

WHAT WORKS NOW

September 2015

The Campaign for
College
Opportunity



LATINOS



BLACKS



ASIAN AMERICANS
NATIVE HAWAIIANS
PACIFIC ISLANDERS

Full Circle Project – Sacramento State University

As the Campaign for College Opportunity releases its 2015 State of Higher Education in California: Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Report, we felt it was important to highlight best practices that can support AANHPI student success. This profile is one of two that showcases initiatives that are targeting subgroups of AANHPI students who have low levels of academic success and college completion.

"I am 21 years old and have five siblings. My father works as a Park Ranger and my mother, sisters and I work as janitors. My parents really wanted me to go to college and after high school I enrolled in Sacramento State University as a film major. My dream is to work on films that have to do with my community."

This is the story of Hnou Lee. Hnou is a Hmong American student at Sacramento State University, and her story, is not unlike that of many Southeast Asian students. Her parents are refugees from Laos who understand the importance of a college education, but lack the resources to help her navigate through college. Fortunately, Hnou is receiving the additional assistance she needs through the Full Circle Project (FCP) at Sacramento State University.

Situated in the state's capitol, Sacramento State is responsible for the education of one out of every 20 residents in the area. The diverse student body of 29,300 students is among the largest in the California State University system.

In 2011, the university was recognized as an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI). This is a federal designation of minority-serving institutions that enroll a high percentage of low-income Asian American and Pacific Islander students. The most populous of the Asian groups were Hmong and Filipino students. Given the large number of Asian American and Pacific Islander students, Ethnic Studies Professor Timothy Fong was interested in learning how they were performing on various college measures

and began to examine academic background, remediation rates and graduation rates by Asian subgroups. What he found was that while Asian American and Pacific Islander students were entering Sacramento State well prepared, their graduation rates were comparatively low. Between 1995 and 2008, Fong found the median 6-year graduation rates were 40.8% for Asians, 38% for Southeast Asians, 38.5% for Filipinos, and 33.3% for Pacific Islanders. Sacramento State has among the lowest graduation rates for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders compared to other CSU campuses. This alarming discovery prompted collaboration between the Ethnic Studies Department, the Institute of Higher Education Leadership & Policy and the Office of Institutional Research at the campus



Left to right: Timothy Fong, Jennifer Yang and Paolo Soriano
FCP staff

to develop a framework that would help improve the retention and graduation rates of Asian American and Pacific Islander students. The framework became the basis of the Full Circle Project and was funded through a five year federal grant (2011-2016) for AANAPISIs that were working to better serve Asian American and Pacific Islander students. The guiding principles of this project are consistent with best practices recommended by research, as well as other successful student support programs like the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) and the Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program at Sacramento State.

Full Circle Project Mission and Goals

Mission: to provide a student-centered approach to steadily increase the graduation rates of Asian American and Pacific Islander students through academic support, intentional student organization and leadership opportunities, and meaningful community engagement.

“We didn’t create anything new. We just packaged it differently.”
– Timothy Fong, Project Director & Ethnic Studies Professor

The goals of FCP are to:

1. Increase Asian American and Pacific Islander freshman enrollment rates by at least 10%;
2. Increase the number and percentage of Asian American and Pacific Islanders engaged in Student Organization and Leadership programs to equal the percentage of Asian American and Pacific Islander undergraduate students at Sacramento State;
3. Enhance and expand service learning opportunities for Asian American and Pacific Islander students;
4. Institutionalize comprehensive data gathering on Asian American and Pacific Islanders at Sacramento State and throughout the CSU.

How the Program Works

The Full Circle Project is a two-semester freshman learning community focused on developing the student. It combines academic support with essential student support services. In the first semester of the program, a cohort of 75-100 students take Introduction to Asian American Studies and a First Year Seminar course. The Asian American Studies course allows students to learn about themselves and the history of their community which is critical to building a sense of community among students. The First Year Seminar teaches students about college generally. For example, students learn time management skills and how to select a major. In the second

semester, students take an Introduction to Ethnic Studies course, which allows them to learn about other racial/ethnic groups and a Co-Curricular Activities course where they apply what they have learned in the First Year Seminar course. In the Co-Curricular Activities class students are required to form a contemporary issue coalition and are tasked with creating an activity that addresses the issue. Students can choose from a range of issues including healthcare, college affordability and environmental issues. For example, as part of a coalition that worked on environmental issues, one group of students built a community garden while another that focused on higher education costs helped local high school students write scholarship applications. The contemporary issue project teaches students team building, research skills, and networking.

This two-semester framework provides students with a comprehensive perspective on social dynamics and prepares them to be successful in college. They are able to embrace their own community, learn about other communities, understand social justice issues, and stay engaged on campus.

Beyond the FCP freshman learning communities, students from older cohorts return as mentors for students just finishing the program to ensure they have continued support through the remainder of their college education. FCP mentors serve as role models to provide guidance and support to mentees in the areas of academic, campus, and community engagement while encouraging personal growth. Mentors also connect mentees to essential on-campus resources such as academic advising, tutoring, financial aid, student clubs and organizations, and community service opportunities applicable to mentees' needs and interests. The peer mentors work with the Full Circle Project staff to organize mandatory workshops on topics such as college survival tactics, applying for a scholarship, and career panels that further prepare the students for both college life and the post-graduation job market.

A four certificate Leadership Initiative (LI) program designed to keep students engaged on campus is also available and a high percentage of FCP students advance to the higher levels of the Initiative. The LI program is designed to develop students' leadership and professional skills, serve as a foundation for involvement in campus life, and promote retention, academic success, and graduation. The foundation of the LI is based on the Social Change Model of Leadership Development, which encompasses individual values, group values, and societal/community values so students become social change agents.

How Students Join

Outreach to prospective students begins in March when students receive their offer of admission to the university. FCP staff works with the admissions and IT department to create a list of admitted students who may be eligible to join the program. An email with information about FCP is then sent out and students who are interested in the program are asked to fill out a short interest form. The resulting interest forms are used to conduct more targeted outreach. This process continues through May until students have submitted their intent to enroll in the university. From May through June the FCP application is open to students and can be submitted online. The application asks for basic information about a student and requires a brief 200-word statement that explains why the student is interested in the program and how the program will contribute to his or her educational goals. The goal of the statement is to ensure students have a correct understanding of the program and will be dedicated to its conditions. On average, FCP receives between 130-150 applications annually and accepts about 100 students. However, interest in the program continues to grow as more Asian American and Pacific Islander students learn about FCP.

Non-FCP students learn about the program through friends and are invited to join some FCP events. In addition, FCP students regularly wear program memorabilia that allows them to quickly



connect with students from other cohorts while also serving as brand ambassadors for the program. The FCP center located in the library serves as another point of connection for FCP and non-FCP Asian American and Pacific Islander students alike. It is a place where students can study, network, and access resources. FCP is helping to create a campus culture where Asian American and Pacific Islander students feel connected and supported.

Success to Date

About 93% of FCP students are low-income and almost 60% are the first in their families to go to college. Moreover, about 43% require remediation in English. Compared to other Asian American and Pacific Islander students on campus with similar academic backgrounds, in spring 2014 FCP students had:

- Higher student retention rates (94.4% compared to 85.7%);
- Significantly higher rates of Good Academic Standing, meaning students maintained a GPA of 2.0 or higher and avoided academic probation or dismissal (97.2% compared to 81.8%); and
- Higher mean overall Grade Point Averages (3.15 compared to 2.77 on a 4.0 scale).

FCP was recognized as a "Model of Success" by the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education and featured in the book, *Educating a Diverse Nation: Lessons from Minority Serving Institutions* (Harvard University Press, 2015). Attention to FCP has led to additional program and scholarship funding from the local community, and an Asian American and Pacific Islander Alumni chapter is scheduled to be launched in spring of 2016. In addition, the Asian Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund (APIASF) is dedicating scholarships ranging from \$2,500 to \$5,000 to Sacramento State to support student success, expand institutional capacity, and to mobilize local resources to help foster economic development.

Thanks to FCP, the faculty and staff dedicated to the program, and a reserved community space on campus, more Asian American and Pacific Islander students feel a sense of community at Sac State. FCP has helped me get out of my comfort zone. The staff has helped me to be more engaged and last year I had enough confidence to start the FCP Club. The Club is a way for students from different cohorts to connect. —Hnou Lee



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