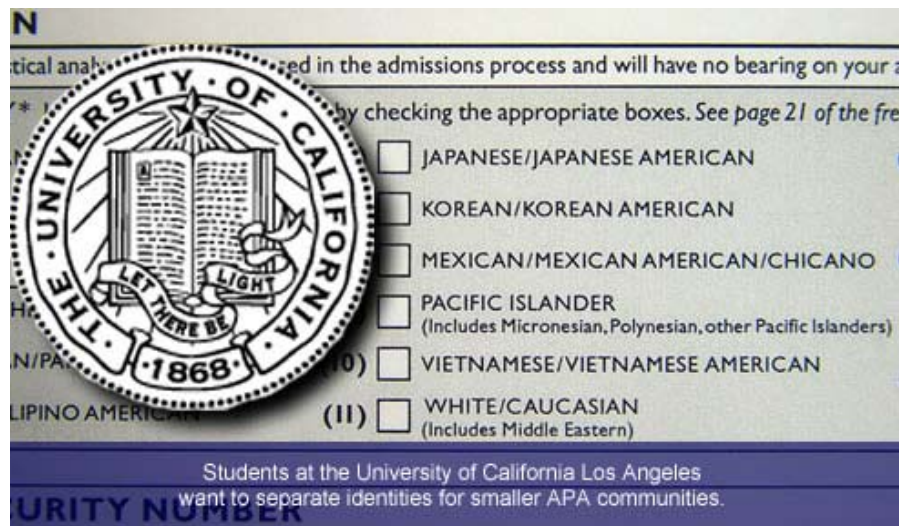


APA Students Launch Campaign to Dismantle 'Asian American' at UCs



The Count Me In! campaign strives to shed light on the plight of smaller APA ethnic groups. A Calif. assembly bill seeks to do the same for state agencies.

by **Lynda Lin, Assistant Editor**

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The title of Asian Pacific American can give and take. It can empower and at the same time engender the feeling of being a minority within a minority group.

APAs make up 34.6 percent of the University of California's new freshman admits in 2005 - the second largest group next to Caucasian, according to university data. The same report defines APAs as: Chinese, East Indian/Pakistani, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese and other Asians.

For Nefara Riesch, who is of Samoan descent, being "other" or just "Asian" doesn't encapsulate a Pacific Islander's struggle for access to higher education. The 19-year-old history major is one of about 40 Pacific Islanders on the University of California, Los Angeles campus of over 24,000 undergraduates. For Riesch, the numbers just don't add up.

In order to call attention to the plight of smaller APA ethnic groups, UCLA's Asian Pacific Coalition (APC) is leading a campaign to pressure university administrators to disaggregate the "Other Asian" category, which critics say traps some APAs under the Model Minority Myth.

Beating the Odds

The Count Me In! Campaign, which is currently a UCLA initiative but will soon spread to the other UC campuses, seeks to achieve:

the inclusion of 10 more APA ethnic groups such as Bangladeshi, Fijian and Hmong in the university's collection of data;

the creation of a Pacific Islander racial category; and

financial support for outreach projects targeted at disadvantaged APAs.

The truth of the matter is, we can't be placed under the homogenous Asian American umbrella," said Riesch, who grew up in East Palo Alto, known then for being the murder capital of the country. "Not everyone fits in that category."

Statistically the odds are against Pacific Islanders like Riesch: only fifteen percent get their bachelor's degree and only one percent go on to get their master's degree. For many, upward mobility and higher education are virtually inaccessible without help. Being lumped into an "Asian" group undermines the struggles of smaller APA ethnic groups, critics say.

The campaign was the direct response to anti-Asian sentiment expressed at UCLA when admission numbers were released. An October 2006 column in the university newspaper blamed APA students for lowered numbers of African American and Hispanic admits.

It was a wake up call," said Riesch. "It was supposed to be sarcastic, but for us it was filled with hate."

he APC immediately hosted a forum to dispel the misconception and from there, the Count Me In! campaign was born.

"We're underrepresented and from a different part of history, a different part of the world," said Kevin Peanh, 20, about his Cambodian heritage.

Being placed under a ubiquitous Asian classification was personally detrimental to the Long Beach, Calif. native because his classmates would often think his family was more affluent than their reality.

"My mom is a caretaker and my dad is a machinist," said Peanh.

Disaggregating APA Racial Categories in California

University of California officials agree that placing all APAs in a single category likely masks differences in experience, educational background and socio-economic status.

"We are currently developing a report that disaggregates these categories at the system wide level," said Nina Robinson, director of policy and external affairs for the University of California. "In addition, we are studying the possibility of expanding the number of subcategories of data we collect and report."

In conjunction with the Count Me In! Campaign, Calif. State Assemblyman Ted Lieu is pushing AB 295, which seeks to disaggregate data collected by state agencies. If passed, state agencies must collect data on smaller AAPI communities similar to the method used in the U.S. census.

Currently, the University of California's undergraduate application offers students the option to report their ethnicity in multiple categories including eight Asian sub-categories - the most of any other racial group. The Chicano/Latino, African American and Caucasian categories remain homogenous.


But campaign supporters say their efforts are specially geared towards dismantling the Model Minority Myth.

"We are not opposed to other groups being able to access disaggregated data. The intent of this bill, however, is to address the Model Minority Myth that exists for the API community. It will accomplish this by gathering accurate data for individual groups that are starkly different from one another in terms of immigration patterns, language and culture," said Lieu.

UCLA's APC is an alliance of 21 different APA organizations. This summer, they are planning to widen their base and build networks on all the UC campuses. For many, the campaign is an APA effort, even for larger APA ethnic communities that are currently represented.

"Japanese Americans for the most part have a pretty well-off community. But this is why it needs to be recognized. We can't just be complacent because our community is doing well," said Craig Ishii, the Pacific Southwest regional director and current UCLA student. "We as JAs and we as ACL need to stand up together with other communities when support is needed. And we as JAs and JACL need to look beyond what directly affects us as Nikkei and instead look to what affects us as Asian Americans and even beyond."

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