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Caucasians and Asian/Pacific Islanders:

A Search for Campus Climate

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Executive Summary

A Campus Climate Study was conducted at the California State Polytechnic University-Pomona Campus (Cal Poly Pomona) with the purpose of obtaining a comprehensive student viewpoint of the general atmosphere of their educational environment. In order to maintain and ensure their objectives and goals, it is imperative to be made aware of what contributes to or detracts from their mission. As a result, a study of the Caucasian and Asian/Pacific Islander populations of Cal Poly Pomona was conducted and a compilation of what conditions students identified as deterrents or advancements to the college experience was obtained and recorded.

Perceptions of the Campus Climate:

- All students are aware that diversity is a positive and much needed aspect of a college university. Most students consider the campus to be an eclectic and liberal environment. However, it does not always provide a warm and welcoming atmosphere. There is a lack of total community around the campus which can be partially contributed to the "commuter mentality" that most students possess while attending Cal Poly Pomona.

- Overall, students believe that committed involvement can drastically change the college experience. Most students have created sustained communities and safe havens within their particular cultural centers. However, many have a sense of uneasiness towards entering and integrating themselves in other cultural centers that are not of their particular race/ethnicity, which makes it difficult for the Caucasian students at Cal Poly Pomona, who do not have any type of representative group to identify and commiserate with.

Introduction

The California State Polytechnic University-Pomona Campus (Cal Poly Pomona) mission statement which states:

Cal Poly Pomona's mission is to advance learning and knowledge by linking theory and practice in all disciplines, and to prepare students for lifelong learning, leadership, and careers in a changing, multicultural world.

Consequently, a campus climate study was conducted under the supervision of the Associate Vice President and Dean of Students, Rebecca Gutierrez Keeton, to gain additional research in order to investigate how Cal Poly Pomona can further enhance and enjoy the benefits of having a diverse student body. While reviewing the quantitative research that was done in 2001, an emphasis and exploration of the levels of comfort that Asian/Pacific Islander and White students feel on the Cal Poly Pomona campus, specifically in the physical, social, and academic realms was initiated. The goal is to uncover areas of discomfort amongst Asian/Pacific Islander and White students in order to improve the college experience of these two racial/ethnic groups and explore the extent of how these students value diversity and perceive it being manifested on campus. These results will be provided to administrators that can be used for informed decision-making and the development of new programs, as well as continued support of existing ones.

<u>Literature Review</u>

Campus climate surveys can be exceptionally constructive to educational leaders as they try to develop effective diversity plans, whether around issues of residence life, curriculum, or student recruitment and retention. California State Polytechnic University-Pomona will conduct a campus climate survey in which they evaluate how students view the general college environment. Specifically, they will explore the extent of their students' value of diversity and perceive how it is being manifested on this campus, because "efforts to enhance access and equity on college campuses through diversity initiatives have numerous implications for campus climate" (Smith & Schonfeld, 2000, p. 18). This qualitative study which will be presented through words and observations will be presented to administrators at Cal Poly Pomona in order

to use the information towards on-going self-assessment and evaluation of the university, creating a welcoming and validating atmosphere, and a continuum to support diversity. Collaborating with Dr. Rebecca Gutierrez Keeton and Sunny Lee, the Director of Office of Student Life and Cultural Centers, there will be about 4 focus groups tailored to certain populations of the university. Specifically, the population to be evaluated in this literature review will be the Caucasian, non-Latino population, and Asian/Pacific Islanders.

While evaluating the results of the previous campus climate study that was initiated in 2001, the White population of students was and, presently, not the majority population within this institution, and it would be beneficial to see what perceptions and experiences they may have considering the environment of Cal Poly Pomona. "White Identity" and "White Privilege" have been repeatedly discussed topics in regards to the Caucasian race. "White privilege" emphasizes the fact that there is an unearned advantage and conferred dominance based on the color of skin and racial background originating from European descent. This grows into a system of neglect and naïve mindsets for Caucasians that the fail to recognize an identity pertaining to their racial background, because of an instilled set of social beliefs and customs. These ingrained concepts of superiority and influence causes Caucasians to have a scheme of thought that they do not need to distinguish their culture, which becomes extremely problematic in educational settings where there are surroundings of heterogeneity, because of there is a lack of dispute with their presupposed assumptions.

Consequently, this becomes a deterrent for Caucasian students' self-identity. A part of self-knowledge requires a grasp on racial understanding of one's race and its effects on others. With the changing demographics of American society and within institutions of higher education, there is a progressive increase of students of varying backgrounds and experiences.

This, in effect, endorses the probability and enhances the opportunity that students of the dominant culture will have to interact with others not of their own culture, which is the initial process illustrated in Helms's White Racial Identity Development Theory. In terms of racism, it has been seen as a system of advantage based on race, which affects the subjugated minority and advances the dominant majority. It has been hypothesized that an integral aspect of identity development for Whites in America is the acknowledgment of racism and the subsequent dealing with this knowledge.

Caucasians students will begin to comprehend that racial identity does not only pertain to biological backgrounds, but also as social constructs and customs that have been influencing them before entering college. Ideally, this exposure will instill a means for dialogue that can enhance social and cognitive learning, a better understanding of the issues of race, and interpersonal competencies especially in contexts of interactions with others they deem as different from them. While examining the implications of certain social group stratifications, students may begin to see their privileged or targeted social status.

Exploring the realms of "white identity" and its effects and attitudes on the campus of Cal Poly Pomona will be very informative and beneficial towards the development of the educational strategies for student advancement. Because cultural diversity is a continually progressive factor of the higher education experience, it is necessary to challenge and acknowledge the universalization of Whiteness in order to unify the campus atmosphere. By conducting this campus climate study and emphasizing the value of cultural complexities affiliated to college populations, methodically informed decisions can be made for a framework of programs and initiatives to instigate positive change and learning experiences for students,

because building connections of multiculturalism is imperative for college students'

development.

According to Kurotsuchi (2003), Asian/Pacific Islander students are the "invisible"

population in U.S. higher education and are the "missing minority" in collegiate racial/ethnic

discourse. Maramba (2008) states, "According to the 2000 census, the state of California has the

largest Asian population in the United States at 4.3 million; of this number, Chinese represent

980,000 (23%) closely followed by Filipinas/os at 903,000 (21%)."

The API category is very diverse; there are over 50 ethnic groups encompassed by it.

Collecting these races/ethnicities into one category can be very problematic as each sub-group is

unique and deserves unique attention, study, and research. In studying the API student college

experience, Lee (2006) reported that 31% of the API population in the U.S. in 2000 was born in

the U.S., while 69% was foreign born. API families are also more likely than Whites to have

incomes of $75,000 or more, yet API families are also more likely than Whites to have incomes

below $25,000.

API students are going to college at a faster rate than any other racial/ethnic group.

Allen, Antonio, Ceja, McDonough, & Teranishi (2004) researched the college choice process for

API students and their families. Broken down by ethnicity, the researchers discovered that

Chinese and Korean students are more likely to attend highly selective colleges than Filipino and

Southeast Asian students. Also Chinese, Japanese, and Korean students are more likely to attend

private universities whereas Filipino and Southeast Asian students are more likely to attend four-

year public colleges. The researchers concluded the more money an API family has, the higher

the selectivity of the college entered and the less money an API family has, the lower selectivity

of the college entered. Also, Filipino and Southeast Asian students wanted to live near home

more than Chinese, Korean, and Japanese students. Chinese and Korean students took more

SAT preparation courses. Southeast Asian and Filipino students were more influenced by

financial concerns and chose a college based on tuition. Chinese and Korean students were more

likely to apply to more than one college. And, Southeast Asian, Filipino, and Japanese students

were more likely to apply to only one college.

The perception that all API students are high achievers is misleading. Yeh (2004)

researched college persistence amongst API students and found that 40% of API students in

higher education are attending two-year colleges and 82% of API students attend public

institutions. High school drop out rates are at 46% for Filipino students, 50% for Southeast

Asian students, and 60% for Samoan students. Also, including Asian foreign students into API

data significantly alters results. In 1997, "Asian foreign students earned 18% of all U.S. doctoral

degrees," while, "Asian Pacific Americans earned only 3%."

Gloria & Ho (2003), in a study of API students' college experience and persistence,

found that API students have higher entry, persistence, and completion rates than any other

race/ethnicity. However, Filipino, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Island students have lower levels

of completion than their fellow Chinese, Japanese, and Korean students.

In higher education, API students make up 6.4% of the student population, while API

faculty makes up 5% of the faculty population. Lundberg & Schreiner (2004), in a study on

faculty-student interaction, discovered that API students reported more negative relationships

with faculty than White students reported. Also, the quality of relationship with faculty was the

strongest predictor for learning for API students, yet API students had lower levels of interaction

with faculty.

On the college campus, minorities experience a lack of support and unwelcoming environment more often than Whites. Ancis, Mohr, & Sedlacek (2000) researched student perceptions of campus cultural climate by race. The researchers found that African Americans, Asians, and Latinos felt more pressure to conform to racial stereotypes than Whites. And African Americans and Asians felt more pressure than Latinos. Whites felt they were treated more fairly than Asians and African Americans. African Americans and Asians felt more than Whites that faculty perpetuated racism. The researchers also found that Whites see groups of minorities as segregation whereas minorities see them as support systems. In a study of perceptions of campus climate for underrepresented groups, Rankin & Reason (2005) found that 64% of API students perceived the campus accepting of difference, 25% were uncertain, and 11% perceived the campus as not accepting.

In Maramba's (2008) look at the Filipino student experience, the researcher noted students were concerned with the lack of Filipino representation on campus and the lack of Filipino coursework. Also, students reported a lack of student service concern and reported a sense that there was no larger community on campus. The students reported their safe zone as a place where they did not feel "tokenized" and "essentialized."

Cal Poly Pomona has 20,000 undergraduate students, 29% of which are API. Arredondo (2001) and Luna De La Rosa (2003) conducted previous research on the campus climate at CPP. The researchers found that 80.5% of students believe there is no racial tension on campus, 88.3% do not fear physical harm because of their race/ethnicity, and 78.9% would recommend CPP to someone from their own racial/ethnic group. Specifically with API students, 21% of Asians (the highest of any race/ethnicity) and 12.7% of Filipinos reported fearing for their physical safety

because of their race/ethnicity. Also, 39.2% of Asians (the highest of any race/ethnicity) and 28.6% of Filipinos felt they needed to change personal characteristics to fit in on campus.

Method

For our study we chose a qualitative approach to look deeper into the campus climate experienced by the Caucasian and Asian/Pacific Islander students on Cal Poly Pomona's campus. Schuh and Upcraft (1996) describe qualitative research as taking place in a "natural setting" rather than a "laboratory." As researchers we believed this natural setting would be more conducive to us receiving vulnerable feedback from the students. In our study we wanted to hear students' stories and this natural setting seemed the best way to provide that. Schuh and Upcraft (1996) also describe qualitative research as "flexible, which allows the researcher to follow promising lines of inquiry as they emerge" (60). In our research we had a broad idea of what we were looking for (how API students view the campus climate), however, we did not want to direct the study down a narrow track; rather we wanted to let the study be guided by the spontaneity of the students. We wanted to follow what the students were saying during the interview process and take the conversation where they wanted it to go. We wanted people's own words. When it comes to campus climate, particularly from a race perspective, voices need to be heard in order to not continue the systemic quieting of the minority voices crying out. We wanted to listen.

Compared to individual interviews, which aim to obtain individual attitudes, beliefs and feelings, focus groups elicit a multiplicity of views and emotional processes within a group context. The individual interview is easier for the researcher to control than a focus group in which participants may take the initiative. Compared to observation, a focus group enables the researcher to gain a larger amount of information in a shorter period of time. Observational

methods tend to depend on waiting for things to happen, whereas the researcher follows an interview guide in a focus group. In this sense focus groups are not natural but organized events. Focus groups are particularly useful when there are differences of opinion between the students and the decision-makers for initiatives relating to programs and activities on campus. It is also beneficial when the everyday use of language and culture of particular groups is of interest, and when one wants to explore the degree of consensus on a given topic. As a result, we specifically used a focus group in our study, because focus groups are rich in detail, providing deeper levels of information, and possess the ability to provide immediate clarification on data collected (Bresciani et al., 2004).

Our study was following up on data collected in 2001 and 2003 on the campus climate at Cal Poly Pomona. That data was survey based and we wanted to clarify some findings in those studies. As so, those studies guided our questions. With the two distinct focus group meetings conducted for each represented cultural population, the main purpose of the focus group research was to draw upon the students' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way in which would not be sufficient using other methods. These attitudes, feelings and beliefs may be partially independent of a group or its social setting, but are more likely to be revealed through the social gathering and the interaction which being in a focus group entails.

The interview was a standardized open-ended one where the questions asked of API students were asked of other communities on campus in order to identify campus climate experiences holistically. The questions inquired about experience and behavior and on the senses. We wanted to know what students had seen and heard as well as actions they had done or seen done, to them or to others. A set of questions that would be all-encompassing for all the various cultures and distinctions that are prevalent within the student body were devised so that

specific comparisons could be made between all the various cultural groups and distinctions

related to the cultural centers of CPP.

Also, these set of questions are general enough for every group to use with their

particular community so that a rigorous and comprehensive self-evaluation can be provided that

presents new information about how majority and minority group members perceived the current

climate for diversity at CPP. There was no particular sequencing of the questions. Follow-up

questions were used to probe deeper into the individual answers provided to these standard

questions posed to the group as a whole. The questions were as such:

> 1. How do you perceive the campus climate at CPP?
> 2. Would you recommend CPP to someone who is [insert group]? Why or Why
> not?
> 3. Do you feel physically, mentally, and emotionally safe on campus? Why or Why not?
> Where do you feel safe on campus?
> 4. Series of related questions:
> - Do you feel you are treated differently by the professors in your academic college (have
> them identify their college) based on being [insert group]?
> - Do you feel you are treated differently by students on campus based on being [insert
> group]?
> - (If they live in Housing): Do you feel you are treated differently by students in your
> residence hall based on being [insert group]?
> - Do you feel you are treated differently by the administrative offices on campus on
> campus based on being [insert group]?
> 5. Finish the following statement: "Being [insert group], in order to 'fit in' at CPP, I often
> feel I need to change some of these personal characteristics..."

The students participating in this study are all recruited by the Director, Office of Student

Life & Cultural Centers California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, Sunny Lee. The Vice

President of Student Activities has agreed to the campus climate focus groups, as did the rest of

the student affairs division cabinet at CPP. As a result, they have been able to provide past years'

reports and statistics of the student population and its demographics and a previous campus

climate study to reference and contrast the changes and protocols used in that study.

When the focus groups began, the term "campus climate" was defined to the students participating in the study so that there were no misconceptions or misunderstandings about the study, which allowed them to answer the questions that were created correctly. Our collected data was analyzed by the two researchers reading the recorded notes several times, coding responses, and looking for themes, frequency, extensiveness, and intensity of participant comments, as outlined by Foubert (2004) and Krueger (1998). Each researcher was also responsible to find a person not involved in the research to read the transcriptions and verify that what the researcher found was correct. Findings were also compared to the quantitative research tallied in 2001 and 2003 to see if findings were similar to those results.

Results

After individually reading the recorded transcriptions and individually identifying themes, the researches came together to verify, crosscheck, and compile a list of themes observed for White students, for Asian/Pacific Islander students, and for the two groups as a whole. For White students there were the following themes: safety for females, perceived "cliquey-ness," openness to diversity, fear of other culture centers, professor treatment, social circles, the "double-edged sword," and an awareness of race. For Asian/Pacific Islander students there were the following themes: openness to diversity, a large sense of community on campus, safety for females, culture center domination, uncomfortable feelings towards reaching out to other culture centers, campus involvement, and visible culture clubs. The two groups as a whole shared the following themes: safety for females, openness to diversity, fear of other culture centers, a commuter campus mentality, and a perceived liberal yet chilly campus climate.

White students had eight themes that surfaced while analyzing the data. The first theme was that of safety for females. When asked whether they perceived the campus as mentally,

physically, and emotionally safe, the White students answered according to gender, not race, claiming the campus to be unsafe for female students. Another theme that surfaced was that of perceived "cliquey-ness" and social circles. The social circles on campus, divided mostly by race, can seem very exclusive to outsiders looking to become part of or take part in a certain group of friends. When asked whether they would recommend Cal Poly Pomona to other White people, the White students thematically answered that they would only recommend CPP to certain Whites who were open to diversity. In other words, it takes a certain kind of White person to thrive at CPP.

On the whole, White students felt intimidated to enter the culture centers. Related to this is the common treatment White students felt from non-White professors when topics of racial justice, inequality, and White Privilege surfaced in the classroom. White students reported being picked on by their professors at these times, as if the professor was giving the White student "a taste of their own medicine." This is also related to the theme of the "double-edged sword" in which the White students reported a desire to sit at the table of racial reconciliation, but felt excluded by people of color for trying to sit at the table. The White students commented about ethnic minorities crying out for them to understand their cultures on the one hand, but on the other hand these White students are excluded and scoffed at for trying to understand these cultures. The last theme the researchers found was that of racial awareness amongst White students. White students as a whole are an ethnic minority on the CPP campus and the White students in the focus groups presented a keen awareness of their White identity that may not be found at predominantly White institutions.

For the API community, they have a very lax view of their racial identity as they see themselves as the dominant group on CPP. API students have also gained a strong sense of who

they are as API students and are able to connect to others at CPP very easily. They believe that most professors, especially business professors, enjoy having API students in their classes. They also see no reason to question their safety on campus based on race. Similarly to the White students, they made a comment based on gender that it can be a lot riskier for a female on campus especially at night.

However, there were mentions of differences within nationalities and their involvement at the API cultural center. There is a strong view that the Filipino group (Barkada) has a very prevailing presence and involvement within the API center, which makes it a little difficult for other API students from other nationalities to fully engage themselves within the API center. While considering other cultural centers, they have a sense of unease entering other cultural centers. They have an understanding that each center has a welcoming invitation to all students, but they do not perceive it that way. It is still considered an estranged and peculiar idea to enter a center that is not specified for one's own race, causing some seclusion between the centers.

It is generally agreed that CPP has a very welcoming, liberal, and easygoing kind of campus climate. But both groups had a commonality that there is a "commuter mentality" where one just shows up for classes and finishes what is necessary and then heads back home. This in effect does not provide much possibility of feeling part of the community that CPP can provide. In order to negate this effect, both groups emphasized the importance of being involved in campus organizations, clubs, and/or cultural centers so that a stronger sense of community and fellowship can be attained while attending CPP. Unfortunately, both sides have a perception that the cultural groups on campus seem exclusive and secluded, but they do provide safe-havens and ports of camaraderie, academia, and a venue to rest and relax for students whose background pertain to those specified cultural groups. However, all in all, both groups are also aware that the

extreme diversity of the institution and its students provide a positive learning environment and experience at CPP.

<u>Discussion</u>

When the White students were asked about multiple forms of safety on campus they responded according to gender rather than race, specifically stating that females had some safety concerns. Some suggestions for CPP would be to increase the personnel of the campus safety department in order to increase response time to incidents and allow for more nightly escort services. Also, the Women's Resource Center could collaborate with Campus Safety in educating students and officers about how to stay safe on campus. A future study could be conducted to see where students frequently feel unsafe at night.

As for the perceived "cliquey-ness" and social circles reported by the White students, more social programming held on campus that encourages interracial interactions could solve this issue. Future research could determine how closely the cliques and social circles at CPP are tied to race and whether these closely knit groups of people are exclusive. Research could also determine whether cliques and social circles are good, bad, or neutral.

The White student's awareness of race was a positive aspect of the research conducted. This area could be further developed as well. A culture center could be implemented for students of European descent. If not a culture center at least a cultural group. Either of these would allow White students to develop more awareness of their own race/ethnicity as well as encourage discussion about racism, "White Privilege", and racial reconciliation. Future research would have to be held to see what other universities are doing with their European clubs, organizations, and/or centers.

Another positive aspect that the research uncovered was that the Admissions Office at CPP is doing well in recruiting White students who are open to diversity. Whether the Admissions Office is aware of their success or not, future research could be implemented to see how CPP was successful in marketing and recruiting White students who embrace diversity.

With the theme of fearing other culture centers, White students felt like they were not welcome in any of them. Small events could be held inside the centers to encourage interracial interactions and to promote the welcoming atmosphere of all the centers. Coffee or tea could be served during midterms and finals week. Each center could offer something distinct and advertise to all students to come and join them in the lounging areas. Research could be done to see ways to make the cultural centers more welcoming to all races and ethnicities.

White students also felt chastised by certain professors and held to a "double-edged sword" by ethnic minorities. In handling faculty, the diversity training for all professors could include training on how to treat White students respectfully, especially when discussing issues of racism, privilege, and wrongs done in the past. In handling the "double-edged sword", students of color and White students could be encouraged to persist in dialoging inside the cultural centers. The centers should not just be utilized for their free stuff and events, but for developing deeper relationships across races and ethnicities. All students can be encouraged to ask questions and the leaders of the centers should especially set an example of how to share one's culture with another person. Future research is needed however to listen to the voice of students of color about this double-edged sword. All sides of the story need to be heard.

At CPP, the API students had a strong awareness of who they were as an API community. They have a very supportive group of peers and colleagues on campus. However, not everyone agrees on the fact that each nationality is fully represented at the API cultural

center. CPP can start some initiatives to further integrate the other API clubs/organizations within the community development of the API cultural center. Further research could be done to evaluate the separate API organizations to see their perception of where they stand in the API cultural center and on campus.

One focus group member who was also a member in the Vietnamese Student Association (VSA) mentioned a collaborative effort between VSA and the Barkada organization in order to fully create a sense of community. The two Barkada members reacted very positively and supported the idea. Encouragement and a means are needed from the Student Life Office so that the other representative organizations can have a perceived notion of the benefits that could result from collaborative efforts. A study could be initiated to see what actions can be taken in order to promote collaboration. Also, another study that can be done is seeing what Barkada is doing that is making them such a presence and how they are staying so proactive within the API culture center and utilizing those findings towards other cultural centers. Solving some of the issues and apprehensions within may create a catalyst change of perceptions that can lead to other collaborative efforts with other cultural centers which can lessen some of the reservations that students have about other cultural centers.

Being that both the White students and the API students responded to safety concerns in terms of gender rather than race reinforces the need for more services and research to create more safety for females on campus, especially at night. Both groups also self-identified as open to diversity and praised the student body for its openness to diversity. While this may be a true perception of self and others, more research may be needed to identify the disconnect that occurs between racial/ethnic groups, particularly in the interactions that occur at the cultural centers. The cultural centers seemingly promote growth for their respective races/ethnicities, however,

interracial interaction lacks for both White students and API students. This may relate to the two groups' report that CPP is a liberal yet "chilly" climate. While most students report and perceive the student body as embracing diversity and being "liberal," the action is lacking. More research can be conducted as to why this is and how to fix it. A related theme for both groups is the "commuter campus mentality". Maybe because CPP is a commuter school, the students are open to embracing other cultures, but do not have the time to take action, to demonstrate this while they are on campus. Again future research would be needed so that a better sense of community can be formed.

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Appendix

1. Cal Poly Pomona Campus Climate Study Questions:

2. How do you perceive the campus climate at CPP?

3. Would you recommend CPP to someone who is [insert group]? Why or Why not?

4. Do you feel physically, mentally, and emotionally safe on campus? Why or Why not? Where do you feel safe on campus?

5. Series of related questions:

   a. Do you feel you are treated differently by the professors in your academic college (have them identify their college) based on being [insert group]?
   b. Do you feel you are treated differently by students on campus based on being [insert group]?
   c. (If they live in Housing): Do you feel you are treated differently by students in your residence hall based on being [insert group]?
   d. Do you feel you are treated differently by the administrative offices on campus on campus based on being [insert group]?

6. Finish the following statement: "Being [insert group], in order to 'fit in' at CPP, I often feel I need to change some of these personal characteristics..."