

HIGHER EDUCATION IN HAWAII: A COMPARISON OF GRADUATION RATES AMONG ASIAN AND PACIFIC AMERICANS¹

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Social scientists have created a voluminous amount of literature in the past two decades on the ostensible economic success of Asian Americans as "model minorities," or argued against such a perspective (cf. Blauner, 1972; Cheng and Bonacich, 1984; Kim and Hurh, 1983; Kitano and Sue, 1979; Ringer, 1984; Suzuki, 1977; Wong, 1985; Woo, 1985). Within this body of research, education has been a principal issue, particularly as education relates to economic and social mobility. Absent in this body of literature is an understanding of the Asian and Pacific American experience in education institutions, especially in postsecondary education.

This paper presents a preliminary examination of longitudinal data on the graduation rates of Asian and Pacific Americans at the University of Hawaii. The data presented in this paper are part of a continuing research project on the analysis of institutional records and student surveys. We also discuss an alternative way to describe these data which have implications for policy and planning issues in postsecondary education.

Methods

Data on the fall 1979 cohort of entering freshmen at the University of Hawaii were assessed over a period of seven years (fall 1979 to summer 1986) to determine their graduation status. The University of Hawaii background, academic performance, and graduation data for all enrolled students in machine-readable form. The major independent variable, ethnic background, is a self-reported measure. The four major Asian ethnic groups at the University of Hawaii (Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, and Koreans) and Native Hawaiians were included in this analysis. While Caucasians are the major group at the University, they were not included in this initial investigation. Many Caucasians come from the mainland United States and

¹An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Conference on the Symposium on Asian America: Asian Americans and Higher Education, Cornell University, May 1988. This paper was supported in part by Allan LIKE, Incorporated, the University of Hawaii, and the National Center for Asian American Mental Health (MH 44331).

transfer to other colleges, and their graduation rates at the University of Hawaii may not accurately reflect their educational attainments.

Graduation status is the major dependent variable. Graduation rates were computed only for the University of Hawaii at Manoa. It is possible that some students left this campus and graduated from other postsecondary education institutions in Hawaii or elsewhere. However, it is our experience that such computed rates underrepresent the overall graduation rates of Caucasians more than other groups. If non-Caucasian students are enrolled at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, most will continue their academic careers at this campus until they graduate or until they permanently drop out. This assumption, however, will be tested as more longitudinal data become available.

We will first examine the bivariate relationship between ethnicity and graduation status and then proceed to introduce several control variables to further explore this relationship.

Findings

The 1979 freshman cohort consists of 2,285 students. The demographic characteristics of the cohort are presented in Table 1. The cohort has a higher proportion of females than males, the modal age in 1979 was 18 years, a majority of the students attended a public secondary school (although 23 percent attended a private or parochial school), and Japanese students are overrepresented at the University while Filipinos and Native Hawaiians are underrepresented.

Certain ethnic minority groups enter the University of Hawaii with an academic disadvantage as evidenced by their high school grades or standardized achievement test scores. Table 2 displays the mean grade point averages and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) math and verbal scores for the five ethnic groups in the analysis. No substantive difference in the grade point averages is evident for the five groups. However, when mean SAT test scores are assessed, differences are readily apparent. Filipino, Korean, and Native Hawaiian students have lower verbal or math scores than Japanese and Chinese students. While all groups do better on the SAT math test than the verbal test, Native Hawaiians and Filipinos have mean math scores below those of the other ethnic groups. In summary, Filipino and Native Hawaiians enter the University at a clear academic disadvantage.

Figure 1 displays the graduation rates for the total 1979 cohort and the five ethnic groups. Fifty-six percent of the total cohort graduated within seven

years. Chinese (70 percent) and Japanese (66 percent) students have the highest graduation rates among the five ethnic groups. Filipino and Korean students have similar rates, 50 percent and 48 percent, respectively. Native Hawaiians have the lowest graduation rate with only 34 percent of the students graduating.

Table 3 shows the length of time to graduation for students who graduated within seven years. The major difference between the ethnic groups appears to be in the percentages of students who needed more than five years to graduate. Among the Chinese and Japanese students, approximately 30 percent needed more than five years to complete their degrees. The comparable percentages are slightly higher for Filipino (41 percent), Native Hawaiian (45 percent), and Korean (40 percent) students.

We were interested in gender differences within ethnic groups (see Table 4). Female students in all of the ethnic groups, except for the Filipinos, have higher graduation rates than males. The differences between males and females are higher for the Chinese and Japanese than in the other groups.

Another issue we explored is how prior achievement explains graduation rates. Earlier we showed that, relative to the other ethnic groups, Filipinos and Native Hawaiians entered the University with lower mean SAT verbal and math scores. We wanted to know whether the differences in scores accounted for the differences in graduation rates. Tables 5 to 7 show the graduation rates for each ethnic group controlling for grade point average, SAT math score, and SAT verbal score. We dichotomized these variables because of the small sizes of some of the ethnic groups. Grade point average (GPA) was dichotomized as "under 3.0" and "3.0 and over," SAT math scores were categorized as "under 500" and "500 and over," and SAT verbal scores were dichotomized as "under 450" and "450 and over." Different cutoffs for math and verbal scores were used because students tended to score higher on math than on the verbal test.

For all of the ethnic groups, students with higher grade point averages and achievement test scores do have higher graduation rates. In some instances, the improvement in rates is dramatic. For example, among Filipino students who had less than a 3.0 GPA, only 35 percent graduated. For Filipino students with a 3.0 GPA and above, 58 percent graduated. Similar results occur for Native Hawaiian students; the rates improve from 24 percent to 49 percent.

Despite these impressive differences, Filipino, Native Hawaiian, and Korean students do not attain the graduation rates of the Japanese and Chinese students when GPA and academic achievement are controlled.

Among students with high GPAs and achievement test scores, Filipinos, Native Hawaiians, and Koreans have lower graduation rates than Japanese and Chinese. Filipino students have higher graduation rates than Native Hawaiians and Korean students when achievement is controlled.

Finally, a multiple logistic regression was used to summarize the graduation rates for the five ethnic groups controlling for high school grade point average, SAT scores, and the type of high school attended (public, private, mainland, and foreign schools). Logistic regression estimates the independent effects of different variables on a dichotomous dependent variable. The dependent variable in this instance is graduation status (graduated or not graduated within seven years). Table 8 presents the results of the analysis. Odds ratios were computed; these represent the odds of graduating for a particular ethnic group compared to the odds of graduating for Chinese students (the group with the highest graduation rate). A "1.0" odds ratio indicates that an ethnic group has the same odds of graduating as Chinese students controlling for high school grade point average, SAT scores, and type of high school attended.

The analysis here indicates that Japanese students have similar odds of graduating from the University of Hawai'i as Chinese students when controlling for the other variables. Filipino, Korean, and Native Hawaiians have statistically lower odds of graduating. Native Hawaiians have the lowest odds of graduating. These results provide further evidence that, even when controlling for certain factors, certain ethnic minorities do not achieve equity within the college environment.

Discussion

This paper presents the results of a preliminary examination of longitudinal data on students at the University of Hawai'i. The findings show that, relative to the other ethnic groups, Filipino and Native Hawaiian students are underrepresented at the University of Hawai'i, they enter with lower average SAT scores and mean high school GPAs, lower percentages graduate after seven years, and, when they do graduate, they take longer to earn their degrees. We also show that even when controlling for academic achievement, Filipino, Native Hawaiian, and Korean students do not reach parity with Chinese and Japanese students with respect to graduation rates.

The findings presented here also call attention to an additional point. Filipino and Native Hawaiian students enter the University of Hawai'i with a disadvantage as evidenced by their low SAT scores. While we recognize the

problems in focusing on these tests as a measure of talent, these scores also indicate that minority access begins prior to entry into the University of Hawai'i. The unequal schooling that certain ethnic minority students receive is established prior to their entry into college and this inequity continues through their college careers.

Elsewhere we have discussed some barriers which discourage ethnic minorities from entering postsecondary education or, if enrolled, deter them from getting a degree. Channeling, inaccurate measures of talent, conflicting learning styles, poor financial incentives, and absence of minority faculty encourage certain ethnic minorities to fail in school, drop out of school, and enter adult society with a low level of education (Agbayani and Takeuchi, 1986a).

Biased books and curricula are also part of the mechanisms that schools use to encourage the poor performance of certain ethnic minorities. However, these mechanisms are part of the larger issue of the culturally-biased, Western, middle class educational system. Such a system teaches and rewards Western middle class educational behaviors which have little to do with success in adult life. Schools often fail to recognize that students come from coherent cultures which may be different from the prevailing Western culture. Gallimore, Boggs, and Jordan (1974) point out that the learning process is upset in school by the clash in attitudes, expectations, cognitive styles, languages, and behaviors between teachers and students. This clash favors students who can adapt to the school's cultural orientations; these students are trained to occupy high status roles. Students who cannot adapt are considered failures and are trained for menial roles. An excellent example of this process is the conflict between "pidgin English" and standard English in Hawai'i (Agbayani and Takeuchi, 1986b). Educators have historically considered pidgin English speakers as inferior to standard English speakers and this has been used as a basis to "treat" pidgin speakers as "deficient" and in need of special services.

But why do some ethnic minority groups do better in the educational system than others? Explanations based on cultural differences have been called into question (cf. Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Collins, 1971; Mayes, 1971). One promising structural approach is provided by Ogbu (1978), who makes a direct connection between schooling and post-school society. Ogbu argues that education is directly related to typical adult roles in the contemporary post-school society. The different positions traditionally assigned to dominant and minority groups affect the school performance of each. The education of the dominant group prepares its members to compete for the most desirable

roles in society. The education of minority groups, on the other hand, prepares them for very different roles.

Ogbu distinguishes between three types of minority groups: autonomous, caste, and immigrant. Autonomous minorities tend to be numerically smaller than, but not totally subordinated economically or politically to, the dominant group. They often possess a distinct racial, religious, linguistic, or cultural identity. They may be subject to some prejudice and discrimination but their relationship with the dominant group is not one of rigid stratification. Members of autonomous minorities do not necessarily regard the majority group as their reference group nor do they necessarily want to be assimilated.

Caste minorities are the opposite. The dominant group usually regards them as inferior in all respects. In general, caste minorities are not allowed to compete for the most desirable jobs or roles on the basis of their position in the stratification system. Their subordination is both political and economic.

Immigrant minorities fall between autonomous and caste minorities. They are people who have moved into a host society. As strangers, immigrant minorities tend to live in groups and operate effectively outside of the established definitions of social relations. They can accept and even anticipate prejudice and discrimination as the price for improving their lives. Although they may initially occupy the lowest positions in the occupational structure of the host society and possess little power or prestige, the jobs they hold may be better than those available to them in their homelands. They see themselves as in the process of bettering their lives in a new country rather than being at the bottom of the hierarchy.

In Hawai'i, Caucasians are considered the dominant group. Their orientation generally reflects Western values and customs. Caucasians comprise the largest group in the state, and the largest proportion of Caucasians are employed in professional and technical occupations.

The Japanese, Koreans, and Chinese best represent Ogbu's autonomous category. They have established their own subcultures and have attained high levels of status. They have higher than average median annual incomes, and higher than average proportions of these groups are in professional and technical occupations. In the past 50 years, the numbers of Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans in professional occupations have increased dramatically.

Native Hawaiians appear to represent Ogbu's caste minority. They have traditionally been on the bottom rung of the social, economic, and

political ladder. Native Hawaiians are indigenous to the state and have experienced many of the hardships of other Native Americans.

Filipinos were the last group of plantation laborers to arrive in Hawai'i and still represent the largest ethnic group annually migrating to this state. Although they have been denied entry into upper level social and economic positions, social scientists consider their growth rate in Hawai'i as a potential source of power in local politics. For this reason, Filipinos best represent Ogbu's immigrant category. Koreans are also immigrating in large numbers to Hawai'i. While they are developing an economic base through entrepreneurial activities, their entry into the social and political hierarchy is blocked by institutional barriers (e.g., language barriers, stereotyping). They also can be considered as representative of Ogbu's immigrant category.

As noted earlier, Ogbu argues that the education of the dominant group prepares its members to compete for the most desirable roles in society. The education of minorities, however, prepares them for very different roles. Autonomous minorities (such as Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans in Hawai'i) are trained to occupy high status roles. In some cases, autonomous minorities may have their own educational system outside of the formal educational system of the dominant group (e.g., language schools). The important point is that with autonomous minorities, as with the dominant group, there is a direct connection between success in school and success in adult life. School achievement for children will have a bearing on the roles they occupy in later life, and the better students will tend to get the better jobs.

In contrast, caste minorities (such as Native Hawaiians) are not trained to compete effectively for high status occupations in society. This is because caste minorities are restricted to the least desirable social and occupational roles. The barriers against caste minorities which exist in the post-school society shape their educational expectations. They are not taught the same skills as other students and they lack the motivation to do well in school.

The children of immigrant minorities (such as Filipinos in Hawai'i) are also likely to occupy the lowest social and economic positions in society, but their situation is different than that of the caste minorities. They see themselves as being in a period of transition. Even though formal education may not bring the benefits of high social status, they are motivated by the anticipation that such rewards are possible. Unlike caste minorities, immigrant minorities have hopes of escaping what may have been a long history of frustrated social mobility.

What Ogbu suggests, then, is that the educational experiences of minority groups are determined by the occupational structure of the society. When high level occupational roles are available, as with autonomous minorities, there is a need for academic achievement. When occupational barriers exist, as with caste minorities, academic achievement is secondary. Schools are organized to prepare different minority groups for different adult roles and positions.

Conclusion: Policy and Additional Research

In a previous study, we have discussed some policy and planning recommendations for reducing institutional barriers which deter minority students from graduating from college (Agbayani and Takeuchi, 1986a). These recommendations focus on establishing programs to reach minority students prior to their entry in college, establishing support programs, initiating minority faculty development programs, and developing joint programs with the community colleges.

Cummins (1986) presents a policy framework within which the above recommendations can be implemented. It is based on an acknowledgement of a stratification system in which certain ethnic minority groups are dominated and disabled through interactions with school personnel. Cummins suggests that schools can have a profound impact by empowering minority students and their communities through incorporating minority students' language and culture in school programs, encouraging minority community participation in schools, encouraging students to use language to actively generate knowledge, and encouraging professionals to become advocates for minority students. By empowering minorities, schools reduce the barriers created by the ethnic stratification system in the larger society.

We have some experience that suggests that this framework can have a profound effect on minority students in postsecondary education. In 1986, a task force comprised of 20 Native Hawaiian faculty representing the various University of Hawai'i campuses was established to work on issues regarding Native Hawaiian access, retention, and education at the University of Hawai'i. The task force provided recommendations for the establishment of an expanded Hawaiian studies program with a full curriculum consisting of language and cultural studies. This task force was unique because it represented the first time that the University administration recognized the need to have Native Hawaiian input in the development of solutions for Native Hawaiian students. Similar task forces have been formed for Filipinos

and Pacific Islanders.

In this paper we have presented some initial analyses in continuing research project on ethnic minority students at the University of Hawaii. More extensive analyses are planned. In addition to conducting further multivariate analyses on graduation rates, we also plan to examine variables which predict academic achievement. Surveys are also scheduled to examine how minority students change their expectations as they progress through their academic careers. Finally, classroom studies are planned to explore the learning processes which can enhance minority student achievement within the classroom.

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Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the 1979 University of Hawai'i at Manoa Freshman Cohort

Characteristic	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Female	1254	54.9
Male	1030	45.1
Age		
Below 18	57	2.5
18	1995	87.3
19	167	7.3
20	18	0.8
21	15	0.7
22	12	0.5
Over 22	19	0.8
High School Attended		
Pvt./Parochial	513	22.5
Public	1550	67.8
Other	222	9.7
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	320	14.5
Chinese	314	14.3
Filipino	119	5.4
Hawaiian	86	3.9
Japanese	1025	46.6
Korean	62	2.8
Others	275	12.5

Note: Total size of the cohort is 2,285. Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding error.

Table 2: Grade Point Averages and SAT Scores of the 1979 University of Hawai'i Freshman Cohort for Selected Ethnic Groups

Ethnic Group	High School GPA		SAT Math		SAT Verbal	
	N	Mean SD	N	Mean SD	N	Mean SD
Chinese	273	3.26 .40	302	537 92	302	409 104
Filipino	102	3.27 .41	104	481 92	106	339 75
Hawaiian	69	2.29 .40	69	463 104	69	413 100
Japanese	968	3.16 .43	968	532 95	970	429 84
Korean	57	3.14 .44	60	538 91	60	391 95

Note: SAT refers to the Scholastic Aptitude Test which is one of several criteria used to determine entrance eligibility at the University.

Table 3: Length of Time to Graduate for Selected Ethnic Groups

Ethnic Group	N	Number of Years (graduates only)				
		3	4	5	6	7
Total Sample	1281	1%	17%	51%	22%	9%
Chinese	219	3	21	48	20	8
Filipino	59	0	15	44	29	12
Hawaiian	29	0	17	38	24	21
Japanese	677	*	13	55	21	10
Korean	30	0	20	40	33	7

* = less than one percent.

Note: Graduation rates are computed from Fall 1979 to Summer 1986. Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding error

Table 4: Graduation Rates by Gender for Selected Ethnic Groups in the 1979 Freshman Cohort

Ethnic Group	Females		Males	
	N	Grad. Rate	N	Grad. Rate
Chinese	178	73%	136	65%
Filipino	68	46	51	45
Hawaiian	38	37	48	31
Japanese	556	70	469	61
Korean	35	43	27	37

Table 5: Graduation Rates by High School Grade Point Average for Selected Ethnic Groups in the 1979 Freshman Cohort

Ethnic Group	Under 3.0		3.0 and Over	
	N	Grad. Rate	N	Grad. Rate
Chinese	55	58%	218	72%
Filipino	23	35	79	58
Hawaiian	34	24	35	49
Japanese	310	55	658	74
Korean	20	40	37	54

Table 6: Graduation Rates by SAT Math Score for Selected Ethnic Groups in the 1979 Freshman Cohort

Ethnic Group	Under 500		500 and Over	
	N	Grad. Rate	N	Grad Rate
Chinese	94	66%	208	74%
Filipino	57	47	47	62
Hawaiian	44	30	25	48
Japanese	340	62	628	71
Korean	20	45	40	50

Table 7: Graduation Rates by SAT Verbal Score for Selected Groups in the 1979 Freshman Cohort

Ethnic Group	Under 450		450 and Over	
	N	Grad. Rate	N	Grad Rate
Chinese	198	70%	104	74%
Filipino	77	49	29	62
Hawaiian	47	30	22	50
Japanese	603	66	364	71
Korean	44	50	16	44

Table 8: The Relationship Between Ethnic Group and Graduation Status: Summary of a Logistic Regression Analysis

Ethnic Group	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	
		Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Filipino	.588	.343	.908
Hawaiian	.362	.202	.646
Korean	.442	.242	.806
Japanese	1.026	.753	1.389

Note: The logistic regression outcome measure is graduation status (0 = did not graduate, 1 = graduated) and controls for SAT-V, SAT-M, high school grade point average, and type of school (public, private, mainland, foreign). The comparison group is Chinese students. If "1.0" is within the 95 percent confidence interval, then the odds ratio is not statistically significant.