

Cornell University

Asian and Asian American Campus Climate Task Force

Report

October 2004

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Introduction

Students of Asian descent are, by a wide margin, the largest community of color at Cornell University. In 2000, Asian and Asian Americans¹ made up:

- Fourteen percent of the student body
- Sixteen percent of undergraduate students
- Fifty-five percent of international students (both graduate and undergraduate)
- Over sixty percent of the minority undergraduate enrollment

In the United States, Asian Americans are the second-fastest growing racial/ethnic group, growing, by conservative estimate, 48 percent between 1990 and 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002).

However, the terms “Asian” and “Asian American” are, in many ways, terms of convenience. They have historically been used to encompass in broad strokes an extraordinarily diverse array of individuals and groups with differences in fundamental but often overlapping dimensions, such as birthplace, class, generational status in the United States, ethnicity, culture, religion, and language. For example, the Office of Minority and Educational Affairs (OMEA) at Cornell identified at least twenty-six Asian ethnic groups in its 2001-2002 survey of incoming first year students. There are as many as forty-three such groups in the United States (Lee, 1998). In addition, much of the dialogue on campus fails to distinguish even between “Asian” and “Asian American,” further obscuring the differences in the concerns and challenges facing two distinctly different communities.

Despite important distinctions and differences, students, staff, and faculty have identified a number of common issues confronting the Asian and Asian American communities at Cornell. Identification of these issues led to the formation of the Cornell Asian and Asian American Campus Climate Task Force in November 2002. These issues included:

- **Over representation of Asian and Asian American students in the completed suicides at Cornell.** Fifty-five percent or eleven of the twenty confirmed or suspected suicides of Cornell students since 1996 were by students of Asian descent. This disproportionate statistic confirmed an existing perception by many in the campus community that suicide was a particular problem among Asian and Asian American students. The suicide rate at Cornell was seen as especially disturbing when contrasted with the overall suicide rate in the United States.

¹ The label “Asian and Asian American” used here refers to individuals whose ancestry can be traced to East Asia, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, as well as the Pacific Islands.

According to the United States Surgeon General's Report of 2001, the suicide rate for Asian Americans was 7 per 100,000. For whites the rate was 12.8 per 100,000 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

- **Bias-related incidents.** The most prominent incidents at Cornell involved women of Asian descent being targeted for verbal, physical, and sexual attacks (National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, 2001).
- **Under representation among university staff and faculty of persons of Asian descent.** In a report prepared by the Vice Provost for Diversity and Faculty Development in 2001, only 6.5 percent of all faculty and less than 2 percent of all full-time, non-academic staff were identified as Asian.
- **Students of Asian descent least satisfied at Cornell.** Consortium on Financing Higher Education (COFHE) survey results showed that seniors of Asian descent graduating in 2000 were the least satisfied with their Cornell experience on a number of variables, including accessibility of faculty members and the quality of academic advising and counseling services.
- **Concerns expressed by Asian and Asian American students about a perceived lack of appropriate services targeted at the needs of the Asian and Asian American community.**
- **Under utilization of existing mental health services by students of Asian descent and international students.** (The majority of international students at Cornell are from Asia.)
 - Fourteen percent of the total student enrollment in Fall 2000 was identified as "Asian."
 - Ten percent of the students seen at Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) of Gannett: Cornell University Health Services during the 2000-2001 academic year were identified as "Asian."
 - International students comprise 15 percent of the total student body.
 - Nine percent of the students seen at CAPS were international.
 - Research (Lin & Cheung, 1999) and anecdotal evidence at CAPS indicate that when persons of Asian descent do seek mental health services, they often do so at significantly higher levels of distress and risk than non-Asians.
- **Perceived lack of recognition and awareness of the reality, experience, and impact of racism and stereotyping as they relate to Asians and Asian Americans.**
 - In Spring 2000, the Asian American Studies Program issued a report on campus climate for Asian Americans at Cornell. The report argues that the Asian and Asian American communities here, as elsewhere, have been subject to the "model minority" stereotype, which holds that they have no need for services beyond those offered to the general student body. Furthermore, the report argues that while continuing to "suffer the consequences of being racially marked," Asians and Asian Americans have been rendered "conceptually invisible." In a most fundamental way, this is the main problem facing Asian and Asian American students at Cornell.

In order to address these concerns, the Vice President for Student and Academic Services and the Provost established the Cornell Asian and Asian American Campus Climate Task Force on November 26, 2002. The Task Force, comprised of students, faculty, staff, administrators and alumni, was charged with developing recommendations for a campus-wide approach to addressing campus climate, services, and program issues as they relate to the Asian and Asian American community at Cornell. In order to best meet this charge, the Task Force initially proposed four subcommittees: Needs Assessment, Student Programs and Services, Crisis Prevention Study, and Multicultural Awareness.

Because it is crucial to comprehensively and accurately assess needs related to each of the areas above in order to craft effective strategies for change, the main focus of the Task Force has been on needs assessment. Simultaneously, the Crisis Prevention Study Committee originally suggested by the Task Force has grown to become a campus-wide committee, under the leadership of Dean of Students, Kent Hubbell, and with the participation of the Task Force co-chairs. The recommendations of the Task Force and the Crisis Study Committee will continue to take place collaboratively, as the work of each is integral to the goals of both.

Similarly, the work related to Programs and Services and to Multicultural Awareness, beyond the needs assessment phase, will be addressed in the recommendations section of this report.

The Task Force adopted a set of guiding principles. These principles were formed in accordance with Cornell's "Open Doors, Open Hearts, and Open Minds" statement on diversity and inclusiveness, and were intended to inform the Task Force's work. The guiding principles are:

- A diverse living and learning environment promotes and nurtures optimal intellectual and personal growth and discovery, scholarship, and creativity.
- The Asian and Asian American community is a rich, diverse, heterogeneous, and dynamic community comprising close to one-sixth of the entire student population. Furthermore, this community will likely continue to grow in the foreseeable future. Any improvement in the well-being of this community will likely have a significant impact on the campus climate for all communities.
- Any effort must recognize and take into account cultural, historical, societal, and other factors relevant to the experience of Asians and Asian Americans in this country.
- Any real change in the campus climate is a responsibility shared by students, staff, and faculty, across the entire university community.
- Any real change in the campus climate will require coordinated, comprehensive, and sustained effort and commitment.
- Student participation is necessary for the achievement of any of the goals set forth by this Task Force.
- Stereotypes, be they "positive" or "negative," exist, and are detrimental to the psychological, social, and intellectual well being of students, as well as contrary to the principles and values of this university.

Thus, the Task Force was predicated on an awareness and recognition of not only the considerable diversity of Asian and Asian American students, but also of their integral contribution and relevance to the entire Cornell community. The Task Force takes an environmental approach (Archer & Cooper, 1998) assuming that defining, assessing, implementing, and institutionalizing any cohesive plan targeted at the Asian and Asian American community requires a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated approach that occurs on multiple levels, across the entire university community.

Part One: Gathering Information

Needs Assessment

The first and primary task of the Task Force has been to examine the concerns, needs, and challenges of Cornell's Asian and Asian American community in order to make recommendations toward improving their experiences at Cornell. It was obviously necessary to gather information from a wide array of sources, in many different forms, and from as many diverse perspectives as possible. To this end the Task Force formed four working groups to conduct a basic needs assessment. These groups were:

- Qualitative Research (Outreach and Feedback)
- Quantitative Research
- Benchmarking
- Literature Review

Qualitative Research Work Group (Outreach and Feedback)

In a two-phase process, the qualitative research work group gathered information from students, faculty, and staff. During phase one the group held a series of meetings with groups of faculty and staff whose work brings them into regular contact with Asian and Asian American students. In phase two a series of community meetings/informal focus groups was held with groups of Asian and Asian American students.

Outreach Meetings with Faculty and Staff

In the Spring 2003 and Fall 2004 semesters, the qualitative work group held a series of informational and discussion meetings, predominantly with university student services staff in the colleges and other campus organizations. (See list of organizations at the end of this section.) The purpose of these meetings was to increase awareness of the work of the Task Force, and to discuss issues and concerns facing the Asian and Asian American student community from each participating group's perspective and experience. Qualitative information was gathered through dialogue about the experiences, needs, and challenges of Asian and Asian American students and those who work closely with them. In addition, it was hoped that such dialogue would generate discussion about practices and approaches that appear successful in addressing these needs and concerns. These discussions contributed to the Task Force's recommendations. Meetings were held with representatives from the following:

- Asian American Studies Program
- College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
- College of Architecture, Art and Planning
- College of Arts and Sciences
- College of Engineering
- College of Human Ecology

- Cornell International Education Network
- Dean of Students: New Student Programs, Office of Student Support
- Gannett: Cornell University Health Services
- Graduate School
- International Students and Scholars Office
- Joint Assemblies Multicultural Issues Committee
- Minority Student Advisory Council
- Office of Minority Educational Affairs/COSEP Associates
- School of Hotel Administration
- School of Industrial and Labor Relations

The format of these meetings was informal and began with an overview of the Task Force and the identified concerns that led to its formation. Following this introduction, the group held a discussion based on these questions:

1. What issues, challenges, or concerns do Asian and Asian American students present with? How are these issues different from those of other students you work with?
2. What challenges do you face in working with Asian and Asian American students? How do you approach these challenges?
3. What services or approaches do you find effective with Asian and Asian American students (for your unit and for Cornell)? Why?
4. What changes, if any, would you like to see in how your office and/or Cornell as a whole addresses needs of Asian and Asian American students? How do you think we can better meet the needs of this population?

Outreach Meetings with Students

Similarly, members of the Task Force qualitative work group met with a number of student groups. In planning these meetings, the work group attempted to get a good cross-section of students from different Asian and Asian American constituencies on campus including graduate and undergraduate students from different ethnicities and colleges. Lists of students were generated, by citizenship (for international students), by college, and by student organizations. Invitations from the Task Force were sent via e-mail to these students for informal “pizza and discussion” groups to discuss concerns facing Asian and Asian American students.

Unfortunately, the work group initially encountered a low response rate to these invitations. In some instances, hundreds of invitations were sent with only a handful of students actually attending. The work group attempted to improve attendance by adjusting the times and venues of the meetings. For example, rather than inviting the students to come to a central location, members of the work group “went to them” at their college or student group meeting. The work group met with student members of the following:

- Asian Pacific Americans for Action (APAA)
- Chinese international graduate students
- College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
- College of Arts and Sciences
- College of Engineering
- College of Human Ecology
- Cornell Asian Pacific Student Union (CAPSU)
- Indian international graduate students
- Journey from Asian American Students to Professionals: Education and Reflection (JASPER)
- Society for India

These meetings were informal yet structured. Over a pizza “dinner,” attendees were given an overview of the Task Force’s history, goals and objectives, and then engaged in a focus group/discussion based on the following questions:

1. What issues, challenges, or concerns do you think Asian and Asian American students face? How are these issues different from those of other students with non-Asian backgrounds?
2. Who would you consider going to if you have any personal, academic, or other problems? What might affect whether you decide to go or not go? If you have gone in the past, how helpful was it? What was helpful or unhelpful about it? What would have made it better?
3. What services or approaches do you find works best for your personal and academic situations? Why? What does or doesn’t work?
4. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your Cornell experience so far? What changes, if any, could Cornell implement that might increase it one point or even half a point?
5. What changes, if any, would you like to see in how Cornell addresses the needs of Asian and Asian American students? How do you think Cornell can better meet the needs of this population? What do you think are some obstacles preventing Cornell from effectively addressing these issues?

In addition, a brief questionnaire was distributed to assess students’ awareness of and willingness to utilize various support services and offices on campus.

Quantitative Research Work Group

The quantitative research work group analyzed previously collected Cornell-specific data to gain a better understanding of the beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of Cornell Asian and Asian American students. The office of Cooperative Institutional Research and Planning (CIRP) supplied data from the 2002 Freshman Survey (2002 FS), the 2003 Enrolled Student Survey (2003 ESS), and the 2002 Senior Survey (2002 SS). Analysis of these surveys provided statistical comparisons of Asian students and of Asian American students with Cornell students of other ethnic origins. Using the same survey data from other institutions, comparisons were also made among Cornell Asian students, Cornell Asian American students, and their counterparts at other colleges and universities. Additional data examined by the work group included:

- National College Health Assessment (2002)
- Gannett: Cornell University Health Services internal data
- Office of the Dean of Students internal data

Benchmarking Work Group

The benchmarking group identified successful, effective programs for Asian and Asian American students at other colleges and universities. The Task Force established the following institutional criteria to be used for comparative purposes:

- Significant Asian and Asian American student population comparable to Cornell's Asian and Asian American undergraduate student enrollment.
- A sizeable graduate program with a significant enrollment of Asian and Asian American students.
- The presence of housing, curricular, advising, or social programs for Asian and Asian American students.

Using these criteria, members identified comparable peer institutions as well as a broader range of institutions in order to survey a wide array of best practices that would inform the Task Force recommendations. The goal was to determine what issues these institutions have faced in the Asian and Asian American communities and how they have successfully handled those issues.

Where available, data was collected on:

- Cultural centers relating to the Asian and Asian American community.
- Programming for the Asian and Asian American community.
- Student support or student services staff dedicated to Asian and Asian American students.

Literature Review Work Group

The literature review work group compiled an annotated bibliography and summary of articles and research relevant to Asian and Asian American students. The bibliography covers topics such as:

- The model minority image.
- Differences in needs among Asian and Asian American ethnic groups.
- Research on Asian American Studies programs.
- Socioeconomic and family differences among both Asian and Asian American groups as well as between those groups and the broader American public.
- Research on providing mentorship for students.

The literature has been copied and filed according to topic with the goal of developing a resource area for Asian and Asian American students and others interested in issues that impact this community.

The findings and subsequent recommendations in this report synthesize this literature as well as the findings of the work groups.

Part Two: Task Force Findings

The Impact of Stereotypes

The literature review work group researched writings in Asian and Asian American studies. The review clarified several theoretical and practical considerations that not only affect (and in some ways limit) the Task Force findings, but also inform the interpretation of the findings. These considerations have to do with the stereotypes that students of Asian descent must contend with at Cornell and in the larger American society in which Cornell is embedded. At some risk of over-simplification, these stereotypes may be broadly stated as “all Asians are alike” and “Asians are a model minority.”

Although it may be evident to readers that these statements are merely stereotypes and thus easily dismissed as irrelevant, this report argues that many such “hidden injuries of race” (Osajima, 1993), whether they be conscious or unconscious, can have real impact on the experiences of Asian and Asian American students. The impact is clear not only in their self-perceptions but also in the perceptions of others -- students, faculty, and staff -- with whom they interact, and ultimately in the kinds of services and supports they receive (Lee, 1996; Educational Testing Service, 1997).

As noted earlier, the terms “Asian” and “Asian American” are very much terms of convenience, and the two groups are often confounded with one another. Indeed, most of what has been written about students of Asian descent does not distinguish between these two groups (e.g., Hune, 2002; Chen, 1999). Part of this is no doubt due to methodological and sampling problems (Chen, 1999), but part of it is also related to the common perception that “all Asians are alike.” There is some basis for this, in the sense that the majority of people of Asian descent living in the U.S. are foreign-born (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). However, regardless of whether they just arrived in the U.S., or if their family has been here for generations, individuals of Asian descent are likely to be subjected to a widespread assumption of foreignness (Center for Teaching and Learning, 1998; Tuan, 1998).

The second widespread stereotype is that of the “honorary white” (Tuan 1998) or “model minority.” This stereotype extols Asian Americans’ seemingly innate knack for mathematics and science and for hard work and self-reliance. The stereotype has been cited for decades as a factual example of what other minorities in America can achieve, if only they try hard enough (Lee, 1996). The evidence used to support the stereotype usually involves Asian Americans’ high educational and economic attainment, and indeed, according to U.S. Census data, Asian Pacific Americans are more likely than non-Hispanic whites to have at least a college degree and to have family incomes of \$75,000 or more. However, the same data also show that they are more likely to have less than a ninth-grade education and to live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). Moreover, because Asian American families often include extended family members who contribute to family income, per capita income is lower than that of non-Hispanic whites and a closer examination of specific Asian American ethnic groups show that some groups experience much higher rates of poverty: Vietnamese (26 percent), Laotian (35

percent), Cambodian (43 percent), and Hmong (64 percent) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

In a university context, any proponent of the “model minority” stereotype can point to the greater proportion of Asian American high school graduates who continue on to college, to their higher scores on the SAT mathematics and GRE quantitative tests, to the relatively higher percentage of such students who receive degrees in engineering, business, or biological sciences, and to the fact that Asian Americans have the highest high school or college graduation rate of any group (Hsia & Peng, 1998). However, because the “model minority” stereotype has terrific potential to be held up as an ideal in the university context, it is here also that the stereotype simultaneously has the greatest potential to obscure the actual experiences of many Asian and Asian American students and the very real challenges they face.

Like many stereotypes, the “model minority” hangs on because it can be supported by some facts; however those facts do not offer a complete or nuanced or true picture of the Asian and Asian American experience of campus life. For example, while it may be true that college students of Asian descent are more likely than other groups to major in math or in the sciences, one study found that, after controlling for factors such as socio-economic status and SAT scores, students of Asian descent had lower GPAs than their matched white counterparts and were more likely than white students to be placed on academic probation or to withdraw for medical reasons. They were also less likely to graduate in four years (Toupin & Son, 1991).

Another study found that when the saliency of the ethnic stereotype was high (such as in a competitive higher education setting like Cornell), Asian Americans’ performance on mathematical problems was significantly impaired, suggesting the potential for “choking” under the pressure of high expectations (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000). Furthermore, when Asian American students did poorly on a mathematical test, it was found that graders gave them substantially fewer points than white students who performed identically (Ho, Driscoll & Loosbrock, 1998).

These findings are consistent with what Asian American university students themselves have reported in other studies.

- In one study, nearly one-third of Asian American students felt that they did not know whether or not their work in class had been fairly graded, compared with only about 10 percent of respondents from other groups (Center for Teaching and Learning, 1998).
- Another study showed that Asian American college students in general reported similarly elevated pressures to conform to racial and ethnic stereotypes regarding academic performance than did African American and Latino/a students, and that both Asian American and African American students reported a significantly higher degree of faculty racism than white students (Ancis, Sedlacek & Mohr, 2000).

- When the Asian Pacific American Educational Advisory (APAEA) Committee of the California State University system examined the experiences of students in their state-wide system, many students testified that they were not comfortable with campus climate, that students services were indifferent to their problems and needs, and that subtle incidents of discrimination were common, such as derogatory or racist statements by faculty and other students, expressions of resentment towards Asian Americans from other students for their achievement orientation, and expressions of mistrust or false accusations from instructors (Suzuki, 2002).

It is clear that despite the image of academic success implicit in the “model minority” stereotype, Asian and Asian American students report significant stresses and concerns. In fact, the “model minority” stereotype itself contributes to these difficulties, both in how others perceive the students of Asian descent and in their own self-perceptions (Lee, 1996). Indeed, when the definition of success was expanded beyond the academic realm into a measure of overall competence, Asian American students were found to score lower than white students (Ying, Lee, Tsai, Hung, Lin & Wan, 2001).

Not only does the “model minority” stereotype potentially cause stress, but it can also prevent Asian and Asian American students from acknowledging problems and seeking help (Lee, 1996; Yang, 2002). The dilemma faced by Asian and Asian American students at a university like Cornell is unique to that group. They experience the stresses and stigmas familiar to other students of color, but because of the “model minority” stereotype and its particular potency in a university setting, they are often viewed as not needing support services or programs, by both school officials and by the students themselves (Yang, 2002).

The internalization of the stereotype has been shown to be related to feelings of shame (Chu, 2002; Lee, 1996) and to a reluctance to seek assistance when confronted with personal or academic difficulties (Center for Teaching and Learning, 1998; Yang, 2002). These hesitations often result in students not getting as much attention from professors or teaching assistants (Center for Teaching and Learning, 1998) and in lower utilization rates of university counseling centers (Chen, 1999).

In direct contrast to the stereotype driven behaviors, studies show that Asian American college students are not immune to mental health difficulties and often show increased risk of depression and anxiety, especially among the newly arrived or foreign-born (Chen, 1999; Chun, Eastman, Wang & Sue, 1998). However, there is evidence that Asians’ and Asian Americans’ levels of distress tend to be underestimated by others to a greater degree than white Americans, especially if the rater was white, suggesting an interpretive bias possibly based on ethnic stereotypes (Okazaki, 2002). In addition, Liang and Sedlacek (2000) showed that white student affairs professionals at the University of Maryland have a significant tendency to hold more positive attitudes towards Asian Americans students than towards students whose race was not identified. Although such a finding may seem innocuous, it may be another manifestation of the “model minority”

stereotype and could contribute to the belief that Asian American students do not need academic support or mental health care (Liang & Sedlacek, 2000).

Ultimately, belief in a “model minority” results in a kind of double marginalization in which Asian and Asian American students are “simultaneously exalted and ignored in the U.S. imagination” (Lee, 1996) and can lead to official neglect of the development of appropriate programs and services (Educational Testing Service, 1997).

Needs Assessment Findings

Although every attempt has been made to be as comprehensive as possible in this report’s coverage of possible issues and concerns, one major limitation needs to be noted before proceeding. The bulk of the information collected, analyzed, and discussed refers to undergraduate students, and, as a result, primarily to Asian American students. The university has collected a wealth of information about the undergraduate community at Cornell, primarily through the office of Cooperative Institutional Research and Planning (CIRP), which conducts regular surveys of incoming freshmen, enrolled students, and graduating seniors. Because a corresponding survey for graduate students does not exist, little hard data has been collected regarding the issues and concerns of Asian and Asian American graduate students. In addition, most of the programs and services on campus are geared towards the needs of undergraduate students with relatively few aimed toward graduate students. However, there is a rough correspondence in terms graduate/international student concerns and undergraduate/Asian American student concerns.

As will be noted later, analysis of the CIRP survey data suggests that Asian undergraduates and Asian American undergraduates are more similar to one another than to other groups. Their issues and concerns are discussed together unless otherwise specified.

Findings: Students

Characteristics of Asian and Asian American Students at Cornell

Judging by information gleaned from the surveys and discussions with Cornell students, faculty, and staff, Asian and Asian American students differ significantly from their peers of non-Asian descent, at least among the undergraduate population. In many ways, these differences are consistent with the “model minority” stereotype, but other findings belie a one-dimensional interpretation and suggest a more complex and conflicted picture.

One theme that emerged repeatedly from the discussions was that Asian and Asian American students at Cornell tend to be more narrowly focused and intent on academic endeavors and success and less focused on non-academic activities and interests. This theme was strongly consistent with the quantitative data. For example, the 2003 Cornell Enrolled Student Survey (2003 ESS) indicated that almost 35 percent of Asian and Asian American student respondents reported spending more than twenty hours a week doing

coursework outside of class and that 21 percent reported spending more than twenty hours a week attending classes or labs. Correspondingly, these respondents also reported being less likely than other students to participate in many non-academic activities.

Although there are positive components to this data, such as the finding that the same respondents tended to engage in fewer alcohol-related activities, they also were less likely to engage in activities which could have potentially stress-relieving effects, such as socializing with friends, exercising, participating in intercollegiate or intramural sports, fraternity/sorority life, or studying abroad (2002 FS; 2003 ESS). One area in which Asian and Asian American students appeared to be more engaged is computer-related activities. Overall, not only do these students spend more time doing work on the computer (2003 ESS), they were also more likely than their peers to participate in internet chat rooms (2002 FS; 2003 ESS). In terms of self-perception, students of Asian descent rated themselves higher in mathematical and artistic abilities but lower in several social dimensions, such as popularity, self-confidence, leadership ability, and drive for achievement (2002 FS).

Asian and Asian American students also appeared to have more pragmatic expectations of their education than did their peers. Incoming Cornell freshman of Asian descent were significantly more likely to view college as preparation for graduate or professional school (2002 FS), and they were more likely to view success in financial terms (2002 FS; 2002 SS). These findings appear to show that students of Asian descent were more focused on a specific future goal and viewed their college education as a necessary stepping-stone toward that goal. Extrapolating from these findings, we can imagine a group of students who have a tendency to put academics above self-care or personal growth activities and who might regard failure more seriously because college is viewed as a means towards a long-term goal or destination.

At the same time, despite these “pragmatic” tendencies, Asian and Asian American undergraduate students at Cornell were also more likely to express a desire for moral and ethical development (2002 FS; 2002 SS). All three surveys showed that Asian and Asian American students were more likely to want greater Cornell emphasis on understanding racism and diversity. The same students were also more likely to endorse a course requirement on diversity (2002 FS; 2003 ESS; 2002 SS). International Asian undergraduates indicated that they were less comfortable than their peers with those of other races, cultures, ethnicities, and sexualities (2003 ESS). Both Asian American and Asian international seniors reported less interaction with other minority groups (2002 SS).

One interesting set of findings was the data indicating that Cornell Asian and Asian American students were more likely to require remedial work in English and reading and that they tended to rate themselves lower in public speaking and writing ability (2002 FS). This suggests a potential deficit in English language and communication skills—skills essential for socializing with peers and for taking full advantage of a liberal arts education. This is consistent not only for international students but also with the fact that over 60 percent of all persons of Asian descent living in the U.S. are foreign-born (U. S.

Census Bureau, 2003). Many Asian American students, while not technically “international,” may be relatively recent arrivals from other countries or may come from households in which English is not the primary language. This has obvious implications for both academic and social functioning.

Another significant set of findings on Cornell students came from the National College Health Assessment 2002 conducted by Gannett: Cornell University Health Services. Consistent with CIRP survey data, self-identified Asian American students at Cornell were less likely to use alcohol and other drugs. However, they were also less likely to get enough sleep or exercise. Although they were least likely to report depression and anxiety, they were more likely to report significant difficulties (sufficient to affect academic performance within the last twelve months) with stress (41 percent vs. 31 percent overall) and sleep difficulties (30 percent vs. 24 percent overall). They were twice as likely to report being in a sexually or physically abusive relationship and were more likely to report feeling hopeless (44 percent vs. 36 percent overall).

This latter finding is significant because research has shown hopelessness to be a strong predictor of suicidal behavior (e.g., Beck, Brown, Berchick, Stewart & Steer, 1990). Furthermore, Asian American and international students were least likely to seek services at Gannett’s Counseling and Psychological Services (Counseling and Psychological Services, 2002 Annual Report), which is consistent with national trends (Chen, 1999). Preliminary Gannett data shows that Asian and Asian American students constituted a disproportionately high 35 percent of the psychiatric hospitalizations and 25 percent of the medical leaves of absence taken by students.

Asian and Asian American Student Experiences of Cornell

Overall, both the qualitative and quantitative data show an ambivalent relationship between Asian and Asian American students and Cornell University. One of the major findings of this report is the tendency of students of Asian descent to be more dissatisfied than their peers with their undergraduate education (2002 SS). It is interesting to note that this is not the case with the Norm Group 1 (schools with whom Cornell traditionally competes unsuccessfully for students). The central question for the university is what factors contribute to this finding.

Conjecturally, there are several issues. Even before they arrive, many Asian and Asian American students may be ambivalent about Cornell, predisposing them toward a greater likelihood of dissatisfaction. The 2002 Freshmen Survey data showed that Asian and Asian American students were more likely to list Cornell as their second, third, or lower choice of schools and that they were more likely to anticipate transferring to another college. These students were also more likely to indicate that their parents’ wishes were very important in their decision to attend college, suggesting less internal motivation to be at Cornell. These findings support the frequent observations regarding strong Asian and Asian American parental pressure so often cited by students, faculty, and staff.

Once here, Asian and Asian American students are less likely to interact with faculty and staff. Not only is there a general lack of contact with faculty, there is general dissatisfaction with the faculty contact that does take place. Asian and Asian American students are less likely than their peers to interact socially with faculty or to have discussions with faculty outside of class. When those discussions do occur, Asian and Asian American students tend to be less satisfied with the quality of the interaction (2002 FS; 2003 ESS; 2002 SS). This dissatisfaction is not consistently found at Cornell's peer institutions. Among Norm Group 1 schools, Asian American students were as likely as their peers to interact socially with faculty and to discuss career plans and ambitions with faculty.

Another finding about faculty interaction is that Asian and Asian American students at Cornell report being less likely to rely on others for advice on courses, academic and career goals or personal issues (2003 ESS). A number of students at the discussion groups expressed discomfort with speaking to faculty members or advisors, citing a general sense of intimidation when speaking to authority figures. While this may be partially a cultural phenomenon, a number also indicated that they had had negative experiences when they had spoken to faculty members or advisors, especially when they felt misunderstood or when they felt that the faculty did not care.

Among Asian international graduate students, a strong theme was the difficulty in choosing and interacting with faculty advisors. Some ascribed this to a general lack of familiarity with the advising system at Cornell; others felt trapped in relationships with advisors with whom they did not feel comfortable. The students generally felt that an earlier and more thorough orientation to the advising system would be helpful.

As noted earlier, Asian and Asian American students also appeared to be more focused and intent on academics in their self-reported behaviors. This suggests another possible factor in their overall dissatisfaction. They were less likely to participate in intramural or intercollegiate sports, fraternities/sororities, and partying or drinking. Considering the fact that most Asian Americans come from urban settings (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000), the rural environment of Cornell and the Ithaca community, with relatively limited options for city-style recreation, may be a factor as well. Interestingly, Asian and Asian American students were more likely to socialize online, participate in cultural/ethnic groups, spend time in the residence halls, and utilize the student center (2003 ESS). These findings may suggest possible avenues for outreach, community building, and service provision.

Noteworthy as well is the finding that almost 50 percent of Asian American seniors (but not Asian internationals) reported having little or no sense of community at Cornell (2002 SS). These students were also more likely than their peers, including Asian internationals, to report that it was very or fairly difficult to have their ideas taken seriously by fellow students (2002 SS). It is challenging to know how to interpret this, but Fisher, Wallace & Fenton (2000) found that Asian American teens reported the highest level of peer discrimination of any group and experienced the highest level of distress because of it.

Suzuki (1998) also highlighted the experience of stereotyping and subtle forms of discrimination experienced by Asian American college students from their peers.

During the community meetings with the Task Force, a number of Asian and Asian American students related past experiences of bias, both blatant and subtle, often having to do with assumptions around language proficiency or with racist humor or comments by faculty and students. Many students also expressed a desire for a “safe place” where they could feel comfortable and be themselves without having to be constantly on guard. This sentiment has been echoed by Asian and Asian American students at other schools and institutions as well (e.g., Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002; Lagdameo et al., 1998).

Self-reported grade data for Asian and Asian American students may also reveal factors leading to general dissatisfaction with the Cornell student experience. While Asian international students were more likely to report having A/A- GPAs, both overall and in their majors, Asian American students were more likely to report B+/B overall GPA and B/B- GPA in their majors. Among Norm Group 1 schools, the Asian American students had higher GPA's (2003 ESS; 2002 SS).

This is an intriguing finding, because it is consistent with the widespread perception among students that Cornell is a tough, stressful school, especially for Asian Americans. Despite the fact that they tend to put more hours into their academics, often at the expense of other activities, they appear to be getting lower grades than their peers in Norm Group 1 schools. (Since Cornell tends to be a second, third, or lower choice for these students, presumably Norm Group 1 schools would include their higher choices.) Thus the Asian American students at Cornell may be frustrated by a combination of factors including enrollment at a lower-choice school, working very hard without much fun, and getting lower grades.

Choice of major may also be a source of dissatisfaction. Some literature (e.g., Toupin & Son, 1991) argues that Asian and Asian American students' choice of majors can be heavily influenced by parental pressure as well as by stereotyping, both internal and external, which can lead to a poor match between course of study and individual aptitudes and interests. These elements may culminate in academic difficulties and lower grades. Asian and Asian American students were more likely than their peers to come from families earning less than \$50,000 and were more likely to report that paying for college resulted in severe impact on their families (2003 ESS). The combination of lower grades and greater financial stress may also contribute to overall dissatisfaction.

Cornell international students confront additional concerns and issues. Many of these are related to living and working in a foreign culture. These concerns include language difficulties, financial stress, dietary differences, cultural communication problems, racial discrimination, and loneliness. A specific, concrete problem involves visas. Asian international students, in particular Chinese students, expressed significant stress and anxiety about U.S. immigration policy. Obtaining a student visa is difficult and costly. For example, Chinese students are required to apply for and obtain a new visa every time they leave the United States. Not only is this a time consuming and expensive endeavor, but there is also the added worry that visa applications are not guaranteed to be approved.

The complicated visa process has led many Chinese students to remain in the U.S. for most, if not all, of their schooling here, cut off from family, friends, and familiar surroundings. This circumstance compounds homesickness, one of the main difficulties confronting international students. Homesickness can manifest in something as simple as food. A number of students specifically complained about the lack of familiar food in Ithaca and at Cornell, particularly among the many campus dining units such as the Trillium.

Related to homesickness, many report the feeling of isolation. Part of this is due to cultural adjustment issues and lack of familiarity with American customs and language. However, a major contributor is the intense pressure to perform well academically, leading to long hours in libraries or labs with limited time for socialization and adjustment. The resulting isolation contributes to a faulty belief that “I am the only one who feels this way.”

Not surprisingly, academic study was identified as another major area of concern for Asian international students. For some students, difficulty with the English language was a contributing factor. They have problems understanding lectures and discussions, leading them to feel greater reluctance to participate in classes. They often require extra time to read and understand books and articles and to articulate themselves in writing to fully communicate their intellect and knowledge. Problems with spoken English also lead to difficulties if they are teaching assistants, as well as with peers, compounding the already existing potential for loneliness and isolation.

The student and advisor relationship was identified in discussion groups as a particular problem. A number of students reported problems with their advisors, including a lack of knowledge around how to choose, change, or interact with advisors. As a possible contributing factor, they cited a culturally-based deference to authority figures and a non-confrontational style of relating to others. Furthermore, they indicated confusion around academic expectations and learning styles. Several noted that they were more accustomed to an emphasis on factual learning, rather than the commonly encountered Cornell expectation of expressing one’s opinions.

Finally, a number of international students spoke about financial pressures. Several were here on government scholarships that are conditional on stringent academic performance standards and are limited in duration. In addition, scholarship students have legal limitations on their academic schedules and course loads. All of these factors contribute to a great sense of pressure to perform and to a correspondingly great fear of failure. Moreover, they often experience more limited options should they encounter difficulties, potentially leading to a sense of entrapment and hopelessness.

Findings: Faculty and Staff

The information gleaned from meetings with various faculty and staff groups, though largely anecdotal in nature, is representative of the collective experience of many members of the Cornell community who work with students of Asian descent. The Task Force findings are categorized into three sections: (1) perceptions of Asian and Asian American student stresses and pressures, (2) challenges in working with Asian and Asian American students, and (3) best practices.

Perceptions of Asian and Asian American Student Stresses and Pressures

Almost uniformly across offices and programs, the faculty and staff who spoke with the Task Force indicated that they perceived greater stress and pressure among Asian and Asian American students than among other students. Although stress is clearly endemic to the Cornell environment and certainly not unique to the Asian and Asian American population, the National College Health Assessment Survey 2002 did indicate that Cornell students of Asian descent were more likely than other students to report significant difficulties with stress. In addition, many faculty and staff have observed several related themes that occur repeatedly in their work with Asian and Asian American students.

One broad theme revolves around academic stress. Faculty and staff often reported to the Task Force that Asian and Asian American students present with great anxiety and stress about academic issues. In many cases, the stress was related to grades and/or other areas of academic performance. Asian and Asian American students' expectations and standards for acceptable grades were often perceived by faculty and staff to be inflated or unrealistic, which is consistent with studies examining perfectionism in this population (Castro & Rice, 2003). This was particularly true in certain fields, most notably pre-med and engineering, and was observed in other areas as well. Not only were the students' standards and expectations high, their perceptions of potential consequences of failing to meet these standards were often more dire and sometimes exaggerated.

The family was an often-cited source of pressure. Many authors have written about Asian American family pressure to do well academically (e.g, Sue & Okazaki, 1990; Yee, Huang & Lew, 1998). Observations by faculty and staff seem to support this concept. Not only were parental expectations high, but also many faculty and staff described tremendous fear and shame among Asian and Asian American students about discussing any problems or difficulties with their families. These problems often centered on poor academic performance or on choice of majors or careers.

According to discussion participants, many Asian and Asian American students felt boxed into majors they did not like or were not well-suited for, especially in areas like pre-med or engineering. One of the primary reasons noted for this was parental pressure or influence.

In traditional Asian culture, a child's educational or career success is seen as a vehicle for enhancing his or her family's social and economic status and security. Consequently, the parents' choice or preference supersedes the individual's wishes (Wong & Mock, 1997). Among the faculty and staff who participated in discussion groups, there were a number of anecdotal accounts of parents threatening students with disownment or termination of financial support in response to a student's expressed interest in pursuing different areas of studies. One common result was a student's continued pursuit of subject areas in which he/she is performing poorly, progressively limiting options for transfer between majors or schools.

Pressure also originates from the Asian and Asian American students themselves. Not only do they often hold themselves to high standards, many faculty and staff have observed that their Asian and Asian American peers do as well. According to faculty and staff, competition among Asian and Asian American peers can be quite intense, reinforcing a collective set of expectations and standards that can be difficult, if not impossible, for some students to meet. Several also noted that informal peer academic "advising" networks exist, particularly in pre-med majors. Peer advice often encourages students to take heavy or difficult course loads, differing sharply from what professional advisors might recommend.

Faculty and staff have further observed a high degree of interpersonal stress. Some noted that many Asian and Asian American students come to Cornell with relatively limited dating experience. One possible explanation is that peer socialization, especially dating, is seen by Asian and Asian American families as a distraction from the main business of obtaining an education. Dating is something to be deferred until education is complete (Wong & Mock, 1997). This is consistent with survey findings described earlier noting fewer non-academic activities among freshman Asian and Asian American students than among other students (2002 FS). Although it is unclear whether or not this is related, data from the National College Health Assessment Survey 2002 show that Asian Americans were twice as likely to report being in a sexually or physically abusive relationship. Regardless of the reasons, these findings are consistent with faculty and staff impressions that many Asian and Asian American students are relatively inexperienced socially and that they often present with serious interpersonal problems and relationship stress.

Challenges in Working with Asian and Asian American Students

Consistent with students' self-reports, faculty and staff recognize Asian and Asian American students' reluctance to seek help. They indicated that these students were generally less likely to interact with them, either formally or informally. This made it more difficult for faculty and staff to establish and maintain relationships with students and to monitor their progress.

Moreover, even when they established some kind of relationship, Asian and Asian American students had a tendency to deny or minimize difficulties, making it difficult to detect problems until they had become major. For example, students asked for help, or otherwise came to the attention of faculty and staff, only when their academic or personal

situation had deteriorated greatly, often to the point of crisis. Problems also tended to become apparent at the end of the semester when relatively little could be done to address the immediate problems.

When students do seek help, they are more likely to be concerned about academic or career problems, rather than those of a more personal nature. However, it was also observed that personal difficulties were often a significant contributing factor and that discussion about more concrete academic or career concerns have sometimes served as a gateway for more difficult-to-talk-about topics.

One strong theme to emerge from the outreach meetings was the difficulty many experienced in encouraging Asian and Asian American students to utilize traditional counseling services. This is consistent with students' self-reports and with CAPS utilization figures. It was also reported that many students were wary of counseling and often did not follow through with a recommendation to seek it. As a result, faculty and staff were helping students through difficult personal or psychological situations. Although the faculty and staff did not feel qualified or comfortable playing the role of counselor, some were reluctant to even suggest professional services for fear of alienating a student and disrupting their relationship.

Best Practices Reported by Faculty and Staff

In conversations with faculty and staff, a question was consistently asked about what approaches they find to be effective in assisting Asian and Asian American students; this includes both approaches they use themselves, as well as services offered by others. The following themes emerged:

A. Make personal contact

- Make an effort to establish personal, ongoing relationships, through individual outreach and conversations, as well as through utilizing personal contacts with colleagues who provide student support
- Provide office hours, to allow for personal, one-on-one interaction
- Make contacts with students in informal contexts, for example by attending out of classroom activities and public functions

B. Make personalized referrals

- The need for a network of services/contacts is extremely important
- Make personalized referrals to individuals rather than to offices
- Help the student make the first contact, if necessary
- Follow up to ensure the connection is made

C. Make referrals and provide services in a context the student is likely to accept

- Present support services and needs in terms of academic or career success; link academic accommodations to follow-through with support services
- Off-site offices/hours for CAPS and other student support services, at locations accessible to students
- Provide services through academic or career contexts
- More training and staff for career services

D. Faculty and staff repeatedly mentioned the University Counseling and Advising Network (UCAN) as a frequently used, effective service; a program that addresses the above factors. UCAN provides training, student-centered consultations, program-centered consultations, networking, and direct service. Highlights included:

- Outreach to students – provides direct assistance to students who might not otherwise access traditional services
- Provides an intermediate alternative or link between the colleges and mental health services, which is more acceptable to some students and thus more likely to result in successful follow-up
- Facilitates a good working relationship with academic advising and student services offices throughout campus
- Provides intervention by a mental health professional when level of student need is beyond the scope of the role or expertise of the faculty or staff member
- Availability; flexibility, instant response, services provided on site
- Less stigmatizing than walking into a psychological counseling office (perceived stigma of psychological illness)
- Already reaching Asian and Asian American, as well as other minority students
 - UCAN reports that last year over 50 percent of the students assisted were from underserved student communities (minority, international, economically disadvantaged students)
 - Majority of these were Asian/Asian American
- One participant noted “UCAN has made all the difference in the world this year.”

E. Frequent mention was made of Asian and Asian American students’ use of on-line services, such as Cornell’s Dear Uncle Ezra.

F. JASPER (Journey from Asian/Asian-American Students to Professionals: Education and Reflection) is a weekly informal discussion forum for students to discuss issues relevant to the experiences of Asians in America, which was frequently mentioned as a best practice. JASPER provides opportunities for students of Asian descent and others to gather and talk about their thoughts, experiences and struggles, in a safe, comfortable environment.

G. EARS (Empathy, Assistance and Referral Service) provides peer counseling; semester-long counseling and communications skills training programs; and outreach services to the Cornell community. EARS consistently has high Asian and Asian

American student participation, in its on-going communication and counseling skills training sessions as well as in students going on to become counselors. (~25% - 30% of 225 students each semester in the training programs; 13% of the current EARS volunteer counseling staff.)

Findings: Programs and Services at Other Universities and Colleges

Comparison of peer institutional resources identified Cornell's relative lack of resources to assist Asian and Asian American students. Specifically lacking are:

- Asian and Asian American staff representation in counseling and advising roles
- A "community center" or physical space for the largest and the most diverse minority group on campus
- A staff position dedicated to supporting Asian and Asian American students

Cornell has some catching up to do. With increasing growth projected for the Asian and Asian American community, Cornell needs to position itself as an institution that supports the success of all students. In our peer institutions, we see a wide array of services that address the diversity of Asian and Asian American needs in areas such as recruitment and retention, housing and student life, faculty/staff resources, and curriculum development.

Asian and Asian American Community Centers

Among the survey schools, the following is a sample having Asian and Asian American cultural centers:

- Columbia University
- Dartmouth University
- Earlham College
- Indiana University at Bloomington
- Mount Holyoke College
- Pomona College
- Princeton University
- Rutgers University
- Stony Brook University
- Swarthmore College
- University of California, Davis
- University of Connecticut
- University of Illinois at Chicago
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- University of Iowa
- University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- University of Michigan
- University of Washington

- Yale University

Most of these centers are overseen and administered by Assistant Deans and/or Directors, with accompanying administrative support staff.

Asian and Asian American cultural centers provide many benefits for the community. The centers serve as a gathering place for students of similar backgrounds, providing a focal point for an often dispersed community. This creates a welcoming space and encourages interactions not possible in other social settings. Information relevant for the community can be collected in a central location. Furthermore, these cultural centers, under the leadership of the Assistant Dean/Director, promote integration of social and academic pursuits, and provide venues for services, advising, and other more informal faculty/student interaction. The universities researched share a common theme that the presence of cultural centers and/or student services staff dedicated to Asian and Asian American concerns have an extremely positive impact on students' perceptions of their university's commitment to diversity.

Part Three: Task Force Recommendations

Task Force members gleaned a wealth of ideas from students, staff, faculty, and alumni with several consistent themes that, combined with the research, are the basis of the following recommendations. Most of the concrete programmatic suggestions can be implemented immediately upon the development of:

- (1) a staff position dedicated to Asian and Asian American student programs and support, and**
- (2) a central space for students to gather, find resources, and implement programs.**

As such, these are the top two priority recommendations by the Task Force.

Following the discussion of these two recommendations are other important recommendations that are beyond the scope of the Task Force. The Task Force recommends they be referred to other top-level administrators and campus-wide committees, such as the Council on Mental Health and Welfare, and the Diversity Council, for consideration on a policy level. Task Force members are aware that some of these issues are currently being considered by these committees and hope the recommendations provide support for work already underway.

The highest priority recommendations are:

- 1. Establish a staff position dedicated to Asian and Asian American student programs and support, with responsibilities to coordinate, create, and promote original programs and supplement existing programs campus-wide.**

- Asian and Asian American students comprise the largest student community of color at Cornell, and the numbers are growing. This is the only such group without a dedicated staff position and without dedicated space such as an office, center, or living unit
- The need for services is too great for the tasks to be add-ons to existing staff positions
- The position needs to be located in an office that spans the campus and can serve as a coordinating hub. The Task Force recommends this be an Assistant Dean position, within the Dean of Students Office of Student Support
- The assigned tasks require administrative and technological support, program funds, and office space

Position Description: Assistant Dean for Asian and Asian American Student Support. The Task Force recommends the following responsibilities be assigned to the new position.

- **Collaboration and coordination:**
 - Collaborates with other student support and diversity programs within the Dean of Students Office, and campus-wide

- Links with Asian American Studies, Graduate Student Life, International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO), Office of Minority Educational Affairs, Diversity Council, Gannett's Counseling and Psychological Services, Campus Life, Cornell United Religious Work, Career Services, alumni, etc.
 - Spends time on location at other sites, especially Asian American Studies, ISSO, Graduate School
 - Supports other advisors to Asian and Asian American student activity groups
 - Serves as member of the University Student Crisis Management and Community Support Teams
 - Serves as director and administrator of an Asian and Asian American student office or cultural center space
- **Program planning and development:** Create and administer a variety of programs ranging from small support groups, to educational programs, to large cultural events, all aimed at:
 - Providing support, advocacy, and outreach
 - Building a sense of connection within the Asian and Asian American community and to the community at large
 - Maximizing peer-to-peer networks, student involvement, and peer support
 - Celebrating the Asian and Asian American community
 - Connecting with parents and other offices doing the same

Some specific program recommendations that may be implemented by the Assistant Dean include:

- A. **Mentoring Program:** Create an innovative mentorship program that may include faculty, staff, alumni, and students as mentors.
- B. **Continue work begun by the Task Force:** This may include focus groups, surveys, and further search for best practices and benchmarking. Create an advisory committee that may include some Task Force members. Work with relevant committees toward the policy level recommendations described below. Continue the work in the original Task Force charge related to conducting a programs and services inventory, and multicultural awareness.
- C. **Explore possibilities to strengthen and utilize online/internet resources:** This effort would capitalize on the existing strength of online usage by the Asian and Asian American community. One initiative could be to create an Asian and Asian American website with student input aimed at:
 - Heightening awareness of campus resources and promoting their accessibility in order to overcome reluctance to seek help
 - Conducting on-line surveys and assessments
 - Publicizing and connecting Asian and Asian American student organizations, programs, and events

Another initiative is to create a strong connection with Dear Uncle Ezra for on-line support, promotion of resources, and discussion of campus climate issues, described in more detail below.

D. Explore options for more forums for students to discuss pertinent issues.

Contribute to and utilize existing programs such as:

- JASPER (Journeys from Asian Students to Professionals)
- Real Life @ Cornell student support series. Create programs to focus on reaching international students, graduate students, and off-campus students, on a range of pertinent topics such as: Asian student identity, sexuality, relationships, stress management, preserving culture vs. assimilation, how to get around, where to eat, etc.
- EARS outreach can provide student-to-student discussion on a variety of topics, including helping a friend in distress

E. Alumni Involvement: Work closely with alumni to institute their suggestions and to engage their participation. For example:

- Providing support that leads to success such as mentoring, coaching, career advice, panels
- Connecting and communicating with the parent community; providing advice on how to best help a son or daughter
- Organizing cultural celebrations and other Asian and Asian American student-alumni events

2. Establish a centrally located Asian and Asian American student community/cultural center or space.

The basis for this recommendation is essentially the same as for the staff position described above. To emphasize, there are over three thousand students in the Cornell Asian and Asian American community, yet this is the only such group that does not have a space dedicated to their needs. The request by Asian and Asian American students for a cultural center surfaced even before the Task Force was formed, and it came up repeatedly in outreach meetings with students as well as from student members on the Task Force. Such a space would send a strong message of institutional support and maximize Asian and Asian American students' potential to thrive.

As with the staff position, the Task Force recommends maximizing the natural link with other student support and diversity programs such as: Empathy, Assistance and Referral Service, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Student Support/Haven, Women's Resource Center, African, Latino, Asian, Native American Program Board (ALANA), and Peer Educators in Human Relations, all of which are located on the second floor of Willard Straight Hall.

The Task Force recommends the Asian and Asian American community cultural space be housed there, as well, and be included as part of the proposed WSH second floor

renovation. The center or space will be directed and overseen by the recommended Assistant Dean position.

The Center will provide:

- A gathering place, meeting space, a hub, support for Asian and Asian American student organizations
- Connections among Asian and Asian American groups and with organizations in the broader community
- A connection with the student support system
- A range of resources that are readily accessible
- Walk in hours offered by staff providing outreach from offices around campus, as well as by the Assistant Dean
- Proximity to other multicultural programs, peer counseling, and peer support services

The following recommendations are referred for consideration to the appropriate university officials and committees such as the President's Council on Mental Health and Welfare and the Diversity Council. These are all equally high priority issues, and so are not listed in priority order. As mentioned above, Task Force members are aware that work on some of these issues is currently underway, and anticipate that the recommendations support these efforts.

A. Provide support services by mental health professionals, for example CAPS staff, in more natural community settings.

- Provide some services off-site in student centers, colleges, and residences.
- Increase student support services for the Graduate School.
- Expand ISSO office space to provide more private space. Perhaps off-site space for international student support could be considered as part of WSH second floor space renovation.

B. Expand and strengthen UCAN Outreach function and services.

- UCAN is an already established program that shows great promise. It was mentioned repeatedly by student services and academic advising staff, particularly in regards to reaching Asian and Asian American and other minority students. The need for outreach services provided by mental health professionals is beyond current UCAN staffing capacity.
- Build on UCAN model to develop a university wide outreach system for pre-crisis intervention and case management.
- Provide a cadre of culturally sensitive mental health professionals to: go on-site (through regular hours as well as in an emergency), to intervene, to provide a bridge to services for students who otherwise might not ask for or accept help; to reach students whose needs exceed the capacities or expertise of other student services and academic advising staff.

- Provide outreach to the colleges, linking academics with resources such as career counseling, Gannett's medical and psychological services, Dean of Students Office, etc.

C. Utilize online resources for student support

Strengthen Dear Uncle Ezra, Cornell's on-line counseling, information resource, and referral service. Dear Uncle Ezra is an established service, and one of the most frequently accessed sites on CUInfo.

- Continue to reach out to "invisible" and isolated students in a unique way.
- Utilize Asian and Asian American students' affinity for online services.
- Highlight, advertise, normalize and personalize the support resources at Cornell.
- Continue efforts to reduce stigma related to seeking psychological and other assistance.
- Influence student campus climate in a variety of ways including: promoting the idea that it is strong to seek help, the importance of understanding and respecting differences, and instilling pride in Cornell.
- Educate about topics important to Asian and Asian American students, that they otherwise might be reluctant to discuss: sexuality, relationships, sexual orientation, eating disorders, and mental health issues.
- Educate and provide information on general topics pertinent to Asian and Asian American students such as career issues, how to get involved, cross-cultural issues, healthcare services and systems, navigating the Big Red tape, etc.

D. Provide more training on cultural sensitivity for faculty and staff

- Utilize UCAN training function and other university training programs to educate faculty and staff on general cultural sensitivity and on cultural considerations in recognizing and assisting students in distress.
- Include a component on cultural sensitivity in the faculty outreach and education programs on students in distress, currently being conducted by Dean of Students, Associate Dean of Students, and CAPS Director.
- Provide more training for front-line services staff (Registrar, Bursar, etc) regarding difficult student situations, language, and cultural barriers, etc.
- Provide more training on cultural sensitivity and helping students in distress for teaching assistants (TA's).

E. Strengthen recruitment and retention of ethnically similar staff in academic, career, support, campus life units, etc.

F. Consider instituting a Diversity Course academic requirement.

Task Force members are aware that this idea has been discussed by the Diversity Council. It came up often, especially in the outreach meetings with students who expressed support of the idea, and is also highlighted in the qualitative research.

G. Examine pertinent policies and procedures in order to reduce environmental stressors, to improve services and to provide clear information to the community.

Find ways to reduce or streamline Big Red tape, especially to:

- Help students deal with financial pressures
- Clarify and streamline academic policies regarding changing majors/colleges
- Clarify and streamline paperwork and procedures regarding medical leaves
- Improve units' communication with each other when handling a student in a difficult situation (academic offices, Bursar, housing, financial aid, etc.)
- Consider a staff/faculty early warning system regarding grades
- Educate students on the advising system of the college they are in. Can they choose? Can they "shop around"?
- Continue the new procedure of conducting a comprehensive review after each student death or suicide, to identify environmental improvements necessary to support student well-being

Conclusion

At this time in history, when the issues we face as a nation and as citizens of the world dramatically demand that we develop understanding and appreciation of our various and unique cultures, it is crucial that Cornell University address the important needs of all of our diverse members. We at Cornell have the immediate opportunity to make tremendous strides in support of our Asian and Asian American student community (whose membership has grown to comprise 17% of the student body as of this writing, and, according to demographic trends, will continue to grow), while at the same time improving the campus climate for people of all cultures. While many of the issues facing the Cornell Asian and Asian American student community are unique, many have commonalities among other cultural groups at Cornell. Any improvement in the well-being of the Asian and Asian American student community will likely have a significant impact on the campus climate for all communities. The Task Force recommendations take into account that any real change in the campus climate is a responsibility shared by students, staff, and faculty, across the entire university, and will require coordinated, comprehensive, and sustained effort and commitment.

The Task Force appreciates the ongoing support that the administration and alumni have shown us as we have carried out this vitally important work. We look forward with enthusiasm to participating in the implementation of the recommendations.

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Cornell University
Asian and Asian-American² Campus Climate Task Force
Charge from Vice President Murphy and Provost Martin

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Students of Asian descent comprise, by a wide margin, the largest single community of color at Cornell University. In 2000, Asian and Asian-Americans made up 14% of the total student body; including 16% of all undergraduate students, 55% of all international students (both graduate and undergraduate), and over 60% of the total minority undergraduate enrollment at Cornell. Overall, Asian-Americans are the second fastest growing racial/ethnic group in the United States, growing, by conservative estimate, 48% between 1990 and 2000³.

However, the term “Asian and Asian-American” is, in many ways, a term of convenience, which has historically been used to encompass, in broad strokes, an extraordinarily diverse array of individuals and groups who differ on a number of important, fundamental and often overlapping dimensions, such as differences in birthplace, class, generational status in the United States, ethnicity, culture, religion, and language. For example, here at Cornell, the Office of Minority and Educational Affairs (OMEA) has identified at least 26 different Asian ethnic groups in its 2001-2002 survey of incoming first year students, and there are as many as 43 such groups in the United States.⁴ Moreover, the common failure to differentiate between “Asian” and “Asian-American” in much of the dialogue on campus may have served to confound and obscure crucial differences in the concerns and challenges facing these two communities.

Nevertheless, despite these important distinctions and differences, students, staff and faculty alike have identified a number of common issues confronting this combined community. These include:

- Over-representation of Asian and Asian-American students in the completed suicides at Cornell; six of the last thirteen confirmed or suspected suicides of Cornell students have been by students of Asian descent. This is especially disturbing in contrast to the overall suicide rate in the United States. According to the Surgeon General’s Report of 2001, Asian-American suicide rate was 7 per 100,000, and for whites 12.8 per 100,000.⁵
- Bias-related incidents, the most prominent of which involved women of Asian descent who were targeted for verbal, physical and sexual attacks.
- Under-representation among university staff and faculty of persons of Asian descent, in relation to the student body; according to a report prepared by the Vice Provost for Diversity and Faculty Development in 2001, 6.5% of all faculty and less than 2% of all full-time non-academic staff were identified as Asian.
- Consortium on Financing Higher Education (COFHE) survey results showing, that in 2000, graduating seniors of Asian descent to be the least satisfied with their Cornell experience on a number of variables, including accessibility of faculty members, and the quality of academic advising and counseling services.
- Concerns expressed by students about a perceived lack of appropriate services targeted at the needs of the Asian and Asian-American community.

² The label “Asian and Asian-American” used here refers to individuals whose ancestry can be traced to East Asia, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, as well as the Pacific Islands.

³ U.S. Census Bureau. The Asian population: 2000. Census 2000 Brief. Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census, February, 2002.

⁴ Lee, S. M. (1998). Asian Americans: Diverse and growing. Population Bulletin, 53(2). Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau.

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2001). Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity - A Supplement to Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Service, Office of the Surgeon General.

- Under-utilization of existing mental health services.
 - Although 14% of the total student enrollment in the Fall of 2000 were identified as “Asian,” only 10% of the students seen at Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) during the 2000-2001 academic year were so identified. International students, the majority of whom are from Asia, also under-utilized CAPS services. Only 9% of the students seen at CAPS were international, even though such students comprise 15% of the total student body. Furthermore, research⁶ and anecdotal evidence at CAPS indicate that when persons of Asian descent do seek mental health services, they often do so in a significantly higher level of distress and risk than non-Asians.
- Perceived lack of recognition and awareness of the reality, experience and impact of racism and stereotyping as they relate to Asians and Asian-Americans.
 - In Spring, 2000, the Asian-American Studies Program issued a report on campus climate for Asian-Americans at Cornell. The report argues that the Asian and Asian-American communities here, as elsewhere, have been subject to the “model minority” stereotype, which holds that they have no needs for services beyond that offered to the general student body. Furthermore, the report argues that while continuing to “suffer the consequences of being racially marked,” Asians and Asian-Americans have been rendered “conceptually invisible.” In a most fundamental way, *this* is the main problem.

RATIONALE

Defining, assessing, implementing and institutionalizing any cohesive plan targeted at the Asian and Asian-American community will require a comprehensive, integrated and coordinated approach that occurs on multiple levels, across the entire university community. Thus any meaningful attempt to address the needs of this diverse yet historically underserved population is a shared responsibility of the entire Cornell community, and a centralized organizing body is needed to guide such an effort.

CHARGE FOR THE TASK FORCE

The Cornell University Asian and Asian-American Campus Climate Task Force is hereby established in response to the need for a campus-wide approach to address campus climate, services, and program issues as they relate to the Asian and Asian-American community. The Task Force will be comprised of students, faculty, staff and alumni, and will be organized on three levels. An Executive Committee made up of university administrators will oversee the efforts of the Core Task Force Committee, and will be chaired by the Vice President of Student and Academic Services and the University Provost. The Core Task Force will have the primary responsibility for directing, coordinating and evaluating the efforts of various subcommittees charged with addressing particular issues or needs. The Core Task Force will be responsible for providing the Vice President and Provost with recommendations and progress reports.

A. GOALS

The university seeks to examine and address the particular issues, needs and challenges affecting the Asian and Asian-American student community. To foster the necessary and fundamental changes in campus climate, the Task Force seeks to assist the university in achieving the following goals:

- Increase Asian and Asian-American student satisfaction with their Cornell experience.
- Reduce the rate of Asian and Asian-American suicides.
- Reduce the number and frequency of bias-related incidents.
- Provide a comprehensive array of appropriate services and programs for the Asian and Asian-American student community.

⁶ Lin, K.M., & Cheung, F. (1999). Mental health issues for Asian Americans. *Psychiatric Services*, 50(6), 774-780.

- Improve Asian and Asian-American faculty and staff representation to better reflect the realities of student diversity at Cornell.
- Increase awareness of Asian and Asian-American issues, and improve overall campus climate for the entire Cornell community.

B. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- A diverse living and learning environment promotes and nurtures optimal intellectual and personal growth and discovery, scholarship and creativity.
- The Asian and Asian-American community is a rich, diverse, heterogeneous and dynamic community comprising close to one-sixth of the entire student population. Furthermore, this community will likely continue to grow in the foreseeable future. Any improvement in the well-being of this community will likely have a significant impact on the campus climate for all communities.
- Any effort must recognize and take into account cultural, historical, societal and other factors relevant to the experience of Asians and Asian-Americans in this country.
- Any real change in the campus climate is a responsibility shared by students, staff and faculty alike, across the entire university community.
- Any real change in the campus climate will require coordinated, comprehensive and sustained effort and commitment.
- Student participation is necessary for the achievement of any of the goals set forth by this Task Force.
- Stereotypes, be they “positive” or “negative,” exist, and are detrimental to the psychological, social and intellectual well being of students, as well as contrary to the principles and values of this university.

C. PRIORITIES

The Asian and Asian-American Campus Climate Task Force will include the following subcommittees with responsibilities described below. The Task Force will create additional subcommittees as needed.

1. **Needs Assessment Committee:** Identify personal, social, academic and institutional factors correlated with students’ sense of satisfaction and well being at Cornell. Develop systematic communication of this information to the other sub-committees and appropriate officials. Tasks may include but not be limited to:
 - Focus groups.
 - Use of existing sources of data, such as the Office of Institutional Research and Planning.
 - Demographic data on the nature and composition of the Asian and Asian-American community at Cornell.
 - Development of other instruments, such as surveys and questionnaires.
2. **Student Programs and Services Committee:** Develop recommendations and help implement the design, structure and coordination of university-wide collaborative programs and services addressing the needs of the Asian and Asian-American student community. Tasks may include but not be limited to:
 - Inventory of existing services and programs.
 - Evaluation and assessment of factors contributing to successful outcomes by these programs.
 - Identification of gaps in services and/or barriers to utilization of services, and suggestions for ways the university can overcome the gaps/barriers.

3. **Crisis Prevention Study Committee:** Develop and help implement a systematic protocol for in-depth examination of life-threatening student crises, such as suicides and suicide attempts, in order to:
 - Identify contributing personal, social, family, academic and systemic factors.
 - Develop and implement suicide prevention strategies.
 - Make recommendations regarding university policies and procedures.

4. **Multicultural Awareness Committee:** Develop recommendations and help implement a system to provide educational and training programs by and for students, staff and faculty, in order to promote awareness and knowledge of multicultural issues. Tasks may include but not limited to:
 - Inventory and assess current educational and training programs taking place campus-wide.
 - Identify existing educational and training resources.
 - Recommend and help implement strategies to improve communication and collaboration among individuals, programs and committees engaged in related activities.