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Anti-Racism: A Student Plan of Action Chapter 2: Anti-Asian Hate

Student Senate for California Community Colleges



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INTRODUCTION

In 2021, the SSCCC watched as Asian hate increased all around the nation and still continues today in 2022. Analogous to the first chapter of the *SSCCC Anti-Racism: A Student Plan of Action* report, the SSCCC was concerned about the impact of hate on our Asian students and held a webinar on May 7, 2021, to hear directly from our Asian and Pacific Islander-identifying (API) students about their experiences on California community college campuses. What resulted is this second chapter of the *SSCCC Anti-Racism-A Student Plan of Action* report, which is dedicated solely to sharing Asian and Pacific Islander student concerns about the hate that is occurring in their community.



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ASIAN COMMUNITY

There seems to be an assumption that all Asians are the same. Asian students do not fit in one culture or one community but have diverse customs, different values, and different dialectics sometimes even in the same ethnicities. However, within the Asian community, there are many different nationalities such as Filipino, Japanese, Chinese, Pacific Islander, Hmong, Indian, and others. Each of these ethnicities has individual and separate cultures and communities but is often lumped together as Asian. To be more culturally conscience, colleges should:

- create an environment where the diversity of the Asian culture is acknowledged, respected, and understood;
- create an environment where the college community can learn about API individual accomplishments over the centuries and their struggles with race and identity;
- allow and encourage API students to define themselves and take over their identity; and
- celebrate each of the API cultures.

CULTURAL AWARENESS AND RESPECT

In Chapter One, Black and African American students shared that they wanted “a climate of cultural awareness and respect to allow students of color to feel welcome, free to express their opinions, and safe in every collegiate environment.” The API community has some of the same issues and concerns as other marginalized groups and their issues are not less or more important than the concerns of others. However, the API community has unique struggles within their race and identity. For example, one stereotype that API students are faced with is the idea of the “model minority.” The myth of “model minority” is that API people are more successful, work harder, cause fewer problems, and are smarter-just to name a few. This myth can be detrimental for API students because it ignores the diversity of Asians and creates an environment where these students are overlooked when they need extra help, more support, or additional resources. As one API student shared during the May 2021 webinar, some Asian students have been told by their parents to “stay small, stay quiet, do not be seen or heard so you will have more opportunities.” Alternatively, Pacific Islanders may not be lumped into the model majority but have different stereotypes. For example, some associate Samoans with football or rugby because many are brave and have a large physique, which can also be harmful to Samoans. There are many other examples of harmful Asian stereotypes similar to other minorities.

The Action Plan Chapter One recommended that colleges “Create a climate of cultural awareness and respect to allow students of color to feel welcome, free to express their opinions, and safe in every collegiate environment” and included the following ways to promote cultural awareness and respect, which applies to the API community as well:

- confront and address racial profiling and microaggression;
- appreciate contributions of people of color to society;
- establish appropriate etiquette sensitive to cultural backgrounds;
- create an environment where students of color can thrive while being their authentic selves.




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What Chapter One did not touch on, however, was that cultural awareness and respect may look and feel different for the diverse populations of students such as API students. Thus, colleges should also

- create an environment where there is awareness of culture and a respect for the differences and similarities within the Asian and Pacific Islander community, as well as other communities;
- create an environment where there is an opportunity to dispel social misperceptions and current issues that are projected onto the Asian culture (e.g., China/Chinese virus, Kung flu virus); and
- provide cultural awareness training that helps the college community understand the different histories and experiences of Asian and Pacific Islanders.



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PEER MENTORS AND ALLIANCES

Chapter One recommended that more should be done by college administrators to bring student groups and clubs together to learn about each other's culture. API students had similar recommendations and stressed the need for multicultural centers, which would promote a greater understanding of each other's cultures, as well as create a shared sense of community.

One area of particular interest to API students was developing the relationships between the API and Black communities. In this current climate, there appears to be a certain tension between the two communities. Members of the API community feel that while they have some of the same challenges as that of the Black community, they feel invisible when expressing their issues or that others feel they are trying to take attention from the Black community experience. As noted previously, API students do not believe their issues are more important or less than. Instead, API students want their experiences to be acknowledged and respected and to find solutions for all marginalized communities.



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Similarly, some members of the Black community have experienced a struggle with the focus of the “model” minority foregrounded in the API community. The notion that the API community are hard workers, have strong family bonds, and are doing well could contribute to the tension between the two communities by assuming that other minorities could be equally successful if they worked harder. This type of belief only perpetuates racism and pits API students against Black or African American students. It creates a racial resentment in the misconception of one’s capacity for educational success and adherence to the American values of hard work, individualism, and self-reliance.

This conflict is also held and evident for the members of the API community with the misrepresentation of culture, values, and identity. Pacific Islanders can often be described solely for their bold and brave stature; when in fact this mere generalization denies diversity and applies simplistic attributes to the API community. In a similar sense, it is wrong and misleading to conclude that all Asians are bound for success simply because of the predetermined notion about their work ethic and ethos.

Ultimately, the fallacy lies in being content with these retrospective beliefs and arguments; therefore, it should be our resolve to change the narrative and lay the framework for more acceptance, understanding, and respect.

Building on the recommendations in Chapter One related to peer mentors and cultural centers, colleges should

- provide a venue for students to learn how both communities can benefit without demeaning the worth of the other community;
- create an opportunity to bridge the gap between both the API and Black communities;
- establish peer mentors and alliances who could facilitate an environment where the API, Black, and other marginalized communities can show up for each other;
- create a space such as a multicultural center, learning center, or similar spaces where students can learn about the cultures, customs, and traditions of people of color and develop a greater understanding of each other, as well as bring difficult conversations to be resolved.



CONCLUSION

Chapter One of the *Anti-Racism: A Student Plan of Action* shared the experiences of people of color, particularly Black and African American students. This new chapter confirms that the recommendations in Chapter One -- curriculum changes, equity training, classroom experience, cultural awareness, etc - are equally true for API students. However, this chapter also provided that all people of color cannot be lumped together but should instead be acknowledged and respected for each of their similarities and differences, which all contribute to the richness of California community colleges, and the nation in general. For all student populations to be successful, California community colleges need to create multicultural learning communities, peer mentors, culturally competent administrators, staff, faculty, and students, as well as create other resources.

NEXT STEPS

As the SSCCC has continued its work on diversity, equity, and inclusion, the need for creating a culturally aware community college environment has become more apparent. Thus, the next chapter of the *Anti-Racism: A Student Plan of Action* will listen to Native American students to explore their unique experiences and share with community colleges the impact of racism on this population of students.

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