

SERU/UCUES Research Symposium

A New Generation of University Students: Understanding the Student Experience and Seeking Opportunities to Translate Analysis into Practice

May 8, 2008

ABSTRACT

Exploring How Asian American Students Navigate Through Physical & Social Spaces of UCSB

Michelle Samura & Paul Kang
UC Santa Barbara

In this post-civil rights, post-affirmative action moment we are currently in, Asian Americans are the fastest growing racial minority group in higher education and the largest, single racial group in the University of California system. However, these significant increases in Asian American college enrollment have created a veil of success often concealing a variety of tensions and dilemmas that many Asian American college students wrestle with—dilemmas that stem from their achievement on the one hand, and their inability to escape processes of racialization on the other. This paper presents a piece of a larger, mixed-methods study that seeks to offer a new orientation to examining meanings of Asian American-ness in higher education today. This approach underscores the variety of Asian American students' experiences and voices and emphasizes their efforts to position themselves within the contemporary US racial system. Using data from the 2006 University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) together with in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations, we explore: 1) how Asian American students at one UC campus (UC Santa Barbara) navigate through physical and social spaces of the campus; and 2) understand the varying levels of salience of race and ethnicity within these spaces.