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More Asian Americans meeting obstacles to academic success

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Collectively, more Asian American college and university students are experiencing obstacles to academic success in U.S. higher education than in the past, according to a new UCLA report.

More Asian American students now come from low-income homes with limited financial capacity to pay for college, and fewer are attending their first-choice institutions than in past years. In 2005, 51.8 percent reported attending their first-choice school, a significant decline from the 68.0 percent reported in 1974.

"This trend has occurred during a time span when entering Asian American freshmen are becoming increasingly better prepared for college, as measured by high school grades and their own self-ratings of key academic and social skills, and becoming increasingly more civically involved and interested in becoming community leaders," said report co-author and UCLA associate professor of education Mitchell J. Chang.

"Beyond Myths: The Growth and Diversity of Asian American College Freshmen, 1971–2005," documents trends in the values and characteristics of Asian American college freshmen nationwide and is based on data for 361,271 Asian and Asian American first-time, full-time college students compiled over 35 years. The report, which represents the largest compilation and analysis of data on Asian American college students ever undertaken, is part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program administered by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA's Graduate School of Education & Information Studies.

In 2005, Asian American freshmen were more likely than the national freshman population to come from families with household incomes of less than \$40,000. Nearly 31 percent of Asian Americans came from such backgrounds, compared with the national average of 22.7 percent — presenting these students with an obstacle to success in higher education.

"A substantial number of Asian Pacific American college students come from poor and modest-income families and are likely to have attended high schools that are predominantly minority," said co-author Don T. Nakanishi, professor of Asian American studies and director of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center. "Moreover, Asian American students and parents do not take full advantage of loans and other financial aid opportunities that can assist in meeting the rising costs of a college education."

Indeed, Asian American students rely heavily on parents, relatives and employment — rather than loans — to finance their college education, with 43.3 percent reporting in 2005 that there

was a "very good chance" they would obtain a job during college, up from 32.4 percent in 1980. Asian American women in particular were 12.9 percentage points more likely than their male counterparts to anticipate working. Also notable is the steady rise in Asian American freshmen who say they plan to work full-time to cover expenses — an increase from 1.9 percent in 1979 to 4.6 percent in 1999.

"Low-income Asian American students, compared to their higher-income counterparts, are less savvy about applying to college, are more likely to be non-native English speakers and are more in need of a job to help pay for college," Chang said.

Over the past 35 years, entering Asian American students appear to have become better prepared for college, although nearly 20 percent in 2005 believed they would need special tutoring or remedial work in English. This percentage is similar to that for incoming Latino students (20.9 percent) and is higher than that for all other racial groups, underscoring a critical remediation need for colleges and universities.

The percentage of Asian American students who applied to six or more colleges more than tripled between 1980 to 2005; 35.9 percent reported having applied for admission to six or more schools in 2005, compared with 10.7 percent in 1980. Asian American students from low-income backgrounds, however, were least likely to apply to six or more colleges, giving them fewer options.

While women in the general college-going population began to outnumber men in the 1970s, Asian American women did not outnumber their male counterparts until 1990. Since 2000, a higher percentage of Asian American women than men came from low-income backgrounds. And while the increased enrollment of Asian American women in higher education is a positive trend, it underscores how Asian American men, particularly those from low-income households, are not keeping pace.

"Nearly 75 percent of first-time, full-time Asian American students attend four-year colleges and universities," said Sylvia Hurtado, professor of education and director of the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. "This is the first report of its kind to track this population since the 1970s, opening the pathway for further research on a myriad of policy and practice issues that impact their progress."

Asian American enrollment in higher education surpassed 1 million students in 2001 and continues to increase each year.

In addition to Chang and Nakanishi, co-authors of the report include Julie J. Park, Monica H. Lin and Oiyan A. Poon

For a copy of "Beyond Myths: The Growth and Diversity of Asian American College Freshmen, 1971–2005," visit www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri. To reach the Higher Education Research Institute, call (310) 825-1925.

Since 1966, the **Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP)** has administered the Freshman Survey, in which more than 8.3 million incoming first-year students at 1,201 colleges and universities nationwide have participated. The CIRP Freshmen Survey is the largest and longest-running survey of American college students, and it documents the changing nature of

students' characteristics, values, attitudes and behaviors. The data have helped shape public opinion about key issues related to the concerns of college youth and contribute to critical policy considerations in education.