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We Are Here To Stay

Mary Lee Vance
George Mason University

"The session will include historical facts, national statistics and personal stories that will assist the participants in debunking many of the myths and stereotypes associated with Asian Pacific Americans."

Asian Pacific Americans (APAs) are the fastest growing ethnic population in the United States. In 1960, there were 877,934 Americans of Asian descent, representing less than one-half of one percent of the country's population. Twenty-five years later, they numbered over five million, or 2.1 percent of the population. It is predicted that by the year 2000, there will be over ten million Americans of Asian descent, or over 4 percent of the total U.S. population. Clearly, the steadily growing numbers would indicate that the AP A community is not a transient one, yet the myth persists that APAs are sojourners.

Not surprisingly, sojourners are not taken seriously as a viable U.S. population, since it is assumed they will not stay. APAs are frequently overlooked for ethnic minority scholarship and/or other advancement opportunities. They are rarely recruited, as their presence at universities is often taken for granted. More often than not, APAs are ignored when being considered for admission to certain undergraduate and graduate programs. APAs are admitted to universities, they generally find few support resources available to them, especially in geographic regions where their numbers are low. APAs are not white, nor are they "foreigners." Rarely are APAs considered minorities. Generally, the question is raised about what are they? Simply stated, Americans of Asian descent are not sojourners, they are Americans who plan to stay.

Americans of Asian descent are not homogenous, as they represent many ethnic groups and generations. Asian students in higher education bring a wide range of issues and concerns, creating a growing need to be more knowledgeable, responsive and proactive to APA diversity. Higher education faculty, staff and administrators can no longer ignore the fact that the fastest growing U.S. ethnic minority population is rapidly becoming a viable student/ employee population. And, as such, require increased respect, understanding and accommodation. Despite the myths and stereotypes, statistics show that APAs are NOT overrepresented and in fact are actually underrepresented in higher education.

I am an American of Korean ancestry, who was adopted and immigrated to the U.S. as a small child. With no other country to call my own, except the United States, I find it frustrating to be asked "Where are you from?" Such a question assumes that I am not from "here." The question "What is your nationality?" is perhaps one of the more aggravating questions, as the questioner seems to be assuming that I am not a U.S. citizen, ergo I must be a sojourner. I am not a sojourner, I am here to stay.

Crashing all stereotypes and myths connected to the APA population, I confess that

mathematics and science are NOT my forte, or my academic interest. During my educational career, I have had to struggle through math, science and statistics courses. Genetics did not provide me any easy breaks. While pursuing my degrees, I developed a strong commitment toward serving as a positive role model for APA students. It is my firm belief that APA professionals are extremely underrepresented in universities and that there is a desperate need for increasing the numbers of AP As pursuing doctoral degrees and administrative careers in higher education institutions.

I plan to cover a wide range of issues related to the Asian Pacific American student population in higher education. The session will include historical facts, national statistics and personal stories that will assist the participants in debunking many of the myths and stereotypes associated with APAs. Practical tips and strategies for increased understanding of the APA community members will be shared. In addition, time for discussion will be provided, so that professionals working with APAs will be better equipped to work with this rapidly growing and valuable population.

PRESENTER

Mary Lee Vance is the Director of Academic Support and Advising Services at George Mason University. She supervises all new and transfer student orientations, academic advisement of students without declared majors and services for students with disabilities.

Previously, she was the Director for Education Student Services at Iowa State University. There, she supervised all student services for the College of Education, including: orientation and registration' minority student affairs; career services; teacher licenses, field experiences and services for students with disabilities.

Prior to Iowa State, Dr. Vance was at Michigan State University (MSU). Initially hired to be an academic adviser and the first Asian Pacific American student liaison, she moved into positions of increasing responsibility, including the coordination of the Big Ten Summer Research Opportunity Program (SROP). She was instrumental in having MSU be one of the first 14 institutions in the nation to be funded one of the prestigious Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program grants. Before leaving the state of Michigan, Vance served as the coordinator for the national Holmes Group Scholars Program.

Vance received her doctorate in higher education administration from Michigan State University, while working full time. Her master's and undergraduate degrees were earned at University of Wisconsin- La Crosse, Wisconsin. During her fourteen years in higher education, Vance made numerous presentations, taught courses on multicultural education, published, wrote grants and did everything possible to keep productive. She has worked with all students from freshmen through doctoral levels. Perhaps most relevant for this bio is the fact that Vance is an Asian Pacific American (APA), who was adopted as a young child and is quite aware what it is like to personally and professionally live, work and survive in a predominantly white world.