

## **The Status of Asian American Studies in California Higher Education**

Senate Select Committee on Asian Pacific Islander Affairs and Asian Pacific Islander Legislative  
Caucus

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### **Background Information**

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### **Background: Asian American Studies (AAS) at 50**

By next year, the very first AAS department in the country will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It is important to underscore: AAS originated at a California public university: San Francisco State University (SFSU).<sup>i</sup> After mass mobilizations by students, their faculty allies and the community, the College of Ethnic Studies at SFSU was established and within it, a Department of AAS. Similar struggles on various campuses would lead to the establishment of AAS programs and departments across the state. Because of AAS' long history in California higher education, the state has played a vital role in defining AAS as a field nationally. Many scholars who serve as the chairs and faculty members of AAS at various institutions across the country were trained in California. AAS has become firmly institutionalized; however, it is unevenly distributed across CA institutions of higher education.

Out of a total of 23 California State Universities, 8 campuses have AAS programs or departments.<sup>ii</sup> Out of a total of 10 University of California campuses, 5 have AAS programs or departments.<sup>iii</sup> In short, less than half of CA's 4-year public institutions have a formal AAS presence. Though California is home to the largest population of Asian Americans and the second largest population of Pacific Islander Americans in the country, this fact is not

represented in the state's universities. Indeed, it is the case that AAS faces barriers or simply does not exist on campuses where the Asian American Pacific Islander (API) population constitutes a significant percentage of the overall student body. As stated in a report by the College Campaign, "with 87 percent of Asian Americans and 73 percent of NHPs (Native Hawaiian Pacific Islanders) starting their college career in one of California's public community colleges or four year universities, the impact of state funding, policy and admissions practices are especially critical."<sup>iv</sup> This report focuses primarily on AAS research and teaching, however it is important to underscore that it is difficult to divorce a discussion of AAS from the access to and experiences of API students in higher education as the formation of AAS historically was a response to API students' demands for increased access to higher education including research and teaching that reflects their experiences.

## **AAS Research**

### Limited Funding

#### *Campus and UCOP*

CA AAS scholars are generally trained in the social sciences and humanities and typically depend on internal (individual campus and UCOP) sources to support their research. The UC-system prides itself as being home to some of the best universities in the world, but it falls short in terms of support for research on Asian Americans.<sup>v</sup> One big blow to AAS research in the UC-system was the ending of the UC Pacific Rim Research Program in 2015.<sup>vi</sup> Moreover, the UC-system does not support research on the most disadvantaged Asian American ethnic groups as well as historically significant Asian American ethnic groups in the state. For example, outside of California, there are public colleges and universities that support research on ethnic-specific groups like Puerto Ricans<sup>vii</sup> or Haitians,<sup>viii</sup> yet a center devoted to the study one of the oldest and

largest Asian American groups in California (and the U.S. more broadly)—Filipino Americans—does not exist at the UC. Unlike the CSUs, the UC system has not produced a comprehensive report on the status of Ethnic Studies, however based on anecdotal accounts, AAS scholars' attempts at securing campus and other state sources for research initiatives on ethnic-specific Asian American communities often fail. The argument generally made by campus and university officials is that they cannot support these kinds of initiatives because it opens up the possibility of too many competing ethnicity-based claims for research support.

### *Federal Funding*

The National Science Foundation (NSF) can be a source for federal funding for social scientific research on Asian Americans. However, because its programs are organized around the traditional disciplines (e.g. economics, political science, sociology), AAS scholars who are interdisciplinary in their training or research methods face significant challenges in securing funding from programs using traditional disciplinary standards for evaluating research proposals.

<sup>ix</sup> Indeed, if AAS is unevenly distributed across the state of California, it exists unevenly across the country. Reviewers of funding proposals may have very little knowledge or understanding of the history and mission of AAS. Even social scientists in the traditional disciplines using qualitative research techniques (as opposed to quantitative methods) have faced challenges in securing funding from the NSF. The problem was such that the NSF had to undergo a review of its evaluation criteria with respect to qualitative research.<sup>x</sup> Though UC-based scholars studying API issues have experienced some success in securing NSF funding in recent years, it must be underscored that none of them are housed in an AAS program or department and the research funded was a quantitative study.<sup>xi</sup>

When it comes to humanities research, AAS humanists can try to secure funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), however they face challenges similar to their social scientist counterparts: a lack of funding support for scholars whose training or projects are interdisciplinary in nature. Additionally, while the NEH has funding programs for “Faculty at Hispanic-Serving Institutions,” “Faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities,” and “Faculty at Tribal Colleges and Universities,” there is nothing designated for “Faculty at Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions” (AANAPISI). This is largely due to the dominance of the “model minority myth,” which leads the NEH to incorrectly assume that faculty at AANAPISIs, which often house AAS programs or departments, do not require targeted funding support. Only one UC campus enjoys the formal designation of AANAPISI though others meet the criteria. In the CSU system, 14 campuses meet the AANAPISI criteria but only 4 CSUs have ever received AANAPISI funding. 51 CCCs qualify as AANAPISIs but only 10 have ever received funding.<sup>xii</sup> The reason for this is because current federal statutes under Title III Part A prohibit institutions from receiving grants as both AANAPISI and Hispanic-Serving Institutions.

Even Asian American scholars seeking support on health-related research face challenges at securing funding support. One report finds that at the National Institutes for Health (NIH), “Minority scientists are less likely than their peers to have biomedical research grants funded — and the disparity has barely changed in 30 years, according to data from the US National Institutes of Health (NIH).”<sup>xiii</sup>

#### *Private Funding*

The challenges that AAS scholars face with respect to federal funding extend to private foundation funding as well. An example of the prevalence of the “model minority myth”

specifically is that the Ford Foundation's Minority Pre-, Dissertation and Post-doctoral fellowships exclude Asian American scholars from eligibility.<sup>xiv</sup> Though the fellowship program is geared toward, "groups whose underrepresentation in the American professoriate has been severe and longstanding," because it conflates all Asian American groups, Asian ethnic groups like the Hmong or the Vietnamese, who are grossly underrepresented in the college/university student population, not to mention the professoriate, are excluded from consideration.

### Devaluing of AAS Research

AAS scholarship is often devalued at our research universities. On the 5 UC campuses where there is an AAS program or department, faculty members are often limited to undergraduate teaching because their programs or departments are only undergraduate programs.<sup>xv</sup> The opportunities for faculty at these campuses to actively recruit graduate students to assist them in growing their research programs is limited.

It should be noted that at the UCs, AAS faculty are predominantly women. It is well documented that the academic profession is especially demanding for women of color, including APIs. They are taxed with heavier and more onerous teaching loads and higher service demands, and tend to receive more negative teaching evaluations.<sup>xvi</sup> As a consequence, they report high levels of stress, feelings of isolation, and are persistently challenged in terms of their legitimacy as scholars and teachers.<sup>xvii</sup> Often, they are "presumed incompetent" and face tough tenure battles.<sup>xviii</sup> This is further exacerbated for AAS scholars, where resources are scarce.<sup>xix</sup> Several UC-based AAS female faculty members' experiences mirror these general trends.<sup>xx</sup>

Higher educational policy in CA, meanwhile, fails to incorporate the findings of AAS research. AAS scholars have long-documented the immense diversity of our communities. Researchers who have disaggregated data on APIs in CA higher education for example, have

found that among Asian Americans, the Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong and Laotians are less likely to hold a college degree than the average Californian.<sup>xxi</sup> This sort of data could be used to improve access to CA higher education for these groups but it is not. As discussed above, this data also fails to inform how funders determine their priorities and thus AAS scholarship is negatively impacted.

## **Teaching AAS**

### Structural Disadvantages

The CSU Ethnic Studies Task Force on the Advancement of Ethnic Studies provides a comprehensive assessment of the state of Ethnic Studies, including AAS in the CSU system. Notably, the California Legislative Black Caucus played a role in supporting this initiative through Resolution ACR 271 (Weber) in the CA Assembly Higher Education Committee.<sup>xxii</sup> According to the report, several structural disadvantages, defined as “policies and practices that create unfavorable conditions and constraints and thus hinder ethnic studies in operation and impact” abound on CSU campuses.<sup>xxiii</sup> Among these include extensive service demands that faculty members of traditional departments do not have. For example, professors of Ethnic Studies, including AAS, are sometimes the only minority faculty members on different campuses. Not only do they have to teach, they often provide personal and professional mentorship for minority students who may not be majors or minors of their programs or departments. Ethnic Studies faculty may also be people on which university administrations depend to diversify the composition of campuses committees. A recommendation issuing from the report includes essential hiring and curriculum development support to address these structural disadvantages.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Though equivalent studies of Ethnic Studies at the UC or CCC have not been done, these structural disadvantages are not unique to Ethnic Studies in the CSU system. As discussed in the above section, the scholarship on faculty of color, including API's, in the professoriate shares similar conclusions about the negative impact of a range of structural disadvantages on both research and teaching. Due to limits on AANAPISI funding, which could enhance student support services on quite a number of CA college and university campuses, AAS faculty are often relegated to perform duties above and beyond teaching.<sup>xxv</sup>

### **Conclusion**

AAS research and teaching offers tremendous social and academic value not only to API community members and college students, but also to the CA citizenry more broadly. Yet, the expansion and sustainability AAS research and teaching across CA higher education is saddled with numerous challenges including a the uneven distribution of AAS across CA higher education; a lack of funding support for AAS research; the delegitimizing of AAS scholarship; structural disadvantages faced by AAS professors that impede AAS teaching, the expansion of contingent faculty making AAS course offerings irregular and threats to academic freedom exacerbated by the current national political climate. API legislators can and should play a role, together with AAS faculty across the California Community College, California State University and University of California systems, in helping AAS tackle these challenges.

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<sup>i</sup> To be clear: a distinction must be made between traditional scholarship that focuses on API communities and scholarship produced by AAS scholars from an AAS perspective. AAS includes the study of APIs, but because the field is rooted in the oppositional politics of the civil rights movements, antiracist power

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movements and antiwar protests of the 1960s and 1970s, it is driven by epistemologies and methodologies that separate it from the traditional social sciences and humanities.

ii <https://www.calstate.edu/AcadAff/ethnicstudies.shtml>. It is important to note the institutional difference between a “program” and a “department.” A “program” enjoys less institutional support and stability than a “department.” “Departmental” status guarantees faculty greater participation in academic governance. It should be noted, UCSD has an Ethnic Studies department and offers courses in AAS; UCR has an Ethnic Studies department where students can choose AAS as a primary field of study; UCSC has a Critical Race and Ethnicity Program that offers courses on AAS, UC Merced offers a major in Critical Race and Ethnic Studies but the course offered toward fulfillment of the major DO NOT include any courses on AAS: [http://catalog.ucmerced.edu/preview\\_program.php?catoid=8&poid=977](http://catalog.ucmerced.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=8&poid=977). UCSC’s API population is the second largest among undergraduates; UC Merced’s APIs constitute the greatest proportion of the undergraduate student body.

iii The AAAS does not have the data on California’s community college system. Only the CSU system, with support of its Chancellor Timothy P. White, has produced a comprehensive analysis of the status of Ethnic Studies, including Asian American Studies across all 23 campuses. See the full report here: <https://www.calstate.edu/AcadAff/ethnicstudies.shtml>.

iv [http://collegecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2015-State-of-Higher-Education\\_AANHPI2.pdf](http://collegecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2015-State-of-Higher-Education_AANHPI2.pdf)

v <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/uc-campuses-named-among-best-world>

vi <http://pacrim.ucsc.edu/>

vii <https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/>

viii <http://haitianstudies.ku.edu/>

ix [https://www.nsf.gov/about/research\\_areas.jsp](https://www.nsf.gov/about/research_areas.jsp)

x <http://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/savvy/footnotes/mar05/fn6.html>

xi <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/nsf-funds-extensive-survey-asian-americans>. The only exception is Janelle Wong, who teaches in Asian American Studies at the University of Maryland.

xii The data on this number is a bit unclear. The following are different sources for AANAPISI Data:

[http://collegecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2015-State-of-Higher-Education\\_AANHPI2.pdf](http://collegecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2015-State-of-Higher-Education_AANHPI2.pdf); also see [http://www.aanapisi.net/list\\_of\\_aanapisis](http://www.aanapisi.net/list_of_aanapisis). Of course the Department of Education, which funds the AANAPISI grant, should be a source of updated data, but the most recent data it has on the AANAPISI is from 2010: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/list/asian-americans-initiative/aanapisi.html>.

xiii <http://www.nature.com/news/racial-bias-continues-to-haunt-nih-grants-1.18807>. Yet, according to another study, “a failure to create more racially diverse research cohorts, some experts say, could exacerbate existing health disparities if those most affected by disease continue to be excluded,” see <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/123-a297/>.

xiv [http://sites.nationalacademies.org/PGA/FordFellowships/PGA\\_047960#criteria](http://sites.nationalacademies.org/PGA/FordFellowships/PGA_047960#criteria)

xv Neither U.C. Davis nor U.C. Santa Barbara have graduate programs.

xvi Agathangelou, Anna M., and L.H.M. Ling. 2002. “An Unten(ur)able Position: The Politics of Teaching for Women of Color in the U.S.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 4:368-98; Fries, Christopher J. and R. James McNinch. 2003. “Signed Versus Unsigned Student Evaluations of Teaching: A Comparison.” *Teaching Sociology* 31:333-344.

xvii Hune, Shirley. 1998. *Asian Pacific American Women in Higher Education: Claiming Visibility & Voice*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, Program on the Status and Education of Women; Rubin, D. L. 2001. “Help! My Professor (or Doctor or Boss) Doesn’t Talk English.” Pp. 127-140 in *Readings in Cultural Contexts*, edited by Judith N. Martin, Thomas K. Nakayama, and Lisa A. Flores. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield; Smith, Janice W., and Toni Calasanti. 2005. “The Influences of Gender, Race, and Ethnicity on Workplace Experiences of Institutional and Social Isolation.” *Sociological Spectrum* 25:307-34; TuSmith, Bonnie, and Maureen T. Reddy, eds. 2002. *Race in the College Classroom: Pedagogy and Politics*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

xviii See <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt4cgr3k>. This text has become a seminal text in examination racism and sexism in the academy but it is actually a growing field of study.

xix Evans, Stephanie. 2007. “Women of Color in American Higher Education.” *The National Education Association Higher Education Journal*, 131.

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<sup>xx</sup> See Vo, Linda, "Transformative Disjunctures in the Academy: Asian American Studies as Praxis," in Stockdill, Brett. *Transforming the Ivory Tower: Challenging racism, sexism, and homophobia in the academy*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2012; Valverde, Kieu-Linh Caroline. "Fight the Tower: A Call to Action for Women of Color in Academia." *Seattle J. Soc. Just.* 12 (2013): 367.

<sup>xxi</sup> [http://collegecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2015-State-of-Higher-Education\\_AANHPI2.pdf](http://collegecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2015-State-of-Higher-Education_AANHPI2.pdf). There are numerous studies of APIs' unequal access to higher education across ethnicity and socio-economic background. There are but a few produced by UC-based AAS scholars or through the UC-based AAPI Nexus, published out of AAS at UCLA: Chang, Mitchell J., Mike Hoa Nguyen, and Kapua L. Chandler. "Can Data Disaggregation Resolve Blind Spots in Policy Making? Examining a Case for Native Hawaiians." *AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice and Community* 13, no. 1 (2015): 295-320; Pimentel, Leilani Matasaua, and Neil Horikoshi. "Educational Opportunity and the Missing Minority in Higher Education: Changing the National Narrative of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders by 2040." *AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice and Community* 14, no. 1 (2016): 66-77; Maramba, Dina. "The importance of critically disaggregating data: The case of Southeast Asian American college students." *AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice and Community* 9, no. 1-2 (2011): 127-133; De La Cruz-Viesca, Melany. "Disaggregation Matters: Asian Americans and Wealth Data." *AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice and Community* 9, no. 1-2 (2011): 91-100; Teranishi, Robert T. *Asians in the Ivory Tower: Dilemmas of Racial Inequality in American Higher Education*. Multicultural Education Series. Teachers College Press. 1234 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10027, 2010; Teranishi, Robert T., Cynthia M. Alcantar, and Bach Mai Dolly Nguyen. "Race and Class through the Lens of Asian American and Pacific Islander Experiences: Perspectives from Community College Students." *AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice and Community* 13, no. 1 (2015): 72-90.

<sup>xxii</sup> [http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201320140ACR71](http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140ACR71)

<sup>xxiii</sup> <https://www.calstate.edu/AcadAff/ethnicstudies.shtml>: p. 15.

<sup>xxiv</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>xxv</sup> Robert Teranishi offers an interesting policy recommendation related to AANAPISIs: "Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions: Areas of Growth, Innovation, and Collaboration." *AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice and Community* 9, no. 1-2 (2011): 151-155.