual effort, one who initially brought the idea for this program to Western University as a former member of the Asian American and Pacific Islander Task Force, but who has since remained involved, even as that task force no longer exists. The other interview was with an administrator who oversees this program as it is related to their job responsibilities in student outreach and recruitment.

With funding provided by the Chancellor's Office in 2015 and 2016, Western University and four other universities within the statewide system each developed and launched an annual recruitment and outreach event at their respective campus called "Journey to Success." Journey to Success was modeled after other college recruitment and outreach programs that had been established in the 1980s and 1990s and funded by the Chancellor's Office. Super Sunday was launched in the 1980s to recruit outreach to African American students and their families, while FERIA was launched in the 1990s to provide outreach to Latino

students and their families. Until Journey to Success was created in 2015, Western University did not have any specific recruitment programs targeting Asian American students and their families. Similar to the goals of the Super Sunday and FERIA, Journey to Success was designed to promote recruitment of underserved Asian American students to encourage them to attend college upon their completion of high school, as well as to educate and inform Asian American parents about the college application and financial aid processes.

At Western University, the 2015 event drew approximately 350 total attendees, primarily Hmong Americans; in 2016, attendance increased to approximately 400, also primarily Hmong Americans, which is understandable, given the demographics of the local communities served by the university. After 2016, the Chancellor's Office ceased funding for Journey to Success. With the exception of Western University, the other universities in the system discontinued this event. At Western University, however, committed faculty, staff, and administrators made the crucial decision to continue to offer this program, as they deemed it a valuable strategy to successfully recruit underserved Southeast Asian students; because of the local community demographics, the targeted students were primarily Hmong American. Journey to Success thus continues to be offered with modest funds provided by the president's office each year. Each year, however, event organizers have sought and received external funding, as the president's office funding is not nearly enough to support the event's annual budget. Committed faculty, staff, and students also volunteer countless hours of their time to ensure the program's success.

Journey to Success at Western University recently concluded its fifth event in January 2020. This event was its largest and most successful to date, drawing over 1,000 total attendees, including high school students and their parents and

other family members, again, primarily Hmong American. The 2020 event was significant not only in its expanded scale, but also in the fact that the campus organizers established partnerships with local school districts and two local community-based organizations to support this event both in financial and in-kind support. These external partnerships allowed event organizers to offer free bus transportation from area high schools, free on-campus childcare, and free lunches for all participants. The additional financial support provided by the external partners also allowed the planning committee to bring in a nationally renowned Hmong American motivational speaker to inspire both the students and their parents.

The two individuals I interviewed both mentioned how these external partnerships were critical to expansion and success of this most recent event. Both individuals also discussed their hopes in continuing to build on these partnerships in order to raise the funds and other resources, expertise, and contacts necessary to grow and sustain this program as an annual event. Because of the instrumental role these external partners have played in this event, they are profiled in the next section of this paper describing off-campus supports for AAPI student success.

Organization: Cross Cultural and Gender Center

(2015 – present)

The findings about the Cross Cultural and Gender Center at Western University were obtained through the university website. I did not receive a response to my initial email in time to schedule an interview with an individual affiliated with this office.

In 2015, the Cross Cultural and Gender Center (CCGC) was created to encourage the development of a safe and welcoming environment for the campus community. Prior to the establishment of this center, The Center for Women and

Culture was the only formal campus entity that existed that addressed racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression. CCGC now encompasses programs and services for the African American, American Indian, Asian Pacific Islander, Latina/o, Gender, and LGBTQ+ student populations.

Organization/Program: Asian Pacific Islander

Programs and Services (2015 – present)

The findings about Asian Pacific Islander Programs and Services at Western University were obtained through the university website, as well as a subsequent email response from an individual affiliated with this office. I did not receive a response to my initial email in time to schedule an interview with an individual affiliated with this office.

As one of the six ethnic and gender diversity programs and services offices within the Cross Cultural and Gender Center, Asian Pacific Islander Programs and Services provides a safe and welcoming space for Asian American and Pacific Islander students to convene. One staff program coordinator is assigned to API Programs and Services, but she also oversees American Indian Programs and Services. There are also two part-time student coordinators assigned to this program. In addition to providing a physical space for students to gather, the API Programs and Services office also offers programs and services to educate the campus and community about issues impacting API students.

Program: Hmong Minor (2016 –)

The findings about the Hmong Minor at Western University were obtained through the university website and online news articles. In 2016, Western University began offering a Hmong minor through the Department of Linguistics in the College of Arts and Humanities as the only Hmong program in the Western

United States (Department of Linguistics, n.d.) and the only one in the nation with a specific focus on language (Boyles, 2016). The Hmong minor program coordinator started the program to help students preserve and celebrate their language and cultural heritage, while also boosting their bilingual and bicultural skills to mainstream society (Boyles, 2016). In the 3 years since the minor was established, 30 students have graduated from the program and 17 are in the process of completing the minor (Girardin, 2020).

Project: Asia in Fresno (2017–2018)

The findings on the Asia in Fresno project were largely obtained through my direct involvement as a member of the planning committee for both events. In 2016-17, a group of faculty in the College of Social Sciences convened a planning committee to spearhead a project called Asia in Fresno. This project was intended to showcase the many diverse Asian cultures in the local community and to build bridges between the campus and community. With faculty from the Departments of History, Communications, Anthropology, Criminology, and the Library, Asia in Fresno held two campus-community roundtables, one on campus in the spring of 2017 and one in the community in the spring of 2018. Both events were well-attended by individuals representing various parts of the campus, as well as a broad cross-section of community leaders. Without annual funding support, however, the committee disbanded after the Spring 2018 event.

Research: The Role of Institutional Data: A Focus on Hmong American Student Success (2019)

The information on The Role of Institutional Data report were gathered from the research report itself, which was published by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness at Western University. In 2018, one of the SSASS faculty project

directors was named a faculty fellow with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE). As part of her fellowship, she worked with an OIE research analyst to revisit the topic of student success among Western University's Southeast Asian American students, specifically, Hmong American students. In this report, the researchers cited the fact that Hmong American college student enrollment nationwide has more than doubled, growing from 11.8% in 2001 to 23.7% in 2010, but nearly half of these students fail to obtain a degree (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019). The researchers suggested these disparities "suggest that systematic challenges that Hmong Americans face have not been adequately addressed" and emphasized the "critical need to focus on advancing success outcomes for Hmong Americans in higher education" (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019, p. 5). With the highest proportion of Hmong students among all campuses in its statewide system, Western University provided the opportunity for the researchers to conduct a detailed investigation of Hmong students' experiences.

The researchers analyzed institutional data to provide a detailed assessment of Hmong students at Western University to better understand how educational institutions can build systems to support student success. Chief among their data findings was that Hmong students were admitted to the university at higher rates than other students, but graduate at disproportionately lower rates than all other students (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019).

In a survey comparing Hmong American students to a control group comprised of non-Hmong students with similar socioeconomic status and academic backgrounds, the researchers found that Hmong students: experience distinct academic challenges; are less certain about their academic progress and success; find some campus connections challenging; experience distinct challenges unique to their gender; and are unique in reporting romantic

relationships issues as barriers to their academic success (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019). Moreover, their survey findings also corroborated the 2014 survey findings of Gong et al. (2014) in that Hmong students in 2019 also reported lower perceived capacity to graduate; lower perceived sense of institutional support; lower sense of belonging; and were more likely to rely on advisors for information (Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019).

Off-Campus Supports for Asian American and Pacific Islander Student Success

The following section describes the results of my research inquiries into past and present off-campus supports for Asian American and Pacific Islander student success. With a diverse Asian American local population, some of whom have been here for several generations, it is important to acknowledge the fact that numerous individuals have been supportive of Western University, its Asian American Studies program, and efforts to support AAPI student success over the last several decades. The supports mentioned in this section, however, only include formal programmatic efforts by community-based organizations with the express intention of directly supporting AAPI student success at Western University.

Below are descriptions of various off-campus efforts led by community-based organizations to support Asian American and Pacific Islander student success at Western University. Although some of the individuals in these organizations may also be affiliated with Western University as part-time lecturers, faculty, or are alumni, it is important to recognize that their involvement in these efforts was not initiated by the university. Rather, the efforts described in this section were the result of community leaders who were committed to supporting efforts to increase AAPI student success at the university.

The Fresno Center (1991–)

The findings on The Fresno Center (TFC) were obtained through the organization's website and were supplemented with information gathered from two interviewees who worked directly with the organization to plan and implement the 2020 Journey to Success event.

Formerly known as The Fresno Center for New Americans, TFC was established in 1991 to establish the Hmong Resettlement Task Force to lead refugee resettlement efforts in the Fresno area. Today, TFC is regarded as one of the leading community-based organizations providing “services in employment, citizenship leadership, networking, mental health, research, and advocacy” (The Fresno Center, 2020, para. 4). In 2020, TFC was a crucial community partner to Western University in offering the university's Journey to Success student outreach and recruitment event targeting local AAPI high school students.

Parent University, a program of Fresno Unified School District (2010–)

The findings on Parent University were obtained through the program website and were supplemented with information gathered from two interviewees who worked directly with the organization to plan and implement the 2020 Journey to Success event. Parent University is a program of Fresno Unified School District (FUSD) with a mission is to “empower, engage, and connect families to support student achievement” (Parent University, 2020, para. 1). Its program empowers parents through courses designed to help parents navigate FUSD's resources, engages families to take targeted actions to support student success, and connects families with district and community resources to improve student achievement (Parent University, 2020). In 2020, Parent University, along with TFC, was a crucial community partner to Western University in offering the

university's Journey to Success student outreach and recruitment event targeting local AAPI high school students.

Organization: Central California Asian Pacific

Women (1980–)

The findings on Central California Asian Pacific Women (CCAPW) were largely obtained through my direct involvement as the former president of this organization. My recollections were supplemented with organizational files.

Founded in 1980, CCAPW is a nonprofit, pan-Asian American, community-based organization with a mission to empower generations of Asian American and Pacific Islander women in the Central Valley. Over the past 4 decades, CCAPW has awarded more than \$200,000 in scholarship funds to low-income API women from the Central Valley to support their higher education goals. The vast majority of CCAPW scholarship recipients are first generation college students and more than half have attended Western University. Further, many of CCAPW's volunteer board members have been faculty, staff, and/or administrators at Western University, and the organization consistently sponsors programs and events that support API diversity and student success. Because of this long history of support, CCAPW is a valued community partner of the university.

Organization: Southeast Asian Community Task

Force (2011–)

The findings about Southeast Asian Community Task Force were obtained through an email and subsequent interview with the former chair of this task force. The following section, including the subsection on the Southeast Asian Young

Men's Educational Summit and the Hmong Academic Decathlon reflects the information gathered from this source.

This task force was created in 2012 by local Southeast Asian community leaders who were concerned about persistent achievement gaps exhibited by Southeast Asian, primarily Hmong American, students at all levels of education. When Western University's new president arrived in 2014, this task force seized the opportunity to welcome him to the community and to make themselves known to him as a valuable bridge to the Southeast Asian communities.

The Southeast Asian Community Task Force has played a key role in advocating for the hiring of more Southeast Asian faculty and staff at Western University. When the director of the Asian American Studies program retired in 2015, the task force played a critical role in ensuring the university was committed to hiring a full-time, tenure-track faculty member to replace him so that the Asian American Studies program would not falter. The task force was also instrumental in lending its support to the approval of the Hmong minor program in 2016, and members of this task force also support many of the other on-campus programs and events supporting Hmong and Southeast Asian American student success.

Worth mentioning is the fact that the majority of the members of this task force are Hmong American community leaders. Although the name of the task force and some of their programmatic efforts are inclusive of all Southeast Asian Americans, in practice, their efforts are driven by these leaders' concerns regarding equity and access for Hmong American students.

Event: Southeast Asian young men's educational summit (2018). One of the achievements of the Southeast Asian Community Task Force was the creation and implementation of the Southeast Asian Young Men's Education Summit in May 2018. Prompted by concerns over gender disparities in Southeast Asian

students' retention and graduation rates, event organizers decided to convene this one-time event at Western University and received a modest grant from the president's office. The event brought together approximately 200 Southeast Asian – primarily Hmong American – high school and college-aged youth as well as Hmong male working professionals who served as guest speakers, workshop leaders, and mentors.

Program: Hmong academic decathlon (2018 –). Another programmatic achievement of this task force was the development of the Hmong Academic Decathlon in 2018 and which continues today. This event drew over 1,000 Hmong high school students, parents, and education community leaders in 2019, in a fun and competitive atmosphere that celebrated Hmong students' mastery of the Hmong language, culture, essay writing, and public speaking skills.

Organization: Laotian American Community of Fresno (2011 –)

The findings about the Laotian American Community of Fresno were obtained through an email and subsequent interview (see Appendix C) with the founder of this organization. The following section, including the subsection on the Annual Lao American Educational Conference, reflects the information gathered from this source.

The Laotian American Community of Fresno (LACF) is a community-based organization with a mission to empower and support Laotian communities and families to achieve educational and socioeconomic success through leadership development, mentoring, and cultural preservation. LACF offers scholarships and supports the educational success of Laotian American students.

Event: Annual Lao American educational conference (2017–). In 2017, LACF hosted the First Annual Lao American Educational Conference (ALEC) in

the Fresno area as an event to motivate and empower Lao youth and families to pursue higher education. This event was launched because one of the LACF leaders was concerned that Lao and Cambodian American youth were not being adequately included in prior efforts to outreach to Southeast Asian students, which seemed to be more targeted toward Hmong Americans. As a result, this leader took the initiative to launch an independent effort headed by LACF to ensure Lao and Cambodian high school students were being invited and welcomed to Western University through targeted outreach efforts.

LACF partnered with Western University, the local school district, and other community-based organizations to fundraise and launch the first ALEC in Fresno in 2017. The first year, approximately 150 students, primarily Lao Americans, attended this event and attendance has increased each year. In 2019, attendance grew to approximately 275 students, mostly Lao Americans, but also some Cambodian Americans.

Summary of Findings: Environmental Scan

The findings of this environmental scan are summarized in Tables 21-23. Table 21 includes on-campus efforts targeting AAPI student success for which the institution has committed funding to support their continuation either in full or in part. Some of these efforts, such as the Asian Faculty and Staff Association and the AAPI Commencement Celebration, receive only a portion of their annual budgets from the university; the rest of the funds required to carry out their annual activities are raised through the volunteer efforts of their board or planning committee members. Others, such as EOP and the Cross Cultural and Gender Center, appear to receive all of their annual budgets from the university.

Table 21

On-Campus, Institution-funded Supports for AAPI Student Success

No.	Name/Title	Type of Support	Target Population/s	Active (Y/N)	Receives Institutional Funding (Y/N)	Year started	Year ended
1	Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)	Organization	first-gen, low-income, minorities	Y	Y	1968	
2	Asian Faculty & Staff Assn (AFSA)	Organization	AAPI	Y	Y	2008	
3	AAPI Commencement Celebration	Program/Event	AAPI	Y	Y	2015	
4	Cross Cultural & Gender Center	Organization	minorities, gender	Y	Y	2015	
5	APIA Programs & Services	Organization	AAPI	Y	Y	2015	
6	Hmong Minor	Program	Hmong	Y	Y	2016	

Table 22 includes on-campus efforts targeting AAPI student success for which the institution does not commit any annual funds. Some of these efforts are still active and depend on volunteer fundraising efforts to support their continuation, while others do not necessarily require any special funding, since they are incorporated into an existing department or office. Others have received one-time sponsorship support from the university president's discretionary fund, but this support is neither guaranteed nor expected on an annual basis. Still other efforts included in this table are past efforts that no longer exist or exist in name only and do not appear to have any recent activity.

Table 23 includes off-campus supports for AAPI student success, for which the university does not provide any committed funding. In fact, several of these organizations provide in-kind or other funding sponsorships to the university in their efforts to support AAPI student success.

Table 22

On-Campus, Non-funded Supports for AAPI Student Success (Past & Present)

#	Name/Title	Type of Support	Target Population/s	Active (Y/N)	Receives Institutional Funding (Y/N)	Year started	Year ended
1	SEA Student Services (SEASS)	Organization	SEA	N	N/A	1986	2003
2	SEASS Graduation	Event	SEA	N	N/A	1998	2003
3	Hmong & SEA Resource & Information	Organization	Hmong, SEA	N	N	1990s	unclear
4	Center for SEA Studies	Organization	SEA	N	N	1995	unclear
5	AFSA Book Awards	Program	AAPI	Y	N	2008	
6	Raising the Bar Student Symposium	Event	AAPI	N	N	2018	2018
7	Southeast Asian Youth	Project	SEA	N	N	2012	2012
8	Academic Challenges of SEAs	Project/Research	SEA	N	N	2013	2014
9	Supporting Southeast Asian Student Success (SSASS)	Project/Research	SEA	N	N	2014	2015
10	CSU AAPI Task Force	Organization	AAPI	N	N/A	2014	2017
11	Journey to Success	Program	Hmong, SEA	Y	N	2015	
12	Asia in Fresno	Project	AAPI	N	N	2017	2018
13	The Role of Institutional Data: Hmong Student Success	Research	Hmong	N	N	2019	2019

Table 23

Off-Campus Supports for AAPI Student Success (1980–present)

#	Name/Title	Type of Support	Target Population/s	Active (Y/N)	Receives Institutional Funding (Y/N)	Year started	Year ended
1	The Fresno Center	Organization	SEA, Hmong, refugees	Y	N/A	1991	
2	Parent University	Organization	not specified	Y	N/A	2010	
3	Central California Asian Pacific Women (CCAPW)	Organization	AAPI	Y	N/A	1980	
4	Southeast Asian Community Task Force	Organization	SEA, Hmong	Y	N/A	2011	
5	Southeast Asian Young Men's Educational Summit	Event	SEA, Hmong	N	N/A	2018	2018
6	Hmong Academic Decathlon	Program/Event	Hmong	N	N/A	2018	
7	Laotian Community of Fresno (LACF)	Organization	Laotian	Y	N/A	2011	
8	Annual Lao American Educational Conference (ALEC)	Event	Laotian	Y	N/A	2017	

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented my findings from research examining institutional student data on the top ten most prevalent Asian American ethnicities at Western University. This research examined socioeconomic variables such as first generation student status, Pell grant status, and parent education levels, as well as academic achievement variables, such as high school GPA, college GPA, 4-year graduation rate, and 6-year graduation rate.

In presenting the results of these research variables, I presented the data both disaggregated by ethnic group as well as aggregated into four regional subgroup identifiers: East Asian, Filipino, South Asian, and Southeast Asian. The purpose of using these subgroupings was to determine whether these identifiers were useful in accurately depicting similarities among the ethnicities they

encompassed. In so doing, I concluded that these subgroupings correctly and consistently portrayed shared characteristics, at least among the selected socioeconomic and academic achievement research variables.

I also presented my findings in the area of academic affairs, examining which colleges Asian American students at Western University are most likely to attend and participation levels in the Asian American Studies program. I attempted to review data on Asian American participation in programs that support student success, but discovered inconsistencies with data collection that precluded this analysis.

I then pivoted my strategy to document the range of programmatic efforts, past and present, that aim to support Asian American and Pacific Islander student success. These efforts are summarized and presented chronologically in order to better understand the numerous and wide-ranging contributions of individuals and organizations who care deeply about Asian American student success. Findings of this program review demonstrated that Western University has greatly benefited from the selfless dedication of numerous individuals and organizations both on- and off-campus, many of whom voluntarily led efforts supporting Asian American student success over the past 4 decades.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter, I presented findings from institutional data describing socioeconomic profiles and academic achievements of Asian American first-time freshmen at Western University from the 2010-2013 cohorts. These data findings were disaggregated by the top 10 most prevalent Asian ethnicities on campus, as well as by the four major Asian subgroups of East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Filipino. The data overwhelmingly indicate that Southeast Asians are the least academically successful subgroup, with Hmong, Lao, and Cambodian ethnicities at the bottom of each nearly every achievement variable studied (college GPA, 4-year graduation rate, 6-year graduation rate).

Further, I presented a chronological review of my research documenting various programs, events, and research efforts addressing Asian American achievement at Western University. In presenting these research findings, it became clear that Western University is very fortunate to have a strong community of support for its Asian American students. The long history and breadth of efforts led by individuals and organizations both on- and off-campus clearly demonstrate longstanding concern over the lack of institutional supports for Asian American students, the third largest racial group on campus. The fact that the institution has merely played a supporting role in these various efforts, some of which were initiated more than four decades ago, and has yet to initiate a comprehensive effort to target these struggling students is troubling.

It is imperative to note that this study was only possible because Western University collects and tracks disaggregated data on its Asian American students. This detailed data have only been available since 2010 when the university made the crucial decision to break out Asian racial data into disaggregated ethnicities.

Prior to 2010, this detailed analysis of the various Asian subgroups would have been impossible, given the previous limitations of aggregated Asian data.

Still, even with aggregated data indicating that Asian American students lagged behind their White, Latinx, and African American peers in 4- and 6-year graduation rates, the university has still not taken proactive measures to address these gaps. This study calls attention to this absence of an institutional response by highlighting specific findings that demonstrate significant areas of disparity. This study further suggests that the lack of institutional attention to these disparities is due to institutionalized patterns of discrimination, perhaps partly due to the ensuring effects of the model minority myth and a reluctance to challenge the existing racial hierarchy.

However, another major factor to consider is the fact that Western University is a public university in the state of California. Since Proposition 209 was approved in 1996, it has had a substantial impact on all state agencies – including Western University – by prohibiting the use of race, ethnicity, or gender to discriminate against them or give them preference in university admissions, public employment, or competition for a state contract. Such prohibitions may have inhibited the university's abilities to implement programming designed to target Asian Americans who may need additional support to succeed.

Regardless of the reasons, the lack of a comprehensive strategy to address the academic challenges facing its Asian American and Pacific Islander students is a significant challenge to Western University made even more troubling by the fact that the university's designation as a Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI).

In this chapter, I discuss the implications of my findings demonstrating that the educational needs of Asian American students at Western University,

particularly Southeast Asian Americans, are still great, but remain unaddressed by the institution as a whole. I also outline a set of recommendations for institutional action to address these disparities.

Educational Disparities

As described in Chapter 1, Asian Americans are a racialized and marginalized minority in the United States that defies easy description. Given their complex heterogeneity, Asian Americans are not a monolithic community. Yet, because Asian Americans have long been lumped into one racial category, particularly at the federal level, public policies impacting these diverse ethnic groups have failed to address vast disparities within this racial definition. Because East Asian, Filipino, and South Asian ethnic groups vastly outnumber Southeast Asian ethnic groups, the appearance of the overall Asian American population is skewed heavily toward these groups. Further, because East Asian, Filipino, and South Asian ethnic groups tend to demonstrate higher rates of education and economic achievements, these achievements outweigh the challenges of Southeast Asians, a small minority within a minority.

At Western University, however, the Asian American student population is unique in its ethnic composition. Representing more than two-thirds (69%) of Asian American first-time freshmen in the 2010-2013 cohorts, Southeast Asian students are the dominant majority in this large, public university serving the Central California region. Yet, the university has struggled to adequately support the educational needs of its Southeast Asian students, despite varied efforts that date back to the 1980s. The findings reported in Chapter 4 describe the continued struggles of Southeast Asians to reach parity with other Asian American students. Even though more than 40 years has elapsed since these students first confounded faculty, staff, and administrators with their lack of traditional educational

knowledge and skills, the university has still not developed a comprehensive strategy to effectively support subsequent generations of these students.

Relevance of Using Regional Subgroup Identifiers

In chapter 3, I examined each research variable by disaggregated data for the top ten most prevalent Asian American ethnicities as well as aggregated by the four major subgroups of Asian American ethnicities: East Asian, Filipino, South Asian, and Southeast Asian. Since I have already discussed the inherent problems of aggregating Asian Americans into one racial group, I wanted to examine whether using the regional subgroup identifiers of East Asian, Filipino, South Asian, and Southeast Asian is appropriate or useful. I did not find any instances where an individual ethnic group displayed data results that were at odds with other ethnic groups in the same subgroup. Therefore, the findings in Chapter 4 indicate that these regional subgroup identifiers are both useful and consistent in accurately depicting their subsumed ethnic groups. The remainder of this chapter will thus discuss major findings as they pertain to regional subgroups, rather than according to individual ethnicities.

Worth noting is the essential fact that these regional subgroup identifiers would not be possible without the collection of disaggregated ethnicity data for the Asian populations. Western University only began collecting data disaggregated by Asian ethnicity in 2010; prior to 2010, it would have been impossible to chart progress for any individual ethnic group, such as Hmong, Lao, or Cambodian, or to group them as Southeast Asians. Even within Western University, the lack of consistency and the lack of disaggregated ethnicity categories precluded this study from examining student success program data. Outside of Western University, local school districts and community college districts have their own ways of collecting race and ethnicity data on their students; some of these systems do not

disaggregate Asian American ethnic data at all, while others may, but data is inconsistent or incomplete.

Socioeconomic Profiles

The findings of this study suggest that Southeast Asian American students are far more likely to rank lower than other Asian American students on conventional socioeconomic indicators such as household income and parent education levels. These indicators were reflected in the four research variables, first generation student status, Pell grant status, mother's education level, and father's education level. Across all four measures, the results for the Southeast Asian subgroup indicated these students are at a significant disadvantage when compared to the other three Asian subgroups.

First generation student status. Southeast Asian students were far more likely to be first generation students than any other subgroup, with 90% of Southeast Asians belonging to this category, compared to 31% of Filipinos, 40% of East Asians, and 66% of South Asians. Within the Southeast Asian subgroup, Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian students all displayed rates over 90%, while 81% of Vietnamese students were first generation college students. The implications of these findings are that Southeast Asian college students at Western University are far more likely than their Asian American peers to lack the guidance of college-educated role models to help them navigate the college experience.

Pell grant status. Using Pell grant status as a proxy indicator of family or household income revealed even more stark disparities between Southeast Asian students and their Asian American peers at Western University. Nearly all (96%) of the Southeast Asian students were Pell grant eligible, compared to 35% of Filipinos, 39% of East Asians, and 67% of South Asians. Again, when looking at

each of the ethnicities within the Southeast Asian subgroup, 97% of Cambodian, 96% of Hmong, and 91% of Laotians were Pell grant eligible. Even though the Pell eligible rate for Vietnamese was slightly lower at 83%, it is worth noting that this rate is considerably higher than the next highest rate of 67% for Asian Indians. These extraordinarily high rates of Pell grant eligibility illustrate the fact that, on average, Southeast Asian students come from families and/or households with significantly lower income levels compared with their Asian American peers.

This finding is consistent with previous research done at Western University (Gong et al., 2014; Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019; Zelezny & Takahashi, 2016). Another report by the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice (2013) based on 2010 Census data also found that Southeast Asian groups in the Fresno area were more likely to have high poverty and low-income rates compared to the total population. This same report reported that Hmong, Laotian, and Cambodian Americans in Fresno have lower per capita incomes than other Asian American groups (\$7,943, \$11,214, and \$11,611) and earn less than their Latino peers (\$12,622). Further, this report noted that 45% of Cambodian and Hmong American children live in poverty, a rate higher than the area's African Americans and Latinos (42% and 39%, respectively).

The implications of these sobering statistics on income as reflected in students' Pell grant eligibility status are that Western University's Southeast Asian American students come from even more economically disadvantaged backgrounds than their African American and Latino peers. Yet, because they are counted as "Asian," they are not considered "underrepresented minorities" and are not targeted as such.

Mother's education. The data for parental education level were broken out separately for each parent's education level. Southeast Asian students were much

more likely than their Asian American peers to have mothers with little or no formal education. Forty-seven percent of Southeast Asian students reported their mothers had “no school,” and 10% reported their mothers had “some high school,” for a combined total of 57% for these two lowest education categories. South Asian mothers had the next highest rates, with 16% possessing “no school” and 19% with “some high school” for a combined total of 35% for both categories.

On the other end of the spectrum, student with mothers most likely to hold 4-year or postgraduate degrees were East Asian (46%) and Filipino (45%). By contrast, only 6% of Southeast Asian mothers held a 4-year degree and only 1% held a postgraduate degree for a combined total of 7%.

The implications for these findings are the extreme differences in knowledge and familiarity with the educational system, particularly for higher education. With nearly half of all Southeast Asian students reporting their mothers had either “no school” or only “some high school,” a major issue for these students is learning to navigate the college experience on their own. As a commuter campus, the vast majority of Southeast Asian students live at home; for many of these students, finding a sense of belonging on campus is a significant challenge (Gong et al., 2014).

Father’s education. Overall, education levels were fairly consistent across both mothers and fathers, though fathers’ education levels were slightly higher across the board. Notably, Hmong students were alone in reporting a majority (58%) of fathers with little or no formal education (49% had “no school” and 9% had “some high school”). Other Southeast Asian students also reported higher than average rates of fathers possessing little or no formal education, with 46% of Vietnamese, 43% of Cambodian, and 41% of Laotian fathers belonging to the

lowest two educational categories. South Asians reported the next highest rates, with 35% of fathers possessing “no school” or “some high school.”

On the other end of the spectrum, 46% of East Asian fathers and 45% of Filipino fathers had 4-year or postgraduate degrees. Only 6% of Southeast Asian students had fathers with 4-year degrees and 1% had fathers with postgraduate degrees for a combined total of 7%.

The finding that Hmong students alone reported roughly half (49%) of fathers possessed “no school” and 9% had “some high school” is, while striking, understandable with some knowledge about the recent history of the Hmong, their involvement in the “Secret War” in Laos, and why so many of them arrived in the U.S. as refugees. Because the Hmong were recruited by the U.S. to help fight the spread of communism in the 1960s and early 1970s, many of these Hmong men and boys, some as young as 10 years old at the time, took up arms. Those who survived and managed to escape Laos and come the U.S. as refugees are likely the fathers of the Hmong American students at Western University.

Knowing this bit of history and context for current Hmong American students, it is therefore not surprising to learn that more than half of Hmong students’ fathers lack formal educations. This family history may also explain why Hmong students report distinct challenges such as asking for help, making campus connections, and balancing family responsibilities (Gong et al., 2014; Takahashi & Nottbohm, 2019). Fathers who have survived these past traumas and continue to struggle to provide for their families likely do not fully understand or appreciate the increased workload or time commitments their children need to succeed in college.

Academic Achievement Profiles

Consistent with the results of the analysis of socioeconomic indicators, the findings regarding academic achievement variables also reveal striking disparities between Southeast Asian and other Asian American students at Western University. With the exception of high school GPA, Southeast Asian American students scored significantly lower across all other research variables, suggesting the presence of persistent inequities that continue to stymie their success.

High school GPA. The findings comparing high school GPA across the 10 Asian American ethnicities as well as across the four Asian subgroups were not particularly instructive. For most Asian subgroups, the most common GPA range was 3.0-3.49; the only exceptions were Chinese, Pakistani, and Vietnamese, for whom the number of students in the 3.5-3.99 range slightly outweighed those in the 3.0-3.49 range. Perhaps because of university admission criteria, students' high school GPAs were fairly consistent irrespective of ethnicity or subgroup.

College GPA. Examining college GPA revealed more enlightening findings. Although Asian American students entered the university with fairly consistent high school GPAs, their college GPAs begin to reveal uneven rates of academic progress. Because the college GPA data totals reflect students' cumulative GPA as of their last semester they were enrolled at the university, the data include students at various stages of their academic career. Some may have graduated and their final GPA is reflected in these data, while others may have been disenrolled due to having a GPA below a 2.0 after their freshman year. Unfortunately, the data I collected did not link students' GPAs to either of these outcomes.

Still, examining disparities of college GPA between subgroups still indicated uneven rates of academic success. When the data were examined

according to the four Asian American subgroups, Southeast Asians are most heavily concentrated in the 2.5-2.99 range, while East Asians and South Asians tend to be more heavily represented across the 3.0-3.49 and 3.5-3.99 ranges. Notably, at least one-quarter of East Asians, Filipinos, and South Asians fall in the 3.5-3.99 range, compared to only 8% of Southeast Asians. These differences between subgroups in college GPA support previous findings of inequities that appear to differentially impact Southeast Asian American students.

Further, a chi-square test of independence revealed there was a relationship between ethnic subgroup and college GPA. In other words, the observed distribution of college GPAs across the four Asian American subgroups differed enough from the expected distribution of college GPAs to be statistically significant.

Graduation rates: 4-year and 6-year. The data on graduation rates are even more telling. East Asians had the highest rates of 4-year graduation (22%), followed by South Asians (18%) and Filipinos (10%). Southeast Asians had the lowest 4-year graduation rate at 4%. When comparing these 4-year graduation rates against the university average (15.8%), it is clear that East Asian and South Asian Americans outperform their peers, while Filipino Americans lag behind their peers. Southeast Asian Americans clearly lag significantly behind their peers. However, when all four Asian American subgroups are treated as an aggregate group, the average 4-year graduation rate for all Asian Americans is 13.5%, just slightly behind the university average, effectively masking these intra-group disparities.

Although most Asian American students at Western University do not earn degrees in 4 years, the majority do graduate in 6 years. Again, East Asians had the highest rates of 6-year graduation (74%), followed by South Asians (68%) and

Filipinos (54%). Southeast Asians trailed these groups, with only 40% of these students graduating within 6 years. Stated another way, more than half of all Southeast Asians who enrolled at Western University *with similar high school GPAs* as their Asian American peers are dropping out or failing to graduate.

When comparing these rates against their cohort peers, again it is clear that East Asian and South Asian Americans have much higher 6-year graduation rates than the university average (55.6%). On this measure, Filipinos are nearly on par with the university average. However, Southeast Asians again trail far behind their peers. When treating all Asian Americans as an aggregate group, their average 6-year graduation rate is 59%, a rate that is slightly better than the university average, again effectively masking significant intra-group disparities.

These disparities are cause for serious concern, especially given Western University's stated goal of achieving a 4-year graduation rate of 35% and a 6-year graduation rate of 69% by 2025. Examining the data on graduation rates by Asian American subgroup reveals that while East Asians and South Asians are on track to exceed these goals and Filipinos may be able to come close to meeting them, Southeast Asians are far less likely to make up that much ground over the next four to five years to meet these goals. However, data dashboards provided by the university system do not reveal these needs, as the data used is not disaggregated by ethnicity or subgroup. Further, because Asian Americans are not considered part of the URM population, their data are commingled with White students' data, further rendering the particular needs of struggling Asian American students insignificant and invisible.

College enrollments. The results of analyzing academic interests and enrollment trends revealed that Asian American students at Western University tended to be most highly concentrated in the College of Health and Human

Services. Asian American students also tend to be more highly represented in the College of Science and Mathematics and the College of Business.

Implications of this finding are simply that those colleges with greater numbers of Asian American students may need to ensure their faculty and staff, particularly those involved in academic advising, are sensitive to particular issues that disproportionately impact Asian American students at Western University.

Asian American studies enrollments and minor. While the results of this study's analysis of student participation in Western University's Asian American Studies Program (ASAM) may not appear to be encouraging on the surface, a deeper look is warranted. I examined ASAM course enrollment trends and the number of students who declared the ASAM minor over the past 10 years. Asian American students comprised the dominant majority (61%) of students who enrolled in ASAM courses, but the courses, particularly those that are in the general education curriculum, also enroll a diverse mix of Hispanics (19%), Whites (10%), and others. Looking more closely at the Asian American student enrollment revealed that the majority (59%) were Southeast Asian, a fact that is not surprising given the demographic profile of the university.

The results of this study's examination of student participation in the ASAM minor are similarly lackluster on the surface. From 2010 to 2019, only four students graduated with an ASAM minor: one in 2015, one in 2018, and two in 2019. However, 13 students declared the ASAM minor, but 11 of these 13 declared the minor in Spring 2019 and have not yet graduated.

Examining ASAM enrollment and participation in the ASAM minor over the 10-year period of 2010-2019 revealed a fractious program history due to a major faculty transition. In 2011, the ASAM program director announced his impending retirement after having served as the sole full-time faculty involved in

the program for over 40 years. At Western University, retiring faculty are allowed to teach part-time for up to five years, after which time they cease teaching altogether. To ensure that the ASAM courses that were included in the general education curriculum would continue, the retiring program director hired me as a part-time lecturer as a temporary strategy to teach these two courses in his absence on alternating semesters. In so doing, he ensured the ASAM program could continue at least on a limited basis during his retirement. In the meantime, he hoped that the department which housed the ASAM program would begin to conduct a search to hire his replacement, however, that search did not happen until the final semester of his retirement.

Because of this arrangement, the range of ASAM courses offered shrank considerably and course electives were only sporadically offered. Also, without the director's constant presence on campus, student advising declined considerably, as did outreach efforts to attract new students to enroll in ASAM courses. During this 5-year period of faculty transition, the ASAM program was effectively stalled and survived largely on auto-pilot.

In Spring 2015, the department which housed the ASAM program launched a national search for a full-time, tenure-track faculty position to replace the outgoing director in anticipation of his full retirement. As a result of this search, two new faculty were hired to revive the struggling ASAM program. Both started the following academic year.

With the addition of the new faculty and the continuation of the same part-time lecturer, the number of ASAM courses offered each semester has slowly increased. Whereas only two ASAM courses had been consistently offered each semester from 2010-2015, there are now four to five ASAM courses regularly open for enrollment each semester and the new faculty are working to develop

new courses in order to continue to grow program. The recent uptick in declared ASAM minors also coincides with the increased activity of the new ASAM faculty. The sudden jump in declared minors in the past year provides some early evidence of the promising results of the ASAM program's budding team efforts.

Connections to Prior Research

Using a critical race theory framework through which to view Asian Americans' unique racialized status challenges the dichotomous framing that typifies most discussions around racial inequalities in the U.S. This normative frame has historically created a racial spectrum, with Blacks and Latinos on one end and Asian Americans and Whites on the other (Teranishi et al., 2009). The limitations of this paradigm do not tolerate discrepancies, therefore, any incongruities are ignored and effectively silenced. In the case of Asian Americans at Western University, the extreme discrepancies in socioeconomic backgrounds reported in this study would have remained invisible if not for the conscious decision to disaggregate the data by both ethnicity and subgroup.

Indeed, the paucity of research examining Asian American students in higher education is one of the key issues contributing to their continued educational disparities. The lack of research on Asian American educational experiences contributes to continued misperceptions and masks the challenges that many of these students encounter on college campuses (Museus & Park, 2015). Asian subgroups with lower socioeconomic levels like Southeast Asians experience challenges identical to those of other historically underserved minorities. Yet, due to the limitations of the normative framework, Asian Americans as a group are not considered underserved and must endure institutional, cultural, and individual forms of racism. For Asian American college students, these forms of racism are manifested in ways both overt and subtle,

including the common but erroneous assumption that “Asians are the new Whites and do not face discrimination” (Museus & Park, 2015, p. 552).

The wide range of socioeconomic discrepancies between ethnic subgroups demonstrate the importance of using an AsianCrit framework to better understand the diversity of the Asian American experience. By centering the voices and experiences of Asian Americans, AsianCrit creates the space needed to critically analyze Asian American experiences within the broader racial hierarchy described by critical race theory (Iftikar & Museus, 2018).

Viewing the present status of the diverse Asian American subgroups at Western University through an AsianCrit lens reveals a critically underserved population that has been systematically overlooked by the university. The institutional fallout from the campus’ fractious history with racial minorities, the lingering effects of the model minority myth, and the dramatic shift in the Asian American student population’s ethnic composition and size have coalesced over the past 4 decades, giving rise to the panoply of inequities evidenced in this study.

How Western University is Serving Asian American and Pacific Islander Students

Despite its designation as an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI), Western University lacks a comprehensive, institutionalized program that specifically targets the Asian American and Pacific Islander student success. Further, the lack of a strong Asian American Studies program and the lack of an office dedicated to Asian American and Pacific Islander student success (as a parallel, for example, to the Office of Black Student Success) hinders the perception of Western University as an institution that welcomes and proactively supports the success of its AAPI students.

On-Campus Supports for API Student Success

While the history and range of on-campus organizations, programs, and other efforts to support the success of API students is heartening, the fact that so few of these efforts were initiated by university leadership is not. Excluding the Educational Opportunities Program (EOP), which was not created with the specific vision of supporting API students, only the Southeast Asian Student Services (SEASS) program, the creation of the Asian Pacific Islander Programs and Services office within the Cross Cultural and Gender Center, and the founding of Asian Faculty and Staff Association (AFSA) can credit their origins to university administrative leadership. All of the other 15 efforts identified in this study were conceived and initiated by faculty or staff who recognized a need to address disparities in AAPI outcomes and took action to rectify the problem of inequities.

It is essential to point out that the majority of these faculty- and staff-led efforts were not created in coordination with any particular office or university administrator. Rather, most were launched purely through individual efforts, independent of university input or support, and were sustained primarily by the founding faculty and/or staff who were willing to commit countless volunteer hours to ensure their success.

The university has eventually supported many of these projects, with financial support granted largely through personal requests made directly to the president's office. But because they are not institutionalized under the responsibility of a designated campus entity and have no place in the university's annual budget, these efforts are not likely to be sustainable over the long-term. The university has been fortunate to have numerous faculty and staff over the past 4 decades who are dedicated to supporting the success of its API students.

However, university leaders should not continue to rely on the goodwill and initiative of dedicated faculty and staff to solve the persistent problem of educational inequities impacting its Asian American students, especially when it is marketing itself as an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI).

Off-Campus Supports for API Student Success

Western University is also extremely fortunate to have the strong support of local Asian American nonprofit organizations and individual community leaders. Although these organizations are not formally affiliated with the university, they have sponsored various programs and events at the campus and play an important role as advocates for API students. These off-campus entities also have a track record of giving both financial and moral support for Western University AAPI students and should be recognized as valuable university partners.

Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on Western University, a large, four-year institution that is part of a statewide public university system, but its findings are intended to be generalizable to other educational institutions that serve large numbers of low-income, first-generation AAPI students, such as those that share the AANAPISI designation. However, because Pacific Islanders comprise only 1.4% of this study's AAPI sample population, all Pacific Islander students were excluded from analysis out of concern for student privacy. The fact that this study only includes Asian American ethnic groups is a major limitation to applying its findings to other educational institutions that may have larger Pacific Islander student enrollments.

Another major limitation was the inability to analyze student usage data for programs that intend to support student success. One of the original research questions for this study was to analyze whether and to what extent current student support programs were serving AAPI students. However, one of the key problems OIE staff encountered when running identical data queries was resulting in data sets that could not be reliably reproduced or analyzed. Therefore, one of the major limitations of this study was the inability to analyze or draw reliable conclusions from this data set because of the current state of the available data.

Several other limitations were carefully considered in creating the research design. Possible limitations include the single research site and the limited sample size of some of the ethnic student groups. For a fully developed research study of how AAPIs navigate and persist in colleges, it would be ideal to compare Western University with at least two or three other campuses in the same public university system that serve similar-sized populations of AAPI students. Nevertheless, this research design is constructed to address the specific conditions of AAPI students at Western University, so its findings are limited to only this campus.

Implications

Because Western University is situated in an area in which large numbers of Hmong refugees were resettled in the 1980s and 1990s, the university reflects this specific demographic. The area is also home to sizeable communities of Laotians and Cambodians and smaller numbers of Vietnamese and Mien (an ethnic minority group from Laos), which also explains their presence at the university.

The socioeconomic inequities experienced by Western University Asian American students are largely historically situated and systemic in nature. Because of their recent refugee history, Southeast Asians share the twin experiences of

overcoming trauma and forging a means of economic survival in a new country. With these experiences combined with the fact that most arrived in the Central Valley region in the last 30 years, the span of one generation, it is understandable that so few of today's students' parents possess high levels of formal education or head households with higher incomes. Given their histories and experiences, it would be absurd to expect otherwise.

Yet, because our government and educational institutions lacks the framework to parse such diversity, Asian Americans are assumed to be a monolithic racial group. Without a critical framework that encourages the widespread disaggregation of Asian American data, Southeast Asians have been held to the same "model minority" stereotype that was ascribed to Asian Americans more than a decade before their arrival.

The toxic perpetuation of the "model minority" myth has not only complicated the perception of racism directed toward Asian Americans, but it has also reduced the visibility of this racism. In the years since its introduction, this myth has been repeatedly leveraged to obscure the vast diversity within the Asian American community. Stereotypes about Asian Americans as a homogeneous, high-achieving group that needs neither assistance nor affirmative action have become so entrenched as to now be codified as public policy.

The largely unchallenged and unchanged system of aggregating all Asian (and sometimes Pacific Islander, too) into one aggregate category is one fundamental example of how these stereotypes have had policy implications. The U.S. Census has made some critical accommodations in separating the Asian and Pacific Islander categories, as well as providing a range of ethnicity checkbox options. But state and local governments, school districts, and healthcare systems have yet to mandate similar changes and continue to aggregate data or use

outdated and/or inconsistent ethnic categories. Although Asian American and Pacific Islander scholars and advocacy groups have been pressing for states like California to enact legislation that would mandate disaggregation of Asian ethnic data, these attempts have largely been dismissed or vetoed.

The lack of government directives to disaggregate Asian data by ethnicity has had a cascading effect that disproportionately impacts lower socioeconomic subgroups. An example of this type of unjust impact is the blanket exclusion of Asian Americans from the category of URMs. As demonstrated in this study, even though some Asian subgroups exhibit the same or even more heightened rates of economic or educational disadvantages as other racial groups that are classified as URMs, they are still systematically excluded by virtue of their aggregate racial identification. In this way, Asian Americans have been held up as an example of minority “success” as a strategy to silence those who question systemic injustice.

Yet, paradoxically, while the model minority stereotype denies Asian Americans URM status, the current surge in pandemic-fueled harassment toward Asian Americans is a reminder that their belonging as Americans is conditional. The recent spate of hate crimes directed toward those with an outward “Asian” appearance, regardless of their ethnicity, rekindles memories of the Chinese Exclusion Act, Japanese internment, Vincent Chin, and numerous other times in our nation’s history where Asians were vilified and blamed for society’s woes. While some Asian Americans became accustomed to being overlooked in racial discussions – or may have taken refuge in the shelter that the model minority stereotype once afforded – they are now experiencing the brunt of our nation’s deeply-rooted, yet unaddressed, xenophobia.

Educational leaders who understand these challenges yet fail to systematically address them have effectively allowed the model minority myth to

continue. In tolerating inadequate policies and implementing programs that fail to correct their shortcomings, educational leaders are upholding deeply rooted systems of inequities that impact Asian American students. At Western University, where Asian Americans are the third largest racial group, institutional efforts to support their success have been inconsistent, narrowly-focused, and lacked a coherent strategy to support their long-term sustainability.

In today's environment, this track record of institutional indifference speaks volumes. Were it not for the independent efforts of caring and committed faculty, staff, students, and community leaders, Asian American students at Western University would have likely languished, unnoticed and unassisted. Still, even with these accumulated efforts, Asian American students lag behind their peers in several measures of academic success. This study demonstrated that Southeast Asian American students lag significantly behind their peers on several measures of academic success. While this analysis was only possible because the university began collecting disaggregated Asian data in 2010, aggregated data also indicate that Asian American students' 4- and 6-year graduation rates trail those of their White, Latinx, and African American peers. Even with these data, the university has yet to institute proactive, targeted measures to address these gaps.

While none of the people I interviewed cited concerns related to complying with Proposition 209, Western University's leadership may be more knowledgeable and attentive to this California legislation, particularly when addressing issues of equity involving a racial component. Still, there are steps the university can take to address historic inequities that have adversely impacted its underserved Asian American students. The constraints of this legislation primarily focus on limiting the availability of programs or resources based on race or gender; targeting race or gender is acceptable, as long as services are open to all

students (University of California, 2016). As the “Guidelines for Enhancing Diversity at UC in the Context of Proposition 209” state, “UC or student groups may provide support services that focus on the experience of URM students, to increase their chances of success at UC, as long as those services are open to all students” (University of California, 2016, p. 6).

Regardless of the reasons, the lack of a coherent strategy to address the academic challenges of its Asian American students is a significant challenge to Western University. That the university is designated a Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI) is even more troubling particularly because the university has benefited from touting its commitment to diversity. It has been recognized as a leading public university for expanding educational opportunities for diverse students and is highly ranked nationally for its graduate-rate performance, particularly for first-generation undergraduates receiving Pell grants.

Yet, as this study illustrates, a closer examination of both student data and campus-wide programming reveals a different story within the Asian American student population. Despite its AANAPISI designation, the university has not taken on the mantle of responsibility to lead efforts that address systemic disparities and actually *serve* its non-URM Asian American students, the majority of whom are first-generation, low-income Southeast Asian Americans. The solution to a problem as deep-rooted as anti-Asian racism cannot be piecemeal and should not rely solely on the goodwill and volunteer initiative of individuals. As an AANAPISI, for Western University to prolong the status quo of institutional apathy toward supporting the success of its AAPI students is unacceptable.

As a new wave of anti-Asian xenophobia triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has resurfaced, the time has come for the university to play a leading

role in combating rampant misrepresentations about Asian Americans. Western University should be at the forefront of efforts to re-shape the narrative about the diversity of the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. In doing so, the university must also demonstrate bold leadership to ensure the success of their AAPI students by investing in its students, staff, faculty, and administrators through a comprehensive, transformative, and sustained social justice-oriented strategy.

Recommendations

The following section details a set of recommendations outlining my vision of how Western University can operationalize a comprehensive, long-term strategy to increase the success of its Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students. These recommendations are detailed in this section and are organized into three main categories of action: reframe understandings of equity; expand and improve data collection and analysis; and create and implement a comprehensive and sustained AAPI student success strategy.

Reframe Understandings of Equity

The challenges identified in this study speak directly to the need to embrace transformational changes regarding how Western University frames its efforts to achieve equity. Educational leaders must understand the socio-political and socio-historical forces that continue to marginalize Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in order to enact corrective measures to effectively address these inequities.

Although the findings of this study show that Southeast Asians were the most vulnerable Asian American ethnic subgroup, these findings by no means imply that other Asian American students are not in need of academic support.

Rather than focusing on isolated solutions that narrowly address only the most disadvantaged AAPI ethnic subgroups, I propose Western University adopt a more comprehensive approach that would encompass all disadvantaged students, irrespective of race, in order to advance equity.

Consider alternatives to URM/Non-URM to identify and assist underserved students. Western University should cease its reliance on the traditional URM/Non-URM binary model and embrace a more critical construct that redefines the concepts of “underrepresented” and “underserved” as they pertain to contemporary students. As this study illustrates, the binary URM/Non-URM model is insufficient to accurately predict which students may require additional support to be successful, particularly in the case of Asian Americans. To more accurately identify students who are likely to be at significant disadvantage, the university should consider using a more complex, intersectional approach that considers multiple factors that have been shown to be related to college completion.

As a large, regional university in one of the most diverse states in the nation, Western University is at the forefront of a demographic shift. Educating students who may be the first in their family to go to college, who come from low-income and/or limited English proficient backgrounds, or who face a multitude of other challenges impacts our region’s families and communities in profound ways. With demographic projections that show “the majority of California’s future college-age population will come from groups that have been historically underserved in higher education,” (California State University, n.d.-b, p. 1), the university must address achievement gaps and increase the graduation rates of students from historically underserved communities.

With a growing proportion of its student body coming from these historically underrepresented groups, the university faces an increased urgency to help these students succeed. Given its oft-cited goal of increasing graduation rates for all students by 2025, Western University must work quickly to close equity gaps that differently impact these vulnerable populations and ensure all students have equal opportunity to earn a college degree.

As an example of a more critical construct, the 23-campus state university system to which Western University belongs, released a research report that examined the development a new Historically Underserved Student Construct (HUS) (California State University, n.d.-b). According to this report, the HUS “provides a more sophisticated understanding of equity gaps in the CSU and challenges us to provide the differential support needed to ensure that all students succeed” (California State University, n.d.-b, p. 1). The researchers demonstrated that several variables are related to student success; being able to consider these factors separately and in combination with one another increased accuracy in identifying which students may need additional support (California State University, n.d.-b). These factors included: first generation student status, economic and financial challenges, college readiness, and coming from historically underserved communities (California State University, n.d.-b). In a revealing example of the utility of this construct to identify historically underserved students who would not otherwise be identified in the URM/Non-URM model, researchers found “approximately 35% of Asian students who are currently classified as ‘non-underrepresented’ should be considered ‘underserved’ and provided with additional support to facilitate their path to a college degree” (California State University, n.d., p. 2).

Western University should thoroughly investigate and consider alternatives to the URM/Non-URM model to identify historically underrepresented and underserved students. The university should also closely investigate the HUS construct and other multi-factor, intersectional models to project the potential impact on its particular student population, better understand their complexities, and be able to identify and eliminate gaps pose challenges to their success.

Expand and Improve Disaggregated Data

Collection and Analysis

Even if Western University moves toward using the HUS construct, it should continue to expand and improve its analyses of disaggregated data, especially for its AAPI students. For AAPI students, in particular, disaggregated data is essential to expose achievement gaps and inequities in academic outcomes between ethnic subgroups, such as those detailed in this study. Without clear and detailed disaggregated data, disparities that exist between ethnic subgroups would otherwise remain hidden in aggregated data sets.

Further, the university must continually strive to improve its data collection systems to establish uniform guidelines for data entry and collection, particularly for student service usage data. The university transitioned in 2018 to a new data collection system and is continuing to address technological issues related to this transition. In addition to data entry discrepancies, one of the key problems OIE staff encountered when running identical data queries was that resulting data sets could not be reliably reproduced or analyzed. The impact of this ongoing transition is that reliable student usage data are not currently available to be analyzed.

The current data entry system for student support programs and services must be amended to address these inconsistencies. Further, in the future, the

university must place a high value on data reliability and reporting when evaluating new products for data collection. Once corrected, researchers will be better able to analyze how well these programs are serving the university's diverse student body and to what degree they are supporting AAPI student success.

Create an AAPI Student Success Strategy

Western University should develop a comprehensive, long-term AAPI student success strategy and should designate and/or hire a lead faculty or administrator to direct this effort. As part of their responsibilities, this director would work closely with University Advancement to identify and secure necessary funding, but would also be responsible for coordinating the implementation of this strategy across campus. Given the history and range of AAPI success efforts as detailed in this study, this strategy should be coordinated by an office that can launch a sustained, university-wide effort that addresses AAPI student success from both an academic affairs and student affairs perspective. Addressing this issue through a university-wide strategy would not only address student-focused goals such as boosting AAPI college completion rates, but would also lay the groundwork for other broadscale goals, such as adding to the body of research on AAPIs, promoting campus-community partnerships, and enhancing the visibility of Western University as a leading educational institution with cutting-edge expertise on Asian American issues.

Academic affairs. Within the division of Academic Affairs, efforts should be made to significantly strengthen the Asian American Studies program at Western University. The following section outlines my recommendations for the development of several integral Academic Affairs components of a comprehensive AAPI student success strategy.

Strengthen Asian American studies program. One of the primary goals of Academic Affairs should be to significantly strengthen the Asian American Studies program (ASAM) at Western University. This academic program has a 40+ year history, but has recently struggled to maintain enrollment. When the reasons for its struggles were analyzed in more detail, it became clear that the program has suffered from a lack of institutional investment until fairly recently; in 2015, its home department hired two full-time, tenure-track faculty to replace the retired program director – its first tenure-track hires in more than 2 decades. With the retirement of the prior program director, from 2012-2016 the program suffered from a lack of consistent teaching capacity and was only able to offer a bare minimum of courses for this 5-year period. Further, with no full-time faculty presence to direct and coordinate the program, no new courses were developed, electives were only offered sporadically, and student advising was at a minimum. As a consequence of this gap in program leadership, ASAM minors virtually disappeared, enrollment shrank, and student awareness of the existence of the program and its course offerings plummeted.

The recent addition of two full-time, tenure-track ASAM faculty in 2015-2016 has begun to inject new life into the program, but rebuilding the program will require additional time. The program has added several new courses and the faculty continue to develop new curricula to increase the number and range of course offerings. The newest course was introduced in the 2019-2020 academic year and both of its sections were at maximum enrollment capacity each semester. The number of minors also increased dramatically just over the past year from only four students who graduated with the minor from 2010 to 2019 to 13 who declared the minor in Spring 2019. Although these numbers are still small, the recent uptick in declared minors is a hopeful indicator of continued future growth.

Further, Western University's AANAPISI designation would seem to imply that there is a strong ASAM program that offers its students the option to major in Asian American Studies. Western University has never offered this major, primarily due to lack of faculty capacity. With ASAM's current capacity, the program is steadily growing in its reach and impact. By continuing to invest in growing its ASAM program by supporting the current ASAM faculty and adding an additional faculty position, the university may soon be able to offer an ASAM major.

The ASAM program could also be significantly strengthened by collaborating with other colleges and departments to mutually support students in related majors. For example, the ASAM curriculum could be a valuable contributor in promoting the success of students majoring in education, social work, counseling, nursing, mental health, and other related fields. Students in these disciplines who expect to work with local communities would certainly benefit from learning about Asian Americans, particularly the histories and experience of AAPI communities in the Central Valley. In the same way, students in the Hmong minor program would also benefit from gaining a broader appreciation of how the Hmong community fits into the broader context of Asian American history and contemporary issues. By promoting such collaborations, the ASAM Studies program could be cross-listed and gain more students as they would be able to use these courses toward their major or minor fields of study.

Another strategy for strengthening ASAM could be to develop new funding streams to support the program so that it could be financially sustainable. Other ethnic studies programs on campus are able to achieve greater degrees of financial self-sufficiency because they generate donations from external community supporters. Further, the university's technological resources could be utilized to

offer curricula via distance learning. As is particularly apparent in the current realities of shifting to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning may well be the new normal. Given the broad expanse of the Central Valley and the range of both urban and rural communities, launching an easily accessible, online leadership institute is an appealing, forward-looking concept.

One recommendation is for ASAM to develop teaching institutes that offer narratives of Central Valley Asian American communities' histories and experiences and offer these courses to the public at-large. Participants would be exposed to teachings from ASAM faculty, as well as community leaders, students, and their families to learn firsthand about issues relevant to Central Valley AAPIs, including: refugee and immigration history, shifting family dynamics, community organizing, mental health, refugee and immigrant-inspired foodways, and media and storytelling. These teaching institutes might partner with local school districts, community colleges, health and science schools, and professional associations whose members are required to complete cultural competency trainings. Participants could earn continuing education units and/or receive a professional certificate based on the number of units completed.

A related recommendation is for ASAM to develop a leadership institute to educate and train AAPI community members on issues such as how to effectively advocate for their constituents, how to impact public policies, and how to build and expand broad-based coalitions to effect social change. As the only 4-year university with an Asian American Studies program in the Central Valley, Western University is well-positioned to play a leading role in educating not only current and future AAPI community leaders, but also non-AAPI leaders who are searching for ways to connect with AAPI populations. Such an institute could also be a vehicle for creating organizational partnerships for student community

service, internships, and/or research projects, thus further enhancing campus-community partnerships. If offered through continuing or global education, the leadership institute could also provide continuing education credits and/or a professional certificate upon completion of a set number of courses or units.

To complement the leadership institute, the ASAM program could also create a research clearinghouse and/or AAPI cultural museum. Oral histories, historic documents, and artifacts chronicling the AAPI experience in the Central Valley are scarce, but there is a wealth of potential to collect and archive these materials at Western University, both digitally and physically.

For example, the ASAM program recently sponsored student interns to help update and catalog artifacts and documents related to the Hmong community's history in the area. These materials are currently housed at a local community organization where they are rarely seen by the public. Further, a major Hmong historical exhibit, HmongStory40, was led by a volunteer committee of community leaders, many of whom are Western University alumni. This traveling exhibit lacks a permanent home and is currently in storage at the expense of the primary exhibit organizer. The university would be an ideal, central location to display collections such as these on behalf of the many diverse AAPI communities who lack the physical space and archival expertise to house such materials. Moreover, the task of setting up and maintaining such a collection would provide valuable learning and campus-community engagement opportunities for students in fields such as anthropology, history, library studies, communications, and journalism, among others.

By pursuing these recommended courses of action, the ASAM program could significantly expand its visibility and public impact. Developing working partnerships with AAPI professionals and community leaders who could serve as

guest speakers, role models, and mentors may also inspire students to complete their college educations. Expanding its reach via a strengthened online presence, digital course offerings, a research clearinghouse, and/or a cultural museum that are open to the public would also draw attention to the experiences of Central Valley AAPI communities and elevate the voices of AAPI community leaders in larger regional, state, and national policy discussions.

Student affairs. Within the division of Student Affairs, efforts should be made to increase AAPI students' sense of belonging, as well as to strengthen their levels of engagement with the campus and surrounding communities. Following are my recommendations for developing integral Student Affairs components of a comprehensive AAPI student success strategy.

Increase AAPIs' sense of belonging, campus & community engagement.

As an educational institution, Western University has a responsibility to play a leadership role in combating prejudice and ignorance, particularly when this prejudice targets a significant proportion of its student body. Student Affairs, which encompasses the access, well-being, engagement, and success of students, must be involved in any coordinated strategy that aims to increase student success.

Recommendations for actions include supporting leadership opportunities for AAPI students. Currently, several AAPI student organizations exist, but, understandably, many seem to struggle with leadership issues, particularly leadership succession. Supporting annual leadership trainings for members of student organizations led by staff or faculty advisers would facilitate better planning, while also help students build collaborative relationships with other student leaders and their staff or faculty advisers.

A related idea is to elevate this concept of student leadership training by developing an AAPI student leadership institute, perhaps modeled after the

aforementioned community leadership institute. Because Western University is primarily a commuter campus and many students also work while enrolled, students often lack significant opportunities to develop working relationships with one another outside of the classroom. Like the recommended community institute, the student institute could also be offered online, but would target students – both undergraduate and graduate – in order to enhance their leadership skills and help them build collaborative relationships. Because it would be focused on the needs of AAPI students, a critical aspect of this leadership training would be to educate and empower students by consciously incorporating opportunities to discuss leadership within the context of AAPI cultural and family values, which are often at odds with mainstream American societal values.

Because many AAPI Western University students are first-generation college students and are from families with immigrant parents, dealing with conflicting cultural values and generational differences is a struggle for many of these students. The pressures of attending classes and succeeding in an unfamiliar university only adds to their struggles. Offering support to these students through a structured course series through which they could be exposed to role models and mentors while also building relationships with one another may be a tangible strategy. Such a strategy could not only boost students' sense of belonging and their campus and community engagement, but also enhance their overall academic experience.

University-wide. University-wide efforts must be made to increase the academic success of AAPI students. The following are suggested recommendations for improving AAPI student success in the areas of boosting graduation rates, expanding qualitative data collection on AAPI student experiences, establishing better coordination between existing AAPI success

efforts, and ensuring student success efforts are inclusive of all underserved AAPIs. These are all critical components of university-wide efforts as part of a comprehensive AAPI student success strategy.

Establish better coordination between existing AAPI success efforts.

While current efforts to address AAPI student success at Western University are inspiring in their range and magnitude, it is also clear that there is a need for better coordination and communication between the individuals who are contributing to this patchwork of efforts. Many of these efforts have focused on specific subgroups for targeted outreach, recruitment, and support services, most notably Hmong and Southeast Asian Americans, and some are focused even more specifically on one gender within an ethnic group. Targeted efforts such as these can be valuable in bringing attention to particularly vulnerable groups; however, they may also be the cause of unnecessary internal strife, particularly when these efforts are piecemeal and not coordinated within the context of a broader strategy.

While the leaders of these fragmented efforts are to be commended for their commitment to AAPI student success, they should also be invited and encouraged to participate in a campus-wide facilitated planning session to develop a comprehensive, long-term AAPI student success strategy. The recommendations listed in this study could be included in this planning session to elicit feedback and/or support, as well as to identify priorities. With an AAPI Student Success office in place, the director of this office should be informed of all AAPI student success efforts to ensure consistent communication and coordinated planning.

Ensure student success efforts are inclusive of all underserved AAPI subgroups. Although Southeast Asians were found to be the most vulnerable Asian American student group in this study's findings, this finding does not imply that other Asian American and Pacific Islanders are free from academic

challenges. On the contrary, Pacific Islanders also demonstrate disproportionately low rates of college completion (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2013). Other refugee groups likely demonstrate similar challenges, if not at Western University, then at other institutions or at some point in the future.

Efforts to support AAPI student success must be inclusive of all Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Even though some AAPIs are multi-generation Americans, racism impacts us all, especially in times of crisis, as we are experiencing a surge of anti-Asian xenophobia in the midst of the current COVID-19 pandemic. The ideals of the student activists who forged the Asian American identity in the civil rights era are still relevant today; we are growing increasingly diverse in our demographic composition and are becoming more divided at the same time. Asian Americans are all impacted by racism rooted in longstanding biases, as demonstrated by the persistence of the dual stereotypes of both the model minority and the perpetual foreigner. As such, AAPIs must be aware of the progress our communities have made as a result of forging pan-Asian unions.

At the campus level, programs aimed at supporting Asian American student success must be open and accessible to all, per the conditions of Proposition 209. AAPI student success programs and services should be open and accessible to all, but, at the same time, they must be culturally relevant to targeted AAPI groups to be meaningful. Incorporating stories of the Asian American experience can be instructive to all and may help Asian American students recognize and appreciate similarities between ethnic subgroups. Forging these unions across ethnicities should be of paramount importance to any AAPI student success strategy to carry on the legacy of the founders of the ethnic studies movement and define a new future for our increasingly diverse communities.

Boost AAPI 4-year and 6-year graduation rates by using proactive analytics. As recommended in Takahashi and Nottbohm (2019), Western University should move towards proactive analytics to “identify key factors that indicate a student’s likelihood to leave the university or not graduate on time, and allow advisers to reach out to these students for in-depth advising” (p. 20). In addition to reaching out to students for in-depth advising, the university could also refer students to the newly-created AAPI Student Success office so ensure a second level of monitoring and support. In this way, the AAPI Student Success office would be able to track students at risk of failing or dropping out and could also strategize ways to identify and provide the support they need to be successful.

Another aspect of this move toward proactive analytics might involve using the aforementioned Historically Underserved Student construct to identify students who are more likely to require additional support to help them reach college completion. This HUS construct identified several factors related to college completion, including first generation status, economic and financial challenges, college readiness, and whether a student comes from a previously identified underserved ethnic community. Western University could pilot a research study to test this construct on a cohort of current students to determine if it accurately predicts students who are in need of academic support. Students who are found to need such support could be referred to the appropriate advisers and/or to the AAPI Student Success office. If the construct proves especially accurate, the university should consider its widespread adoption as a tool to better support students on their journey to college completion.

Expand collection of qualitative data on AAPI student experiences. One of the primary goals for the university should be to expand collection of qualitative data on AAPIs at Western University. AAPI students are already

grossly underrepresented in higher education research, but research on ethnic subgroups are even more scarce. Increasing qualitative research on AAPI students can help further understandings about underlying reasons for student behaviors and academic outcomes. Such critical insights are needed for educational leaders to design intervention strategies that can effectively support student success.

Additionally, more qualitative data are needed to fully understand the challenges experienced by Western University Asian American students, particularly its Southeast Asian students. Quantitative data such as those presented in this study are useful in highlighting the presence of socioeconomic and achievement gaps, but detailed qualitative data are needed to provide critical insights into reasons why these gaps persist. Having access to qualitative data would enhance the university's ability to better address obstacles and challenges to student success.

Moreover, qualitative data on AAPI student experiences would be a valuable complement to the aforementioned community leadership institute, student leadership institute, and research clearinghouse concepts. Involving students in qualitative research studies as both the subjects as well as researchers would also likely contribute to their leadership skills, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and campus and community engagement.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Asian American students are at a significant disadvantage at Western University. Historical, political, and economic factors have all played a role in shaping the university's current Asian American student population, as well as the campus environment these students experience once they arrive. Numerous efforts have been made by various faculty, staff, students, and administrators to address what they recognized as a lack of

support for Asian American students on campus, yet the institution has yet to embrace a comprehensive and sustained strategy targeting AAPI student success.

The reasons for the university's seeming indifference toward its Asian American students is complex and multi-layered. First, data disaggregated by Asian ethnicity was not available before 2010, as data was only collected for Asian Americans as a monolithic racial group. Second, even though disaggregated data is available, it is not common practice to parse through each ethnic subgroup – for Asian Americans or for any other racial group. However, due to the extreme diversity within the Asian American population, disaggregating by ethnicity is particularly critical for Asian subgroups that are much more likely to be disadvantaged and underserved than others.

Third, because Asian Americans are not considered an underrepresented minority (URM) group, their data is often commingled with White students when reporting on university-wide initiatives, such as Graduation Initiative 2025. For struggling Asian American subgroups, the aggregated Asian American data already masks their needs. Lumping aggregated Asian American racial data with White racial data to compare this combined group against URMs even more effectively hides these disparities, effectively rendering struggling Asian American subgroups invisible.

In conducting an environmental scan to examine supports for AAPI student success, this study also identified 27 organizations, programs, projects, events, or research endeavors that have been launched over the past 50 years. These efforts have been largely initiated by committed and caring individuals who recognized that AAPI students needed additional support to help them succeed. Despite the general expectation that, as minorities, AAPIs would participate in minority-serving student success programs, the reality has been that this has largely not

been the case at Western University. Instead, special programs, initiatives, and events have been developed and implemented by faculty, staff, students, and administrators to fill what they perceived as gaps in supporting AAPI students. Moreover, community leaders and organizations have also taken the initiative to support Western University AAPI students, offering scholarships, convening conferences, and sponsoring on-campus events to help boost AAPI student success. However, these efforts, while commendable and inspiring, should not absolve the university from its responsibility of supporting the success of its AAPI students.

This environmental scan also revealed that Western University's Asian American Studies program (ASAM) is struggling to remain relevant after a long period of stagnation, in part due to a lack of institutional action to address faculty capacity issues. With a lack of full-time faculty for a 5-year period, the ASAM program recently hired two full-time faculty and is only now beginning to show signs of growth. Still, its existence on a campus with a sizeable Asian American student population and the dedication of its small faculty are encouraging signs of progress.

When the disparities in Asian American students' educational outcomes are viewed in conjunction with the lack of sustained, institutionalized supports for API student success, it is clear that Western University must develop a comprehensive, long-term strategy to address these inequities. Using the university's stated objectives of increasing the 4-year graduation rate to 35% and 6-year graduation rate to 69% by 2025 can serve as straightforward, clearly-defined indicators of progress toward the imprecise goal of "academic success."

But I contend that to fully embrace its role as the leading regional 4-year university, Western University has an obligation to advocate for social justice and

equity on behalf of the diverse communities it serves. It has already established strong academic and student affairs programming benefiting its Latino and African American students. Western University leaders must now establish the infrastructure to develop, coordinate, monitor, and evaluate a comprehensive success strategy for its Asian American and Pacific Islander students. Such a strategy should, at a minimum, increase college completion rates.

Yet, as an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI), Western University should strive to do much more than simply graduate more students. As the only 4-year, public university in its statewide system serving the Central Valley region, Western University prides itself on educating the region's next generation of leaders. To build the leadership capacity of students, the university must also foster opportunities for critical thinking, community service, and civic participation.

To effectively build a strategy for AAPI student success, university leaders must recognize and understand the socio-political and socio-historical conditions that have effectively marginalized Asian American students, break down the organizational structures that perpetuate this marginalization, and have the moral courage to take bold action to correct these inequities. By employing a critical, yet comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to support AAPI student success, Western University would demonstrate its commitment to breaking down traditional barriers to equity, as well as its leadership in forging a forward-looking path that embraces technology and seeks campus-community partnerships. In doing so, the university would not only justify its designation as an AANAPISI by better serving its AAPI students, but it would model diversity, equity, access, and inclusion as core values that ultimately benefit students and communities alike.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL TO GATHER HISTORICAL
INFORMATION ABOUT WESTERN UNIVERSITY

1. Describe your involvement with Western University, beginning with why you were first hired, what your position was, and what your primary responsibilities were.
2. How would you describe the general campus environment with respect to Asian American students at the time you first arrived on campus? How did you work to change this environment?
3. What were the main issues and challenges you observed that were obstacles to Asian American student success?
4. Describe the changes you observed with respect to the Asian American student population during your time at Western University. How were these students being served by the university to support their academic success?
5. How would you describe the state of Western University today with respect to how Asian American students are being supported to be successful?

APPENDIX B: EMAIL TO CAMPUS LEADERS TO GATHER INFORMATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Dear _____,

I hope this email finds you safe in our current "shelter in place" situation.

I was planning to personally interview you, but the COVID-19 situation disrupted those plans. Instead, I'm reaching out via email and will include the questions I would have asked you. My overall goal is to establish a baseline of where we are as a campus in supporting the success of our Asian American students in 2020.

Toward that end, here are the items for which I'm looking for your input:

- 1) Please list any programs, services, organizations, or other resources that you are aware of that specifically aim to support the academic success of Asian American students. Please include the year each program started (or approximate length of time it's been in existence) and also include your role and/or involvement.
- 2) For each of the above listed resources, how is data on student participation being collected?
- 3) How are each of the above listed resources funded? If it receives institutional support, is it part of the university's annual budget or is it one-time funding that must be requested each year?
- 4) For each of the above listed resources, how are students being recruited/informed about this resource?

If it would be easier to talk on the phone or on zoom, I'm happy to do so. Also, please note that I will not identify you by name in my dissertation, but I would like to cite you as a source using your title. If you would prefer that I do not identify you by your title, please let me know.

YOUR TITLE (or how you would like me to refer to you as a source for my dissertation):

Thank you in advance for your help with my request!

Sincerely,
Gena Lew Gong

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL TO GATHER INFORMATION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

1. Describe your involvement with Western University, specifically your involvement in efforts to support Asian American student success, whether through a paid position or through volunteer efforts.
2. Talk a bit more about the details of your efforts to support Asian American student success. Are these efforts supported by the university, meaning, does this program receive annual funding from the university as part of its regular budget? If not, how are these efforts funded? What is the approximate program budget? How do you track student participation data? How do you know if your efforts are successful?
3. What are the main issues and challenges you've observed that are obstacles to Asian American student success at Western University?
4. What are your recommendations for what could be done to better support Asian American student success at Western University?
5. How would you describe the state of Western University today with respect to how Asian American students are being supported to be successful?

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Gena Lew Gong

Type full name as it appears on submission

7/9/2020

Date