

Filipinos at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa: Condition and Opportunities to Foster College Success

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According to the United States Census (2010), Filipinos are now the second largest ethnic group in Hawai‘i at approximately a quarter of the population, and their numbers continue to rise at an accelerated pace. However, attainment of higher education and the socioeconomic status of Filipinos in Hawai‘i remains low. This is a point of concern as research continues to highlight the positive correlation between educational attainment and income levels (U.S. Census Bureau 2013). In Hawai‘i’s public higher education system, Filipinos are well represented at the University of Hawai‘i (UH) community colleges while they are underrepresented at the flagship campus of the UH system—the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UH Mānoa).

Two recent studies examined this phenomenon and the related experiences facing Filipino students as they transition and progress through their undergraduate years. The first was a quantitative study that examined the effects of social and academic background variables on undergraduate degree completion of Filipino students from the theoretical lens of social stratification (Libarios 2013). The second was a qualitative study that explored the direct experiences of Filipino students and how these experiences influence persistence in undergraduate higher education (Bachini 2011). Combined, these studies present unique insights into the condition of Filipinos at UH Mānoa and highlight critical areas to be addressed in order to improve the higher education achievement of Filipinos in Hawai‘i. The article begins with a demographic overview of Filipinos as they are represented in the UH community colleges and UH Mānoa. Next, a brief overview and summary of key findings from the aforementioned studies are provided. Finally, the authors draw on the two studies to offer five practical recommendations for improving rates of success in higher educational achievement for Filipinos.

Condition

Filipinos in Hawai‘i Community Colleges and at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

As the public higher education institution in Hawai‘i, the University of Hawai‘i system consists of three universities and seven community colleges located throughout the Hawai‘i island chain. Of the ten-campus, UH Mānoa is the flagship campus and the only Carnegie Doctoral Research Extensive University in the system and the state. This section provides a brief summary of the representation of Filipinos in the UH community colleges and UH Mānoa in year 2010.

The demographic data collected by the UH Institutional Research Office only accounts for full Filipinos, not people who identify as part Filipino. In fall 2010, students who self-identified as full Filipinos represented 15.7 percent of students in the UH community colleges (Institutional Research Office 2011b). For that same year, full Filipinos were similarly represented at 14.5 percent of the population in Hawai‘i (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). After Native Hawaiians, Filipinos have historically been the second largest ethnic group in the UH community colleges and generally reflect the high concentration of Filipinos living in different geographic regions of Hawai‘i. For example, the communities surrounding Honolulu Community College, Kaua‘i Community College, Leeward Community College, and Maui College are areas known for the dense population of Filipinos and each of these campuses have Filipino student representation of 20 percent or higher. Table 1 below summarizes the percentage of Filipinos in the UH community colleges by individual campus in fall 2010.

In 2010 at UH Mānoa, Filipinos only represented 7.7 percent of the total student population and their percentage

Table 1: Percentage Share of Filipino Students by Community College, Fall 2010

Community College	Number	Percentage
Leeward Community College	1718	21.6%
Honolulu Community College	927	19.6%
Kauai Community College	277	19.4%
Maui Community College	798	18.3%
Kapiolani Community College	1196	12.9%
Hawai'i Community College	340	8.9%
Windward Community College	119	4.5%
Community College System	5375	15.7%

(*Institutional Research Office, 2011b*)

decreased markedly between UH Mānoa undergraduate and graduate levels (Institutional Research Office, 2011a). While Filipinos represented 9.6 percent of the UH Mānoa undergraduate population, they only represented 4.6 percent of the graduate level population. Table 2 below encapsulates the percentages of Filipinos in Hawai'i at the UH community colleges and the UH Mānoa undergraduate and graduate levels for 2010.

Table 2: Percentage Share of Filipinos in Hawai'i, UH Community Colleges, and UH Mānoa, Fall 2010

State of Hawai'i	UH Community Colleges	UH Mānoa Undergraduate Level	UH Mānoa Graduate Level
14.5% (197,497)	15.7% (5,375)	9.6% (1,311)	4.6% (263)

(*Institutional Research Office, 2011a, 2011b; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010*)

As a major ethnic group in Hawai'i, the circumstances of Filipinos deserve closer exploration, particularly their underrepresentation at UH Mānoa. Recently, a pair of studies delved into these issues and they are timely for two reasons in particular. Firstly, UH Mānoa has recognized the importance of Filipino student representation in campus ethnic diversity needs, and it has identified an increase in the numbers of Filipino students as a specific strategic campus goal (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Committee on Enrollment Planning 2009). Secondly, both studies are based on the premise that earning a four-year degree is an important factor in social mobility since educational attainment corresponds positively with income levels (U.S.

Census Bureau 2013). Hence, efforts to understand and increase the higher education attainment of Filipinos in Hawai'i can pay dividends in improving their socioeconomic standing and benefit all of Hawai'i since they make up a significant portion of the state population.

Study 1

The first study analyzed the high school through post-secondary education pathway with a focus on the completion of undergraduate degrees (Libarios 2013). More specifically, the study examined the impact of students' social and academic backgrounds on baccalaureate degree completion, focusing primarily on Filipinos as a case study. A longitudinal data analysis was conducted which tracked the educational pathways of 5,206 students from thirty-eight Hawai'i public high schools after their senior year through their enrollment in the UH system and completion of baccalaureate degrees at UH Mānoa. This study identified several key findings related to patterns of retention, persistence, and failure in the transition from high school graduation to pursuit of post-secondary education via the UH system.

The first finding is that of the four largest ethnic groups in Hawai'i—Whites, Filipinos, Japanese, and Hawaiians—Filipinos are significantly more likely to enroll in public higher education. This finding is in accord with what other studies have indicated about the value that Filipinos place on higher education (Alexander 2001; Azores 1986-1987; Bachini 2011; Maramba 2008a, 2008b). It further suggests that Filipinos have a strong ambition for higher education and its associated benefits such as an awareness of higher education as a means to improve income and workforce opportunities (Church and Katigbak 1992). Moreover, Filipino parents are highly influential in encouraging their children to pursue higher education—an influence that reinforces this ambition because the parents, too, view educational attainment as a means to greater financial stability (Castillo and Minamishin 1991).

Secondly, Filipinos who choose to pursue higher education in Hawai'i primarily enroll in the UH community colleges (Libarios 2013). Although the community colleges do represent a viable means to pursue higher education, if Filipinos in Hawai'i continue to enroll predominately in the community colleges and do not transfer and complete degree from four-year universities, they will continue to face obstacles in upward social mobility and remain under-

qualified for higher level labor market occupations. Further studies to understand why the community colleges are the higher education institution of choice for Filipinos would be helpful in identifying the underlying issues. Affordability is clearly one reason (Teranishi, Allen, and Solarzano 2004), but other reasons may be present as well. For example, Hoxby and Avery (2013) found that many low-income students do not apply to selective colleges, regardless of being qualified for admission, because they do not know individuals who attended a selective college.

Thirdly, while Filipinos in Hawai'i predominantly enroll in the community colleges, they do not do well in transferring to four-year universities (Libarios 2013). Again, costs may be a factor as financial pressures increase during transfer due to higher tuition rates at the four-year university. In addition, associated costs such as application fees, housing/dormitories, travel, parking costs, and specific college fees also rise. These circumstances may discourage Filipino community college students from transferring as noted by Bachini (2011) who found that finances are an important factor in the higher education persistence of Filipinos. Furthermore, community college degrees and certificate programs represent a relatively quick way to become "job-ready," and this alone may satisfy the higher education goals of some Filipino students, especially those who belong to a low socioeconomic group and must give priority to more pressing financial needs.

Fourthly, social factors are also influential in affecting the transfer of Filipinos (Libarios 2013). Filipinos concentrated in the community colleges may not see themselves as capable of successfully transferring and completing degrees at the four-year university level as Harris and Nettles (1996) purport that the attraction to a particular college destination for minority students is strongly influenced by the existing percentage of minority students at that campus.

Filipinos may remain at the community college level simply because there are more Filipinos there for social and academic support (Libarios 2013), particularly because socializing in groups is a strong cultural value for Filipinos, and they rely on their networks with other Filipinos while they are in college (Bachini 2011; Banaria 2004). Studies have shown that immigrants rely on their networks to acculturate and adapt to situations they are placed in (Liu, Ong, and Rosenstein 1991; Tamura 1994). Many low-income students do not even contemplate applying to top colleges

because they do not know individuals who attended one (Hoxby and Avery 2013). Filipinos may not have support systems with other Filipinos who have successfully transferred from a two-year community college to a four-year university. A similar social influence may be that Filipinos in the community colleges do not see Filipinos in the labor force with relatively high level and high paying occupations associated with university degrees, and therefore they do not feel a need to transfer and complete a baccalaureate degree.

Finally, Filipinos who enroll in four-year universities, either directly out of high school or by transfer, are likely to graduate with a baccalaureate degree (Libarios 2013). While Filipinos attending community college in this study were less likely to transfer to the university, those who did successfully transfer or who enrolled directly in a four-year university were more likely to complete a baccalaureate degree compared with other groups. This is something positive to build upon. Programs and policies that help Filipinos enroll directly into four-year universities, or assist them in the transfer process, would help in baccalaureate degree completion and, in turn, lead to improved social mobility opportunities for Filipinos.

Study 2

As a complementary extension to the previous study, this qualitative case study captured the first hand experiences of twelve Filipino students enrolled at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Half of the students in this study enrolled directly from high school, while the remaining six were college transfers. All students graduated from Hawai'i public schools, and the group represented ten high schools from various districts. Eleven students received some type of needs-based or merit-based financial assistance. Transfer data revealed that more Filipino students live with their parents and are less likely to hold a job while they attend a university. They report that their studies deter involvement in campus activities, express a need for educational counseling, have educational loans, and consider religion an important part of their lives (Harms 2001).

Understanding the role of culture in a student's college experience and success is important (Museus and Quayle 2009). For Filipino students, the family is the core social unit. While the college campus culture emphasizes the importance of individual academic achievement, Filipino culture expresses a strong commitment to maintaining

the value of family and community over individuality and independence. Museus and Maramba (2010) found that students who come from cultures that differ greatly from the dominant cultures that are found on their respective college campuses encounter the greatest challenges as they adjust to college. Therefore it is likely that Filipino students encounter the same challenges.

This study centered on the role of culture in college success as measured by student persistence. In this framework, the focus of persistence shifts to institutional responsibility (Bachini 2011). Results from this study identified key five areas that contributed to student persistence or college success.

The first was *finances*. When compared to other racial minority groups, Filipinos are relatively low in income (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). In Hawai‘i, the socioeconomic returns Filipinos receive in income and occupational status are not commensurate with their educational qualifications (Okamura and Agbayani 1997). Combined with the high cost of living in Hawai‘i and the low wage earnings of Filipinos (Agbayani and Ah Sam 2008), the cost of university tuition adds to the parents’ struggle to afford undergraduate education. In extended families, this is especially pronounced. Accordingly, tuition costs at a community college is more affordable and therefore attractive to Filipino families, especially when another child is attending college at the same time. Filipino parents tend to restrict their children’s post-secondary choices for a variety of reasons (e.g., too costly, too far away, etc.). Their role in the decision-making is a common reason that their children do not apply to a broader range of institutions. However, when students receive some type of scholarship or financial support that minimizes the financial burden to parents, then Filipino students are more likely to persist in their studies.

The second key area identified in this study that contributed to student persistence and college success is *family*. Minority students face greater financial pressure and more family responsibility than the typical middle class student (Cho et al. 2008). Filipinos are more willing to sacrifice for one another and frequently want to “please and achieve” for their parents. Gender defining roles were apparent in this study. Among female students, both aspirations in college and the perceived need to manage family obligations at home (e.g., child care, cooking,

cleaning, etc.) were greater when compared to males, and these factors created a source of parent-child conflict among immigrant families. Filipino parents frequently enforce discipline and rigid academic standards. Thus, Filipino students often feel their parents are overprotective and disapprove of peer social interactions such as dating. For the female students in the study, the pressure to succeed while managing home expectations was tremendous and achieving anything less than an ‘A’ is regarded as unacceptable (Wolf 1997).

Ethnic identity is the third area identified in the study that contributes to college success and is a significant factor in student persistence. When the values of one’s culture of origin support the goals of education, they encourage persistence (Kuh and Love 2000). One of the negative consequences of racist stereotyping of Filipinos in Hawai‘i is the tendency among some young people to feel ashamed of their ethnic identity and consequently to disavow it (Okamura 2008). It is encouraging, therefore, that the college experience at Mānoa has created a renewed sense of ethnic pride and identity for students primarily through Filipino language classes, Filipino student organizations, and Filipino faculty and staff who are able to serve as role models. A strong sense of ethnic identity contributes to an increase in self-esteem and a growing sense of belonging that is critical in coping with the challenges that students encounter in the college environment. This re-discovery—the idea of a shared identity, or *kapwa*—is a supportive value that helps students to negotiate and construct their identities in relation to living their lives in the world of higher education in America.

A sense of belonging was the fourth factor. When students are faced with the reality of microaggression on campus, they often strive to find a connection with others and a comfort zone on campus (Cheng 2004). Hurtado and Carter (1997) suggest a sense of belonging is fundamental to a student’s identification with a group and affects both cognitive and affective behavior. Museus and Maramba (2010) are in agreement and posit a student’s connection to her or his cultural heritage is positively associated with a greater sense of connection to college life.

In a study of first and second generation Filipino students, Museus and Maramba (2010) found that first-generation students experienced the lowest sense of belonging to the college campus, while second generation

students had the most difficulty making new friends, maintaining relationships with family, and dealing with feelings of isolation on campus. This study found that students were able to find a “home” at the Mānoa campus and connect with individuals and groups that validated their cultural heritage without abandoning it, and contributed to success in college. For some, studying their native language brought welcome benefits in improving their ability to communicate with others in the household. Others were empowered to minor in Filipino language and found supportive cultural mentors in Filipino language instructors.

Social networking was the fifth element that was found to contribute to student persistence and college success. Social networking allows students to strengthen interdependence and helps mitigate the negative effects of unfamiliar cultural and academic environments. Espiritu and Wolf (2001) found that social networks among Filipino youth closely resembled those of their parents. Research in student development has repeatedly indicated that increased student engagement is linked to improved retention (Baruch-Runyon, Van Zandt, and Elliott 2009). Students became more involved in university life once they had established social connections and began to feel a greater sense of attachment with the institution. Peer support was particularly salient for first-generation college students (Yazedjian et al. 2007). The social networking groups that are available to Filipino students at the Mānoa campus offer students an important support system to cope with the negative stereotyping of being Filipino. As Phinney and Haas (2003) suggest, social support is an important factor in persistence, especially for students who have few, if any, family members who attended college.

Opportunities to Foster College Success

The two studies summarized in this article have explored the high school through baccalaureate degree completion pathway to UH Mānoa for Filipinos and have detailed those experiences of Filipinos that affect persistence. They bring to light some important insights into the condition of Filipino students at UH Mānoa and recommend areas that need to be addressed in order to further their higher education achievement. The following recommendations are offered and are primarily intended to inform practice at UH Mānoa. Nevertheless, we believe these recommendations may also apply to other higher education institutions that

are facing issues of underrepresented students as they pertain to transfer, persistence, and baccalaureate degree completion.

First, more financial aid and scholarship opportunities need to be provided to underrepresented students. Financing a child’s college education is a serious problem for the families of potential students that not only impacts student educational opportunities, but also affects persistence and student success. Within Filipino families, money issues are an emotional life-impacting issue, and they often result in clashes between parents and children (Espiritu 2009).

Filipino families usually qualify for scholarship support based on needs. Therefore, high school students and parents should have better access to the financial aid application process and more information about how to navigate the confusing and intimidating burden of submitting documents and filling in forms. It is imperative that both high school and college officials, whenever possible, simplify this process and take the extra time to explain this important step and guide families through the process. Also, local and community-based groups should consider adopting a school within their community and providing additional funding resources for college-bound students. Creating scholarships or tuition waivers should be explored for first-generation students who attend community college campuses. Pre-college experience programs (e.g., Upward Bound, Running Start, Summer Bridge) often offer students subsidized tuition or supplemental aid for participation and subsequent enrollment in post-secondary education. In some programs, students earn college credit while still enrolled in high school. Finally, incentives should be offered for high school students to take advanced placement courses, assume student leadership positions, manage part-time employment, or participate in athletic or musical competitions as ways to help reduce college expenses. Accordingly, it is critical for universities to create linkages and specific relationships with community colleges, high school counselors, teachers, and administrators.

Secondly, university campuses should do all they can to provide welcoming environments to underrepresented students and implement policies that encourage a culture of four-year degree attainment. As our studies suggest, one important way to help accomplish this is to bring underrepresented students to campus early and assist them in developing productive relationship connections with campus

sources of support. Admission data suggest that when students visit a college campus during their high school years they are more likely to enroll after they graduate. Encouraging a culture of attending a four-year campus begins with outreach efforts to homes, neighborhoods, and high schools. Four-year colleges should build communities of support with the Filipino community and promote engagement of potential students in ways that are engaging and attractive to students. Non-academic activities can be used to build meaningful relationships among students and faculty (Chronicle of Higher Education 2013). These kinds of activities are especially beneficial to Filipinos who often seek opportunities to join a number of campus or community based groups that provide opportunities to network with other Filipino students (Bachini 2011).

When individuals join groups, interactions influence the larger institutional culture and enhance its sub-environments (Kuh and Love 2000). In other words, when students interact with other college-bound students, they are more likely to pursue baccalaureate studies to graduation.

In connection with this insight, families should begin to think “outside the box” and beyond the perspective of their local communities. University campuses, like UH Mānoa, may seem like a distant prospect beyond the reach of their son or daughter; but the institutions are not as remote as they may seem at first, and they can serve as a very welcoming second home to many Filipinos and other underrepresented students. However, this depends on a greater degree of communication between both sides.

Third, more efforts should be made to increase the number of visible role models for underrepresented students. Higher education institutions need to do much more to build an ethnic representation of faculty, staff, and administration in proportion to the community being served. Underrepresented students are better served when they have role models who are available to them as sources of support. In addition, these role models are of value individually and collectively as they are better placed to advocate for the concerns and welfare of underrepresented students. Fulfilling this need would definitely be of benefit to Filipinos at UH Mānoa. As Bachini (2011) has found, the presence of Filipino faculty and staff contributes to the positive higher education experiences of Filipino students. Indeed, Filipino students often report that they experience

a lack of encouragement and guidance when they have no Filipino faculty role models at other American universities (Azores 1986–1987)

Fourth, university systems should implement stronger policies, programs, and resources that increase the transfer of underrepresented students from community colleges to university. Universities have not fully initiated transfer policies that increase their student population diversity, despite the high representation of low income and ethnically underrepresented students in the community colleges and lower representation in four-year colleges (Anderson, Sun, and Alfonso 2006; Dowd, Cheslock, and Melguizo, 2008). Such policies should aim at simplifying the application process, establishing opportunities for early registration, improving course equivalencies, and creating program articulations for community college students to meet university level requirements.

In addition, strong “transfer bridge” programs should be developed. Such programs will provide opportunities for community college students to visit university campuses, shadow senior students, and facilitate mentoring by university faculty and staff. Lastly, these kinds of policies and programs to assist students in transferring from community colleges to universities should be equally shared obligations from both institutions. Just as community colleges need to “push forward” students to the university level, universities need to become partners in “reaching out” to students in the community colleges.

Finally, further research on Filipinos in higher education should be conducted. The educational challenges facing Filipinos are easily masked by the broad and false notion of the “model minority myth,” which assumes that Asian Americans are generally academically successful. In reality (and demonstrated in the case of Filipinos in Hawai‘i), there are distinct higher education achievement results among and within Asian American communities (Buenavista, Jayakumar, and Misa-Escalante 2009; Ngo and Lee 2007; Suzuki 2002). Higher education research on Asian Americans, especially Filipino research, is a neglected topic of research in academia. Over the past decade, research centered on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders is present in only about 1 percent of articles published by the five most commonly referenced peer-reviewed academic journals in the field of educational studies (Museus and Chang 2009). However, distinct subgroups of the Asian

American populations will become increasingly important as this group continues to grow at a rapid pace (Pew Research Center 2012). Therefore, we believe that there is a need for more higher education research on Filipinos to serve as a basis to inform policies and practices to improve rates of higher education achievement.

Conclusion

In closing, progress in the higher education achievement of Filipinos in Hawai‘i remains at a critical point. While Filipinos have a valuable place in Hawaii’s history and constitute a significant percentage of Hawaii’s population, they do have a record of underachievement in higher education and, as a result, their status among the socioeconomically disadvantaged and underserved groups in Hawai‘i persists as a serious problem. Although the value of a good education continues to be emphasized within the Filipino culture, key factors that are needed to improve the higher education achievement of Filipinos ought to be met. They are financial aid resources, cultural heritage reinforcement, and institutional support systems. Efforts to make positive progress in these areas can serve to benefit all of Hawai‘i as the number of Filipinos in Hawai‘i continues to grow.

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