Exploring Needs and Experiences of AAPI Faculty, Staff, and Students on US College Campuses: Leadership Communication, Sense of Belonging, and Campus Member Wellbeing

Piyawan Charoensap-Kelly
Southern Methodist University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.smu.edu/dcii_smuappi_research

Recommended Citation
https://scholar.smu.edu/dcii_smuappi_research/1
Exploring Needs and Experiences of AAAPI Faculty, Staff, and Students on US College Campuses: Leadership Communication, Sense of Belonging, and Campus Member Wellbeing

DR. PIYAWAN CHAROENSAP-KELLY

Southern Methodist University
“In academia, or a professional setting, the racial issues are implicit. You cannot really articulate it, but you can feel how others are treated differently...”
Research Background

Where am I coming from?

- Originally from Thailand
- Joined SMU in August 2020
- Became part of SMU’s newly found AAPI faculty and staff group (AAPASA)
- Proposed a research plan for assessing needs of SMU AAPI community to present to SMU administration
1. Baruch College, CUNY, New York
2. California State University, Fullerton
3. Oakland University, Michigan
4. Southern Methodist University, Texas
Overview

• What research are we doing?
• What have we found so far?
• What are takeaways?
Research

Goals

UNDERSTAND
Experiences and needs of Asians, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders (AAAPI) in US higher education

IDENTIFY
Individual, peer, and institutional factors relevant to enhancing AAPI experiences

INFORM
University administrators of ways to support AAPI and potentially other marginalized groups
Research Methodology

- Online survey
- Nov 2021 – Mar 2022
- 508 campus members across the USA who identify as Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander (AAAPI)
  - Students (34%)
  - Staff (24%)
  - Faculty (23%)
  - Alumni (14%), and
  - Mixed group (7%)
Participants

UNIVERSITY
- Baruch: 25%
- CSUF: 18%
- OU: 29%
- SMU: 10%
- Others: 10%

FAMILY ORIGIN
- East Asia: 32%
- Southeast Asia: 50%
- South Asia: 4%
- Mixed: 4%
## Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Length of Membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average: 29.14</td>
<td>Female: 51%</td>
<td>&lt; 1 year: 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range: 18-68</td>
<td>Male: 42%</td>
<td>1-2 years: 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others: 7%</td>
<td>3-4 years: 32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Length of Membership:
- < 1 year: 5%
- 1-2 years: 21%
- 3-4 years: 32%
- 5-6 years: 14%
- 7-8 years: 13%
- 9 years+: 8%
General Racism

Perceived racial insensitivity or negative comments regarding one’s ethnicity from faculty, staff, or students

“I have experienced racial insensitivity from faculty.”

Perpetual Foreigner Racism

The stereotypical perception that an ethnic minority will always be seen as foreign in the US

“You are told that you speak English so well.”
Across universities, participants experienced *perpetual* *foreigner racism* at a significantly higher rate than *general racism*.

PFR $m = 3.03$, $sd = .96$; GR $m = 2.71$, $sd = .92$,

$t = -9.15$, $df = 49$, $p < .001$
Student participants perceived *perpetual foreigner racism* significantly more than those in the mixed group.

Students:  $m = 3.10$, $sd = .92$; mixed group:  $m = 2.49$, $sd = 1.10$; $F(3, 422) = 3.90$, $p = .009$
Recent Racist Incidents

“The most recent incident was last year when someone was passing by me on campus and coughed close to me and muttered COVID under his breath.” - Chinese-American Student

“…My director told me to not put my name on a document supporting new AAPI efforts for fear of ‘backlash’.” – Korean-American Student/ Staff
Perpetual Foreigner Racism

“I feel as though my accomplishments are boiled down to the fact that I am Asian-American; my hard work and commitment is being diminished and my success is attributed to nothing but my race.”
What variables predict sense of belonging and psychological distress?

Which is the strongest predictor?

**INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS**
- Leadership Communication
- Climate of Respect
- AAPI Representation

**AAAPI COMMUNITY FACTOR**
- Community Resilience (support within AAPI community)

**INDIVIDUAL FACTORS**
- General racism
- Perpetual foreigner racism
Institutional community individual

\[ F(6, 379) = 57.81, \ p < .001, \ r^2 = .48 \]
Psychological Distress

Leadership Communication

Climate of Respect

Representation

Community Resilience

General Racism

Perpetual Racism

Psychological Distress

Institutional  community  individual
Psychological Distress 

\[ r^2 = .33 \]

Leadership Communication 
\[ \beta = -.32 \]

General Racism 
\[ \beta = .25 \]

Perpetual Racism 
\[ \beta = .18 \]

\[ F(6, 378) = 31.12, \ p < .001, \ r^2 = .33 \]
Leadership communication is the most significant predictor of higher sense of belonging as well as lower psychological distress.
What has your university done well?

• Acknowledgment of the impact of the pandemic on the AAAPI community
• Start of support groups
What should be *improved*?

- Provide more formal support
- Listen to the AAPI community
Participant Suggestions

“Develop an Asian American Studies program, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Studies program, AAPI student resource center, and AAPI-specific retention and scholarship programs. Treat Asian international students as human beings instead of as sources of tuition and high test scores. Recruit and retain AAPI faculty and staff at all levels, including at the administrative and executive levels.”
Takeaways

01
Recognize perpetual foreigner racism and its impacts.

02
Leadership communication is key to enhancing sense of belonging and mental health.

03
Tangible support from administration and collaboration with the community is critical.
“In academia, or a professional setting, the racial issues are implicit. You cannot really articulate it, but you can feel how others are treated differently... It’s the systematic oppression.”