Harold and Kumar Go to College: Defining “Merit” to the Asian-American Student

Share, Learn, and Connect
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Jennifer Lee, Oaks Christian School, CA
Arun Ponnusamy, Collegewise, CA
Excerpt from Amy Chua’s “Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior”

“Here are some things my daughters, Sophia and Louisa, were never allowed to do:
• attend a sleepover
• have a playdate
• be in a school play
• complain about not being in a school play
• watch TV or play computer games
• choose their own extracurricular activities
• get any grade less than an A
• not be the No. 1 student in every subject except gym
• play any instrument other than the piano or violin
• not play the piano or violin.”

January 8, 2011 Wall Street Journal
Diversity or Discrimination?

- Princeton sociologist Thomas Espenshade reviewed data from 10 elite colleges and estimated in “No Longer Separate, Not Yet Equal” that Asian-American students need approximately 140 additional points on the SAT or 3.4 points on the ACT to compete with white students in applicant pools.

- In a follow-up study, if race was eliminated as a consideration, Asian-American admit rates would rise by nearly a third from 18% to 23%.

- The University of California system (where race cannot be used in decisions) has Asian-American undergraduate populations in the range of 18% (Santa Barbara) to 42% (Berkeley) to 51% (Irvine). Amongst Ivy League institutions, it ranges from 14% (Yale) to 19% (Penn). Stanford is 22%.

- When 15 years-old teenagers were asked whether they expect to graduate from college, 58% of white teenagers expected to graduate from college. 85% of Korean and Japanese teenagers expected to graduate from college, and 95% of Indian teenagers expected to graduate from college.
The Hsus, Wats, and Nairs

- The U.S. Census Bureau definition of Asians as "Asian" refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent.

- As of the 2010 Census, 17.3 million identify as Asian which comprises approximately 5.6% of the U.S. population.

- This is a 46% increase from the 2000 Census.

- In 2009, 3.8 million were of Chinese descent followed by Filipinos (3.2 million), Asian Indians (2.8 million), Vietnamese (1.7 million), Koreans (1.6 million) and Japanese (1.3 million).
Bachelor Degree or Higher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>67.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic White</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cambodian</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laotian</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General US Population</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Society
Culture
Pressure to Perform

- The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) lists suicide as the third highest cause of death among the 15-to-24 age group in America. Recent studies reveal that Asian Americans are at high risk. In fact, it is the second leading cause young Asian and Pacific Islanders. Pressures facing Asian students have changed little, for the majority of Asian parents, it’s all about succeeding.

- Asian American women ages 15 to 24 lead in the highest suicide rate amongst all ethnic groups according to the Department of Health and Human Services.

- According to New American Media, from 1996 to 2006, of the 21 students who committed suicide at Cornell, 13 were Asian/Pacific Islanders. This 61.9% is significantly higher than the overall percent of Asian/Pacific Americans students, which was 14%.
Where Merit Meets the Bamboo Ceiling

- IQ vs. EQ

- Holistic Review
What is Merit?
In Your Admissions Office

- Train your staff
- Words matter
- Have the complex conversation
- We are perceived to be experts
- College counselors need to speak up
In Your Counseling Office

- Take An Authoritative Role
- Reach Them Early
- Encourage Campus Visits
- Require Balanced Lists
- Utilize Naviance
Numbers Game

- **Washington Monthly**: social mobility, research and service
- **Payscale.com**: starting and mid-career salaries
- **Forbes Magazine**: quality of teaching, career prospects, graduation rates and low levels of debt
- **Center for Measuring University Performance**: academic research
- **QS World University Rankings**: research, teaching, employability, and internationalisation
Building a Toolkit

- Harvard University’s *Choosing Courses to Prepare for College*
- National Survey of Student Engagement’s *Guide to Choosing a College*
- College Board’s *Apply to College*
- NACAC’s *Student and Parent Resources*
Questions? Comments!

- Do you have any best practices to share when you work with Asian American students and parents?

- How do we raise the profile of these issues?

- How do we continue this conversation?
Thank You.

Jennifer Lee
jhlee@oakschristian.org

Arun Ponnusamy
arun@collegewise.com